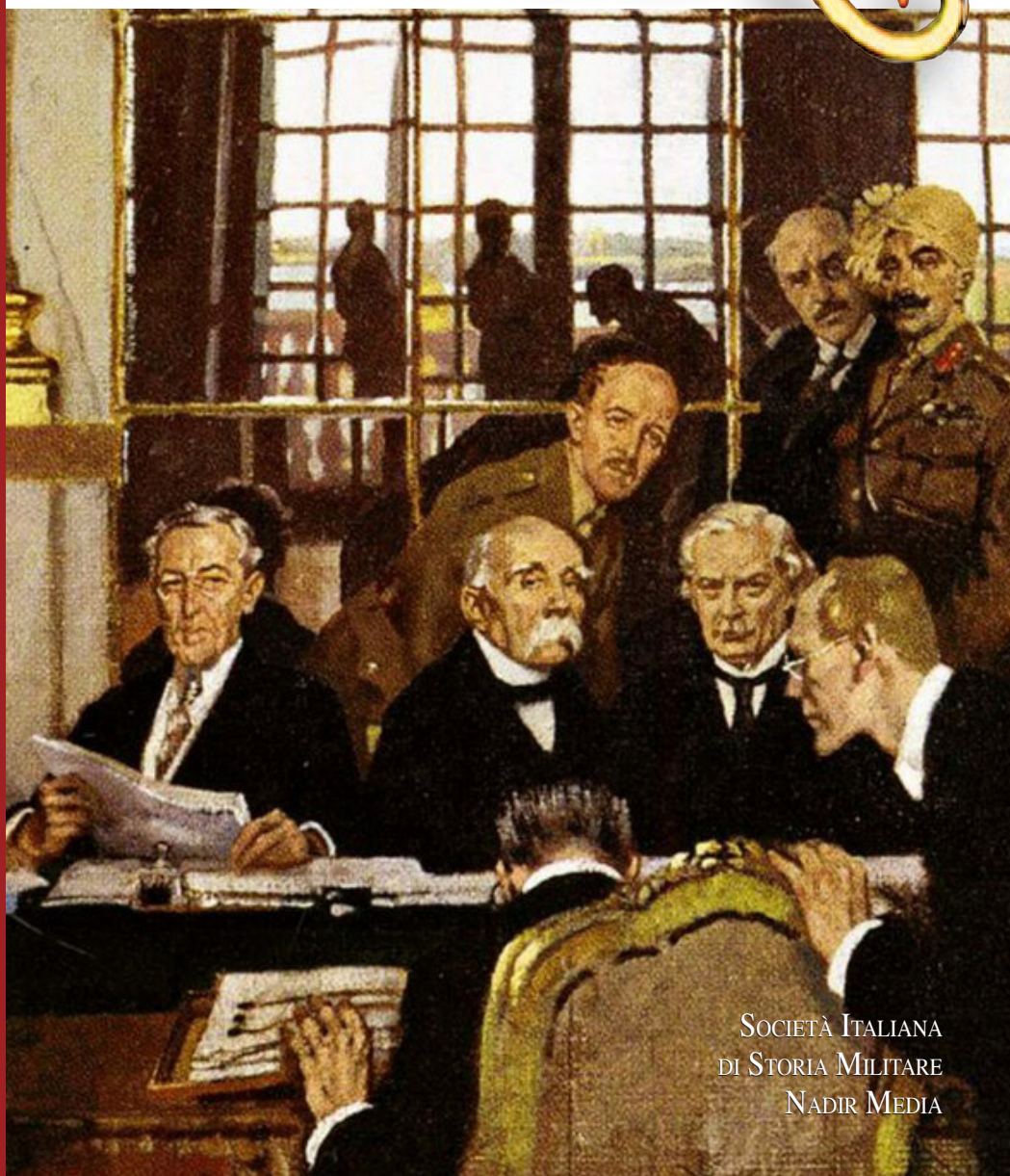


GEOPOLITICS AND WAR

EDITED BY JEREMY BLACK



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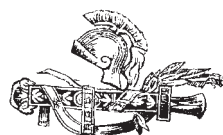
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L'expérience historique a favorisé la prise de conscience théorique. La raison, effectivement, ne s'exerce pas dans le vide, elle travaille toujours sur une matière, mais Clausewitz distingue, sans les opposer, la conceptualisation et le raisonnement d'une part, l'observation historique de l'autre.

R. ARON, *Penser la guerre*, 1976, I, p. 456

Fondata nel 1984 da Raimondo Luraghi, la Società Italiana di Storia Militare (SISM) promuove la storia critica della sicurezza e dei conflitti con particolare riguardo ai fattori militari e alla loro interazione con le scienze filosofiche, giuridiche, politiche, economiche, sociali, geografiche, cognitive, visive e letterarie. La collana *Fvcina di Marte*, dal titolo di una raccolta di trattati militari italiani pubblicata a Venezia nel 1641, affianca la serie dei Quaderni SISM, ricerche collettive a carattere monografico su temi ignorati o trascurati in Italia. Include monografie individuali e collettive di argomento storico-militare proposte dai soci SISM e accettate dal consiglio scientifico.

THE WORLD

TODAY AND YESTERDAY



EUROPE AS IT LOOKS TODAY
MAPS OF THE NEW COUNTRIES
WHAT THE NEW TREATIES MEAN

CHICAGO

RAND McNALLY & COMPANY

NEW YORK

The World, Today and Yesterday, a pamphlet published by Rand McNally in 1919, referring to the Peace of Versailles. Courtesy by The National WWI Museum and Memorial, Kansas City.

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EDITED BY JEREMY BLACK



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ISBN: 9791298507746



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Sir William Orpen (1878-1931), *The Signing of Peace in the Hall
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Graphic design and realization: Antonio Nacca

Print: Nadir Media – Roma
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*To Lorenzo Guietti and Luigi Loreto,
Good Friends of Mine from Italy*



Map of Eastern Europe in 1919 according to *Almanacco Italiano XXV*,
R. Bemporad e Figlio, Firenze, 1920, p. 192.

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Introduction

BY JEREMY BLACK

No full-fledged military expedition since ancient times has succeeded in crossing the Pyrenees or the Alps from south to north and making the invasion stick. The great formative invasions since the time of the Romans have all come from east to west, from the Russian plains or the Anatolian plateau of Turkey. The “soft underside of the Axis,” the “unprotected belly of Europe,” is then, a figure of speech that lacks geographical common sense. The mountains and sketchy roads of crippled Spain, the narrow, easily closed gap of the Rhône, the tunnels of Switzerland, the Nazi air force in Crete, pose terrifying problems of both military tactics and supply. From the communications officer’s views it is thus American dollars to Italian lire that Hitler’s Germany will not be invaded in force from North Africa ... what did we get out of the African campaign? When the Mediterranean is cleared, it will save miles of shipping. But from the positive standpoint, it spreads Hitler thin all around the margins of Europe. He must defend Italy to keep Americans from taking over airfields within easily striking distance of the Skoda works in Pilsen and Munich ... possession of the Mediterranean south shore gives the United Nations the opportunity to deliver confusing multiple blows ... and Hitler’s own power of the initiative has been critically impaired.’

Fortune magazine, in its issue of 27 January 1943, drew on the lesson offered by the topography displayed in Richard Edes Harrison’s aerial map of Europe seen from Africa, ‘The Not-So-Soft Underside.’ The map caption, however, added a valuable level of qualification:

‘From the geographical point of view the “Not-So-Soft Underside” is an apt title for the Mediterranean’s northern shores. Too many other variables exist in modern war, however, to conclude on a geographical basis alone that the mountainous “underside” will not see action.’

Indeed, although Germany was not invaded from North Africa, the German sphere of control was in Italy (1943) and southern France (1944).

Any collection on this topic is perforce selective because both geopolitics and war cover vast tranches of human experience, and, if the relationship between them is necessarily more limited, the subject is still a major one. This collection offers a range of approaches, and at different scales. The variety is deliberate, one designed to show how geopolitics can be used to probe a range

of topics about war, and vice versa.

In doing so, we also throw instructive light on the nature of the current literature. Unfortunately, the topic generally is overly limited because of the misleading way in which both geopolitics and war are usually presented. The emphasis for the latter is commonly on international conflict rather than also, as it should be, on civil warfare, and on Western rather than also, as again it should be, on non-Western powers. There are, of course, innumerable valuable exceptions, but, nevertheless, this is the established focus and it is heavily misleading, for war, its causes and impact.

Secondly, there is the related problem with geopolitics, plus significant conceptual, methodological and historiographical issues with much of the writing on the subject. There is a tendency to adopt a determinist approach, one of 'Geography as Destiny,' rather than a possibilist one; to focus on major powers and at the state level or that of the international system, rather than on all powers, and giving due weight to alignments and divisions within states; and to consider the geopolitical reflections of a small number of geopolitical thinkers, rather than the geopolitical actions of geopolitical actors. Thus, in a parallel to the emphasis in works on strategy on Sun Tsu, Clausewitz and Jomini, there is a focus with standard work on geopolitics on Ratzel, Mackinder, Haushofer, and Kennan. The alternative, often somewhat bizarre, is the so-called 'Critical Geopolitics,' a radical (but also, as such, heavily conformist) fashion in geographical studies that is anything but critical in its treatment of its own highly partisan assumptions.

A reflection on the existing literature that is full of criticisms invites the rejoinder that something still has to be offered. Just so, but the best approach, as here, is one that is permissive as to approach, rather than doctrinaire as to method, and, indeed, conclusion. The variety can readily be seen in this collection. It is one of subject, not least scale, topic, palette, tone and approach; as well as of engagement with conceptualisation, methodology and historiography. At the same time, necessarily, there is a reflection of what is available, in terms of both research and authors willing to write (for no pay of course). Thus, it is inevitably easier to include pieces on the Cold War, rather than on the geopolitics of conflicts within Madagascar prior to French conquest in the 1890s, or on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 and not on IndoChina in the eighteenth century. That particular Franco-Prussian war might have been of scant lasting significance, but the key point is the academic capital invested in it, and notably within the Western tradition. These elements provide a context for the availability of contributors.

How best to conceptualise the level of civil warfare is made more complex, but also interesting, by the degree to which that level, and indeed question, was frequently linked to international rivalries, as in the extent to which civil conflict in Uruguay was the precipitant of a wider Latin American conflict in the late 1860s. So also for current conflicts.

The key conceptual element is that the state, or nation, or indeed system or *zeitgeist*, is not an abstraction, one given causal potency and active direction through reification, but, rather, a sphere of and for contention with debate generally highly politicised. In this sphere, there is a constant attempt, which should be addressed explicitly, to control state, nation and system, and, moreover, to fix their narratives.

Deliberately, or not, later commentators including scholars often compound this problem by readily and uncritically embracing these categories and assumptions. That is understandable, and can be interesting as part of an intellectual exercise, notably about present-day categories; but it is also usually unhelpful, if not downright misleading. There can be a potent ahistoricism involved, as in the habit of downplaying cultural drives of great significance, notably those relating to religion, and, instead, going for materialist interpretations of policy using present-day criteria and definitions, as with imperialism and the quest for resources. Indeed, geopolitics, as classically and currently approached, is really a materialist approach resting on geography, rather than on classic Marxist socio-economic factors; but with many of the same faults as Marxist analysis, notably a degree of determinism and a simplistic account of causation.

Geopolitics as politics in spatial terms still has value even though there is a continuing tendency to downplay the human agency involved in human geography by emphasising a deterministic approach to (and via) physical geography, particularly in the geography as destiny approach. In part, moreover, modern politics can be apt to transform territorial space into a form of virtual utopia in which territorial factors and the elements of human geography are collapsed in favour of the world as an isotropic (uniform) surface open at every point to the same analytical framework. In part, this is a form of political geography that operates by an inversion of what territorial space might be assumed to mean.

Such an isotropic space is indeed an aspect of the approach of geopolitics as being profoundly political, in that there is an inherent subjectivity to much of the 'big picture' analysis. This can be seen, moreover, in the commonplace use of geopolitical arguments.

Yet the misuse of a theory, approach, analysis or, indeed, entire subject does not mean that it should be discarded. Indeed, were such a discarding to be pur-

sued and practiced, then history as a whole would have to be dropped due to its very frequent misuse, and not only in the public arena. Linked to this, even if there are (or can be) serious conceptual, methodological or historiographical problems with a subject and/or approach, that does not mean that there cannot be important work; and it is this that is offered here.

First, geopolitics and war are closely linked, not least in terms of the causation of conflicts and the formulation and application of strategy. Secondly, war is very important for geopolitics, both in general and in specifics. As far as the general relationship is concerned, war greatly contributes to the adversarial character of much geopolitical discussion, as it generally relates explicitly to issues of international competition and conflict.

Moreover, in specific terms, Haushofer was blamed during World War Two with inspiring German revanchism, and this helped compromise the subject; although, in this case, both analysis and response were mistaken. Indeed, the exaggeration of Haushofer's influence is one of the major failings in the historiography of the subject. So also with the alleged prescience of Mackinder when, in practice, despite the posts he held during his career, he was a secondary figure, one without the clear influence otherwise suggested by his work and connections.

Instead, it is the spatial concepts of key players or actors, such as Hitler and Roosevelt, that are of interest, even if none of them wrote a geographical work, in contrast to the histories written by Churchill, Stalin and others. Not to write a formal geographical work did not mean, however, a lack of geographical consciousness, that the writings or speeches of these figures were devoid of geographical remarks. Those are of value, not least in assessing military and political strategies.

Less so are the assumptions extrapolated onto these figures by geopolitical commentators often devoid of evidence but, nevertheless, very free with the idea of strategic culture. And so even more further back in time when there was no equivalent to Roosevelt's radio broadcasts with their reference to maps. Geopolitics does not require geographical knowledge, but it draws on perceptions of geographical links, relationships and contexts. Many of these are obscure. What Crassus assumed of the geography he was advancing into in 53 BCE en route to disaster at Carrhae is unclear. It is possible to suggest a misreading (a singularly inappropriate term for what should be misunderstanding) by him of the terrain and its implications in terms of conflict, in part as a standard instance of the relationship between routes and risks.

Yet that might be far less significant than the hubris also seen with many

military leaders, such as Alexander, Napoleon and Hitler; not to suggest any equivalence between them. That hubris is played out in space ie territorial space, does not mean that the latter is the prime component in the situation. Indeed, assumptions about territorial space are likely to be secondary to the hubris; which is another way of arguing in terms of an isotropic surface.

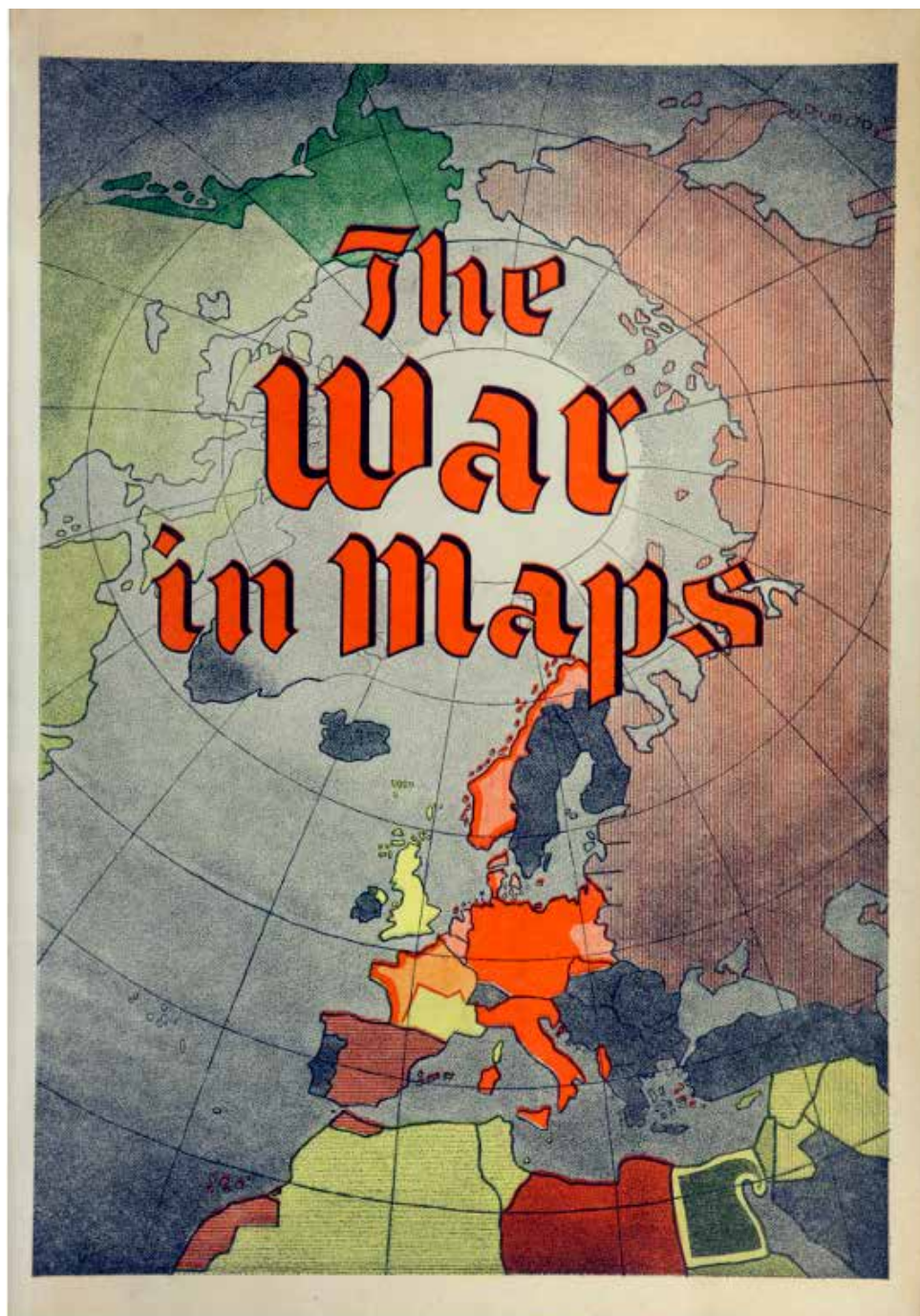
Similar points can be made about seas, where currents and other factors are reduced to a space that is to be overcome; with land also treated as a form of sea, a setting for geopolitical manoeuvre that is almost as if it is emptied of people. That looks toward the discussion of war in terms of advanced technology, especially aerial, from satellites to drones.

At one level, geopolitics is the geographical dimension of strategy, which, indeed, is an approach that covers both analytical and rhetorical usages, two sides of the descriptive coin. In modern terms, there was a militarisation of geography, but that is not a wise description given that geography in the sphere of war was 'militarised' from the outset, and notably so with the understanding and presentation of campaign and battle 'spaces,' especially through surveying and maps. In his Memoirs, Ulysses S. Grant noted the ability of General Meade to understand terrain.

This element, indeed, has become more pertinent of late as these spaces have come, for the major powers, to encompass the entire world. Indeed, alongside the pressures and opportunities from new military technologies, this global scope is what helps drive a demand for what is presented as geopolitics. The pertinence of this approach is relatively recent, and owed much to the extent to which steamships, telegraphs and railways provided a way to overcome the spatial obstacles of range that had affected earlier imperialisms.

That, however, did not mean that these earlier eras lacked geopolitics that were specific to them, and it is to that dimension that we will turn. At every stage, however, it is worth remembering that the question of who owns geopolitics, like that of who owns strategy, should be seen as implicit. This question moves us away from the glib certainties of eager determinism, an arid approach.

On the following page: Cover of *The War in Maps, 1939/40*, edited by Giseler Wirzing in collaboration with Albrecht Haushofer, Wolfgang Höpker, Horst Michael, Ulrich Link. New York, German library of Information, 1941.



The Geopolitics of 1066

BY STEPHEN MORILLO

Modern varieties of geopolitical theory are abundant and often conflicting. Anglo-American and German approaches tend toward a geographically oriented outlook that tends to see politics at work within a geographical setting that is, if not strictly deterministic, at least very influential (the classic theories of Halford Mackinder certainly fit this characterization), whereas French interpretations tend less towards geographical determinism and see “geography” as a culturally influenced perception that is more malleable and shapable by human action.¹

But most modern theories share a global outlook on geopolitics that reflects the reach of modern technology, whether in terms of space-based cartographic tools or terrestrial communications and transport technology. The geographic views and scopes of action enabled by modern technology are, however, relatively recent. What does geopolitics look like in an earlier age, and what did it look like to the participants in “international” relations in an age without “nations” (certainly in the modern sense) and whose “states” were far more limited as organizations than the global superpowers for whom modern geopolitics has usually served as an analytic guide to diplomacy and potential war? To put this question in specific terms that this article will explore, can the Norman Conquest be “Mackinderized”?

This article’s analysis of the events of 1066, which included not just the Norman invasion and conquest of Anglo-Saxon England by William the Bastard, duke of Normandy, but the near-simultaneous invasion of Harold Godwinson’s England by Harald Hardrada, king of Norway, will demonstrate that geopolitics was, in the world of 1066, a malleable text, an arena of action constructed by its participants and their views, far more than a deterministic field of play that closely shaped the participants’ destinies. Though the eleventh century is far

1 Among a vast sea of sources, see Halford Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *The Geographical Journal* 23:4 (1904); Pascal Venier, “Main Theoretical Currents in Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century”, *L’Espace Politique* 12:3, 2010.

removed from the early 21st, this analysis suggests that even today, geopolitics is less deterministic than it looks in some modern theories.

11th Century Geopolitics

Translating geopolitics into the eleventh century is not straightforward. Both elements of geopolitical analysis, geography and politics, were not then as they are today.

Modern conceptions of geopolitics arose in a world where the entire globe was both well-mapped and within reach via rapid communications (telegraphs) that have only increased in scope and speed with electronics, and militarily via slower but still relatively rapid transport technology. Communications and transport were both vastly slower in the eleventh century, and so the realm of “conceivable” geopolitics was correspondingly more restricted. The geopolitics of 1066, in other words, was certainly not global, but was multiple and fragmented into (small) regional geographic realms. We shall focus on the geopolitical worlds into which the British Isles fit.

In addition, however, Britain did not constitute a unified nation state of the sort usually envisioned in modern geopolitical analysis, nor did any of its geopolitical neighbors, whether rivals or friends. Within the main island alone, the Kingdom of England coexisted with Scottish and Welsh lordships. Each of these (including the kingdom) existed less as a “state” — an institutional structure existing in a “public” sphere over and above the individual humans who occupied it — than as a realm of personal political influence personified in the person of its ruler, though elements of institutional existence certainly attached to the ruler in some ways, including perhaps most importantly the legitimacy of the royal line from which each ruler emerged. Within these polities, more-or-less hereditary attachments between the ruler and a hierarchy of subordinate political actors filled out the sphere of action the polity operated in. Clearly, such constructions of “state” structure could conceive of and pursue the sort of long-term policies and goals that constitute the actions of geopolitics only sporadically and inconsistently, if at all.

Such polities pursued a form of politics that was far more personal and personality driven than our contemporary world is used to. Furthermore, the dominance of individual actors in such a system of politics meant that boundaries and borders were not only less fixed and even defined than modern ones, existing more as frontier zones than as lines that could be drawn on a map, but as a consequence held far less importance in mental conceptions of how the world was

put together than questions of allegiance, loyalty, and other aspects of personal relationships. One might in fact say that “geopolitics” was, in the eleventh century, “geo-personalpolitics”. In other words, geography obviously still played a role in shaping the relationships between political centers of gravity, but the meaning of “geography” was not what it is today.

As a further complication, politics was not restricted to secular political lordships. Religious affiliations and realms both underlay and at times transcended the personal politics of the secular world. This happened through several channels. First, the Catholic Church was itself a powerful “transnational” political institution that, in territorial terms, was everywhere intermingled with secular governments as an “on the ground” authority. Second, Christendom was a *cultural* geopolitical entity not actually coterminous with the realm of Catholic Church authority, especially after the Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, but also because Christianity met other religions in broad frontier zones rather than at defined borders, just as political authorities met each other fuzzily. Analysis of eleventh century geopolitics in terms of competing “national interests” is thus not only impossible but places a seriously anachronistic lens on the evidence.

In short, the mental maps through which eleventh century geopolitical players would have perceived the world and projected their various interests do not conform easily to the underlying assumptions of modern geopolitical analysis. Nevertheless, if we bear the world-view differences in mind and leave open alternative modes of analysis of eleventh century warfare,² we can create a rough geopolitical framework for thinking about the events of 1066 and their consequences in England and beyond.

The World of 1066

In the eleventh century, the kingdom of England existed within a complex geopolitical world encompassed by the geographic British Isles, and between two geopolitical worlds: the Scandinavian North Sea; and Franco-cultural northwest Europe.

2 For example, my own suggestion that warfare can be culturally analyzed as a form of discourse by which competing groups made claims, not just about geopolitical power and possessions, but claims about cultural identity that were made performatively, and that were not always as “winner-loser” driven as wars appear to be in a geopolitical analysis: see Morillo, *War and Conflict in the Middle Ages: A Global Perspective* (Polity Press, 2022).

The World of the British Isles.

For much of its history between the arrival of Angles, Saxons and other closely related Germanic tribes in the fifth century and the beginning of Viking invasions in the ninth century, Anglo-Saxon England actually comprised up to seven different “Anglo-Saxon” kingdoms. These fought each other, with one sometimes establishing primacy, but also shared a culture, extensive trade within the Isles, and common social organization.

That social organization was built in part on the relationship of the incoming Germanic-speaking population and the extant Celtic population of Roman Britannia, though the Romans had themselves withdrawn early in the fifth century before the Germanic invasions had commenced. The numbers of invaders is a matter of scholarly debate, but undoubtedly comprised more males than females. There is no evidence of mass extermination of Celtic men, but the invaders seem to have established enough social dominance (especially over marriage and reproduction) that the genetic heritage of today’s English population is massively Germanic among men, but more evenly divided (to majority Celtic) among women.³ “English” is crucial here, because the outlying parts of the Isles — Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall — farthest from the arrival zones of the Germans the in southeast both fell largely outside the realm of control of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and retained predominantly Celtic politics, genetics and linguistics.

Overall, the intracultural⁴ competition — military, diplomatic, ecclesiastical, cultural, and so forth — between the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and their Celtic fringe comprised the first fact about geopolitics in the British Isles for several centuries.

Viking raids into the Isles, famously beginning with a raid on the monastery on Lindisfarne Island in 793, upset the equilibrium of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Over the course of the ninth century, all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms save Wessex succumbed to Viking attacks. Under the leadership of Alfred the Great and his successors, Wessex reorganized its defenses around a set of fortified *burghs*, beat back the Viking invaders, and emerged as a unified Anglo-Saxon kingdom of England that claimed the cultural inheritance of all the previous separate kingdoms. Though the Celtic fringe remained separate, the unification

3 Jonathan Shaw, “Who Killed the Men of England?”, *Harvard Magazine* July-August 2009, at <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2009/07/who-killed-the-men-england>.

4 For the categories intracultural, intercultural, and subcultural see Morillo, “A General Typology of Transcultural Wars: The Early Middle Ages and Beyond”, in Hans-Henning Kortüm, ed., *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*. Akademie Verlag (2006), 29-42.

of the Anglo-Saxon realms simplified the internal geopolitics of the Isles.

The century of Viking invasions and occupations, however, had created within England a region, the Danelaw, that remained heavily influenced by Scandinavian law, politics, language, and culture, and that remained distinctive even after Wessex regained political control of the area in the later ninth century. The Scandinavian ties of the Danelaw connected the unified Anglo-Saxon England kingdom, geopolitically, to the Scandinavian world of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. In the early eleventh century, those geopolitical ties would suddenly loom large in the reign of Aethelred the Unready.⁵

The Scandinavian World.

As noted above, Viking raids into the British Isles began at Lindisfarne in 793 and continued through much of the ninth century. These raids were not state-sponsored expeditions. The beginnings of state formation and centralization in the Scandinavian world in the ninth century contributed to the raids, but in the way of provoking independent-minded local leaders to escape growing royal influence by gathering a band of supporters to “go a-viking”, or to go on a private raiding and plundering expedition. Nor were the goals of such raids particularly “political”: their targets were, as at Lindisfarne, targets of opportunity characterized by weakly defended piles of riches, especially monasteries. (Since monks were the most prominent chroniclers of the age, this pattern contributed significantly to the Vikings’ terrible reputation.) Thus, this first phase of Scandinavian raiding, which extended from the British Isles and northern France (about which more in a moment) into the Mediterranean and eastwards into the Slavic east (where the Scandinavian Rus laid the foundations for what eventually became Ukraine and later Russia) constituted a generalized geopolitical threat to established states such as Anglo-Saxon England, but can hardly be analyzed in terms of state-vs-state geopolitics of a modern variety.

The success of the earliest hit-and-run raids of this sort led the raiding bands to begin over-wintering in good target areas; their depredations therefore became longer-lasting and more significant. The size of the bands also grew, as the most successful attracted and absorbed smaller groups. This elevated the geopolitical threat to the political powers they attacked, though without immediately raising themselves to state-level organization. But in some places, as the raiders

5 Marc Morris, *The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England, 400-1066* (New York, Penguin Books, 2021) provides an accessible overview; see also Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, Longman, 1998).

settled down across multiple over-winterings, acculturation to the local political forms of organization led to the formation of new states with Viking origins. We noted the emergence of Kievan Rus above; a Norse Viking band under a war leader named Rollo created the Duchy of Normandy from their base in the lower Seine valley in the early tenth century.⁶

The “state-ification” of Viking groups proceeded both from the internal dynamics of the groups, especially the larger and more successful ones, and from efforts by their targets to “normalize” them into the established geopolitical relations of the day. The normalization of Normandy from Rollo’s band was largely at the initiative of Charles the Simple, king of West Francia, for example. A key tool in this normalization was conversion of the Vikings to Christianity, in large part because the religion could then provide the moral basis for more reliable oaths and treaties, in addition to its being the cornerstone of western European culture. Alfred of Wessex followed this path in his campaigns to resist and then reconquer the lands subject to Viking control. At the same time, interestingly, the newly emerging kings of Scandinavia also pushed Christianization as a tool in their efforts to legitimize their positions and centralize their powers. By the mid-tenth century, therefore, private Viking raids were largely ceasing, squeezed from both ends by the forces of geopolitical normalization, especially Christianization, exerted both by their targets and by their home rulers.

But the success of geopolitical normalization in bringing private Viking raids to an end created a new dynamic, as Scandinavian expeditions continued under the newly centralized and Christianized royal powers of this northern geopolitical sphere. In short, private raiding gave way to royal expeditions of conquest in the eleventh century.

These hit England in 1013 when King Sweyn of Denmark led an invasion into the Danelaw. The Anglo-Saxon king Aethelred fled to Normandy, in Franco-cultural northwest Europe, the other geopolitical region adjacent to England (see below), and Sweyn briefly became king before dying in 1014. Sweyn’s son Canute succeeded him, though not without fighting against Aethelred’s son Edmund Ironside. To help consolidate his legitimacy, he married Queen Emma, the widow of Aethelred and daughter of Richard I, Duke of Normandy. In 1018 he succeeded to the throne of Denmark when his brother died, and by 1028 he had

6 Among many others, see Robert Ferguson, *The Vikings* (London: Penguin Books, 2010). The crucial influence of established political structures on this process is illustrated by the fate of the Viking settlements in Ireland. As the island lacked indigenous state-level polities, no Viking state emerged there. The emergence of Kievan Rus in this light highlights the influence of Byzantium on the political development of that region.

also become king of Norway and parts of southern Sweden, creating what some historians have called the North Sea Empire. Under his reign Viking raids on England effectively ended, as England had become part of a now Anglo-Scandinavian world, ruled by an Anglo-Scandinavian elite.

The solidity of this geopolitical configuration, however, did not long outlast Canute's death in 1035, undone by succession problems that illustrate the personal (and therefore less institutionally stable) foundations of eleventh century geopolitics compared to modern times.⁷ Canute was succeeded as king by the two sons of his wife Emma of Normandy: his own son Harthacnut, who died after two years on the throne, and Aethelred's son Edward, who became known as the Confessor. Edward's succession brought into relief the rivalry between the two factions of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom's elite that had been held together by Canute's personal leadership: the Anglo-Scandinavians, in the ascendant and under the leadership, after Harthacnut's death, of Godwin Earl of Wessex, the richest and most powerful nobleman in the realm, and after his death the leadership of his many sons; and the Anglo-Normans. Edward had grown up for most of his life in exile from England at the court of Robert I, Duke of Normandy. His preference for those with connections to Normandy led the Anglo-Scandinavians to effectively reduce him to figurehead status for much of his reign. Edward's lack of an heir of his own would lead to the crucial conflict between these factions in 1066, in which the geopolitical world of Franco-cultural north-west Europe would play a key role.

Franco-cultural Northwest Europe.

The foundations of Normandy take us back to the pre-royal phase of Viking raids. One of these Vikings, a Scandinavian of uncertain origin named Rollo, had established himself and his followers in the lower Seine valley by the early tenth century, and Charles the Simple, king of West Francia, granted him the countship of Rouen in exchange for Rollo ending his raiding and converting to Christianity. Rollo's grandson Richard became the first Duke of Normandy, indicative of the process whereby Normandy's Scandinavian connections faded in favor of the French-dominated, Christian cultural world of the continent, putting Normandy in geopolitical conflict and connection with other polities of

7 Though modern personal dictatorships also suffer from succession problems, usually without the help of the legitimacy conveyed by heredity. The Line of Kims in North Korea demonstrate the power of the hereditary principle in the absence of institutional mechanisms to guide succession.

the fragmenting Carolingian realm, including Flanders, Anjou, Brittany, and the Kingdom of France itself.

This was the world of Edward the Confessor's upbringing at the decal court of Robert I, grandson of Richard I who was grandson of Rollo. Probably the key "ideological" difference between this world and the Anglo-Scandinavian world Edward came to reign over had to do with the governance of the Church, that "trans-national" (to use an anachronistic term for the eleventh century) player in geopolitics. Starting in 1054, the Gregorian Reform movement gained dominance within the Papacy. The reforms aimed for by its proponents had to do with the role of the laity (crucially secular rulers) in the appointment of church office holders such as abbots and bishops: the reformers wished to free the Church from "corrupt" secular control whereas rulers wished to retain control over appointments that, given the vast landholdings of the Church, had considerable importance in their realms. Duke Robert's son and illegitimate heir William managed to project the image, at least, of friendliness to the reformers and therefore garner Papal support in geopolitical terms, whereas the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, like most of Scandinavia, resisted what appeared to be a potential threat to royal power.

England between two worlds.

Anglo-Saxon England was therefore a somewhat complicated geopolitical world unto itself, positioned between two other distinct geopolitical worlds, but more closely aligned through much of the eleventh century with the Scandinavian than with the French world. The nature of these worlds illustrates the differences between eleventh century geopolitics and the modern variety around which geopolitical theory has been built.

Each, and even all three in combination, were very far from global because the communications and transport modes available to their inhabitants were so slow and limited. The Scandinavian world was geographically the largest of these worlds (especially when it included significant parts of Britain), centered as it was around the sea lanes of the North Sea; while potentially the fastest lane for communications and transporting of troops, the Sea was also subject to the unpredictable (in the eleventh century) vagaries of wind, tide, and storm. Franco-cultural northwestern was smaller because it was dependent on slower and more expensive land transport except where river valleys created limited faster lanes. The effective size of England was similar, as land transport and rivers again constituted the main modes of transport. The North Sea and the English Channel both connected and divided the three worlds, and each had other con-

nections beyond this triad. The geopolitical dynamics of this triad of worlds, in other words, were neither global nor isolated to themselves.

This communications and transport environment meant that even the political leaders in these worlds had only a slow and faulty idea of what geopolitical threats or challenges they faced, often right up until they came virtually face-to-face with those threats; and even more limited means to influence or respond to those threats that loomed beyond the horizon or emerged over it. Geopolitical “planning” or large scale strategizing in such worlds was necessarily also limited and contingent. It began with simply keeping one’s own house in order.

The competing factions at the heart of eleventh century Anglo-Saxon England noted above meant that England’s house was anything but in order, and when the transitional moment came, both of the worlds the kingdom was connected to responded, albeit independently of each other, illustrating the limits of communication and planning across these geopolitical realms. Edward the Confessor died in January, 1066, without an heir of his body. The three men who at that moment dominated the triad of geopolitical worlds at whose center the kingship of England lay now came to the fore.

Harold Godwinson, son of the Earl Godwin noted above and head of the Scandinavian-leaning faction that had dominated the English realm since Canute’s reign, despite Edward the Confessor’s Norman leanings, was crowned king shortly after Edward’s death. His succession was uncontested in England itself, but he came to the throne in the midst of a fluid and uncertain geopolitical situation created in part by his dead predecessor. Having recognized (according to Anglo-Saxon sources) Harold as his heir on his deathbed, Edward had previously recognized William duke of Normandy as his heir as well. Harold had the support of the Anglo-Saxon thegnage — except for his own brother Tostig, who went into rebellion and sought help in Scandinavia — and the advantage of being on the spot when Edward died, but William had ambition and the resources of Normandy at his disposal.

A third contestant seriously complicated this apparently binary contest for rulership of England, however. Harald Sigurdsson, whose epithet “Hardrada” meant “hard ruler” or “stern counsel” had become king of Norway in 1046, reclaiming for his line a position that Canute the Great had disposed them of in 1030. (At that point Harald had gone into exile in Kievan Rus, whence he joined the Byzantine Varangian Guard, rising to command that elite unit in the Empire.) Having consolidated his rule in Norway and unsuccessfully tried for the throne of Denmark, he saw Edward’s death in 1066 as an opportunity to re-establish Canute’s Great Northern Empire by seizing the throne of England,

encouraged by Tostig Godwinson.

The events of 1066 have been covered in detail numerous times and need not detain us long here. In brief, Harold Godwinson was initially aware only of the threat posed by William of Normandy. By May he had gathered the Anglo-Saxon fleet in the Channel while posting troops along the southern coast in anticipation of William crossing. But contrary winds held up William's invasion all summer and into the fall,⁸ which not only forced Harold to stand his troops down as supplies ran low, but also gave time for Harald Hardrada to gather his invasion fleet and appear off the Northumbrian coast of the kingdom in mid-September. Harald defeated the northern forces of the kingdom at Fulford on September 20 and occupied York. Harold Godwinson rushed north with his army, surprised Harald at Stamford bridge on 25 September, killing Harald and Tostig and sending the remains of the Norwegian army fleeing back across the North Sea. But in the meantime, William finally managed to cross over to the English coast at Hastings. Force marching back south with his battle-weary army, Harold met William at Hastings on October 14 and lost his life and his kingdom. William carefully consolidated the south with a circuitous march into London (nearly succumbing to dysentery at Kent on the way) and was crowned king of England in December.

This bare narrative, however, the events of which reshaped the geopolitics of northwestern Europe so decisively that alternate outcomes are by now difficult even to imagine, disguises the uncertainties, contingencies, and unexpected outcomes of 1066. It is to these we must turn to fully appreciate the geopolitical effects of that year.

Unexpected Outcomes

The first point that needs emphasis is that in January 1066 the entire geopolitical situation was utterly uncertain. There were no predetermined outcomes, nor could any of the participants predict (or even control) the chaotic flow of events to any great extent — with chaotic here having the technical meaning it carries in the science of chaos theory.⁹ The interpretation of William's delay in crossing

8 Morillo, "Contrary Winds: Theories of History and the Limits of *Sachkritik*", in Gregory I. Halfond, ed., *The Medieval Way of War: Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach* (Ashgate, 2015).

9 James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York, 1987) is a clear, non-technical introduction to the development and principles of Chaos Theory. See also Michael Waldrop, *Complexity. The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York, 1992). History, some philosophers of history have argued, is a chaotic system. George A. Reisch, "Chaos,

the Channel that sees him as “waiting on events” credits William with powers of knowing and predicting that are highly implausible. What William knew of the large-scale geopolitical moves in the course of the 1066 campaign could not have been central to its outcome, because he could not possibly have known enough to predict with any accuracy what was going to happen. Nor do I think that he thought he could. Individuals not blessed with the benefit of hindsight cannot fall into the temptation to teleology that hindsight provides. My reading of the implications of this view for William’s actions is that he would have wanted to seize the initiative as soon as possible, so as to exert as much control as he could over the course of events. He would not want to wait two chaotic months before moving. The same applies to Harold Godwinson and Harald Hardrada.¹⁰ Each entered this tournament with only their own actions known to them or under their control. The limitations of communications and information flows in the eleventh century compared to the information strategists have available to them in the early 21st century or even in Halford Mackinder’s day make this point even more central. Put another way, eleventh century geopolitics was the *result*, not the frame, of political-military decision making.

The very uncertainty of the year is reflected in the unexpected decisiveness of its events, culminating in the unexpected decisiveness of the Battle of Hastings itself. Had there been betting odds in January 1066, the most likely outcome for the end of the year might well have been some sort of indecisive situation with all three contenders still alive and holding different pieces of England and continuing their rivalries. That two of the contenders would be killed in decisive routs and that William, from the most “outside” of the geopolitical realms involved in the struggle, would emerge as the winner, was surely unforeseen by any of the contenders except William himself, and then only in his most optimistic hopes.

The level of uncertainty that framed the year underlay the unexpected outcomes that emerged from the unexpectedly decisive and significant geopolitical outcomes: Hasting was a decisive battle in ways that no geopolitical view of the world of 1066 could have anticipated. To see this we have to start playing that dangerous game, counterfactual history. But the very concept of decisiveness necessitates this game: the decision reached by a decisive battle implies other possible decisions not reached, and then implies a comparison of the differences

History and Narrative,’ *History and Theory* 30 (1991), 1-20. A somewhat different approach to the same problem that reaches similar conclusions follows in the same volume: Donald N. McCloskey, “History, Differential Equations, and the Problem of Narration,” 21-36.

¹⁰ Morillo, “Contrary Winds,” p. 218.

between the outcomes of those possible decisions in order to assess the importance of the decision actually taken.

Start with the fact that, despite his avowed and probably sincere intention to rule within the traditions of Anglo-Saxon kingship, William the Conqueror's position as a foreign conqueror made this impossible. Although he was able, within slightly more than a year of his victory, to call out elements of the Anglo-Saxon army in support of his campaign against a recalcitrant city of Exeter, he had to rely, perforce, mainly upon the baronage of Normandy to help secure his rule of his new kingdom. He endowed them (and himself) with massive amounts of land, estates confiscated from the defeated thegns of the Anglo-Saxon polity. A new, French-speaking and Norman-connected aristocracy now sat atop the social structure of England.

This was more than just regime change, a level of decisiveness at the geopolitical level where military and political analysis meet and which is actually not at all uncommon. Rather, this was regime change that geopolitically realigned a significant chunk of a civilization. Hastings and the Norman French aristocracy it inserted as rulers of England moved England from the Scandinavian world at the northern margins of medieval European civilization into the French heartland of that civilization. In this way, Hastings was decisive in ways that Stamford Bridge could not have been, whoever won it, because that was an intramural struggle between two pieces of the same world. Had Harold Godwinson won at Hastings, confirming the decision at Stamford Bridge, the status quo would have been defended; or had Harald Hardraada won at Stamford bridge and then seen off the Norman upstart, England would have seen regime change but no geopolitical shift. As it was, the temporarily decisive military victory that was Stamford Bridge became a footnote to the truly decisive battle.

Furthermore, William's victory not only imposed regime change on England, but the change of regime was accompanied not just by a change in geopolitical orientation, but in the nature of the state, society, and culture over which the new regime ruled. This is reflected most obviously in the changes to the language this culture spoke: without Hastings, the English language of today would not be the rich, messy *mélange* of Germanic pie crust overlaid with a gooey layer of Latinate filling that it is; it would be a much more homogenous Germanic recipe — and Anglophones would all be eating cow and pig instead of beef and pork. It took adding the great weight of Henry II's continental empire to England in 1154 to allow French enough influence to work its long term culinary magic on the English tongue. But when we mention Henry II, the Conqueror's great-grandson, we can really start talking long-term decisiveness, as follows.

The royal administration that Hastings brought into being was, like the language that eventually emerged around it, a hybrid. William took over the administrative and legal mechanisms of the Anglo-Saxon state, which were for the time quite sophisticated. He reinvigorated them and turned them to the purpose of supporting and institutionalizing the rule of himself and his Norman magnates, who brought with them their own, continental-French ideas about property, landholding, and their connection to power. In the context of the vast and ad hoc tenurial revolution that gave estates to those magnates all over England, with each magnate's holdings scattered so that they did not form compact, easily defensible regional power bases, Anglo-Saxon mechanisms of legal governance and Norman cultural ideas about land and power fused into a peculiar system of property law. The main elements of this were probably in place by the reign of the Conqueror's youngest son, Henry I in 1135. But this nascent system was put under stress by the civil war between Henry's daughter Mathilda and nephew Stephen between 1137 and 1154, the latter of whom grabbed the throne on Henry's death. Much forced dispossession of supporters of both sides in the civil war ensued, and when Mathilda's son by Geoffrey the count of Anjou, Henry II Plantagenet, came to the throne in 1154, settling these disputes entailed some codification and systematization of this Hastings-created legal structure.

Thus, it is arguable that the Common Law, especially as it applies to real property, only emerged as we know it because of Hastings. Nor is the Common Law the end point of this exercise in historical chain reactions.¹¹ Twelfth century English property law is very recognizably the direct and not that distant ancestor of our own modern property law. That law, privileging private property rights, and set in the context of an English aristocracy that was always more a creation of wealth (which meant land holding) than birth — and that characteristic is another result of the conditions created by Hastings — formed the underlying context for the development of the English Parliament, for the whole vexed history of the 17th century leading to the Glorious Revolution, and thus for English constitutionalism and, ultimately, democratic government. After all, John Locke philosophized the Revolution as based on the natural rights to “life, liberty, and *property*”, Thomas Jefferson's “pursuit of happiness” being a feel-good substitution that has proved inaccurate as a descriptor of actual practice.

And that actual practice points out the fact that even more directly than for political history, 12th century property law formed the framework for economic

11 A more extended defense of the following proposed chain of historical consequences is embedded in my world history textbook, *Frameworks of World History* (Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. v2 centered on Ch 18.

developments of global significance. The Anglo-Norman conception of private property, and of the rights and social status grounded (quite literally) in property, formed the environment in which limited liability corporations as we know them evolved from the late 16th century on. In the 18th century, those same conceptions invaded the royal privilege of granting monopolies, metastasized, and turned that privilege into the set of rights now collectively known as Intellectual Property. In short, the Hastings-created system of property law formed the legal framework for the Industrial Revolution, which is what ended the Agrarian era and created our modern world.

Thus, my ultimate argument about the consequences of 1066 is that without Hastings, none of these developments would have happened, nor anything even very close to them, since the Industrial Revolution was an unpredictable, highly contingent event that went against the established grain of Agrarian civilizations and required some pretty weird legal, social, and political structures in England to be born at all. None of this could possibly have been foreseen by the main actors (or anybody) in 1066, nor were the event of 1066 and their consequences embedded in the geopolitics of that fateful year.

And at a less exaggerated scale of historical consequences, the events of 1066 produced a new geo-political player, Anglo-Norman England, which shortly produced the 12th century Angevin Empire as a major geopolitical player centered on the English Channel and with geopolitical connections to the Low Countries and France, all of which contributed to the marginalization of the Scandinavian world in western European geopolitics.

Conclusions

Thus, the year 1066 was momentous from a geopolitical perspective. But the details of how its events and consequences played out cast light on the political half of the geopolitical equation. That light shows that human cultural geography is not determined by physical geography: land masses that are immovable except at the level of continental drift can move around quite dramatically in the heads of the political leaders who confront each other on the playing boards that physical geography provides. Worlds can realign, and today's heartlands can be tomorrow's marginalia. The intensely personal politics of the eleventh century, played within severe limitations of geographic knowledge and the reliability and speed of political communication, emphasize these conclusions and call for a different (more French than Anglo-German?) conception of geopolitics for times and conditions as dramatically different from our own as 1066 was.

The Geopolitics of Crusading

BY JOHN FRANCE

Who rules East Europe controls the heartland:
Who rules the heartland commands the World-Island:
Who rules the World-Island commands the World.¹

Geopolitics, of which Mackinder was an outstanding champion, seeks to understand and even predict the political behaviour of states through an understanding of their geographical position and circumstances with regard to one another. The immensely broad world view which he expresses in this quotation would have bewildered medieval people, and in particular those living in north-western Europe and Italy, because it demands a range of geographic knowledge that they simply did not have. This does not mean they were unable to link political power to particular geographic spaces. But geographically theirs was a smaller world, and though they were aware of distant powers and places, it was for long only as vague shadows. The geopolitics of medieval people was much more local than that of the twentieth century.

Many years after he had gained possession of the place Philip I of France (1060-1108) is said to have recalled the troubles caused by the castle of Montlhéry, and remarked to his son and heir, Louis the Fat:

Beware, my son, keep watch and guard that tower; the distress I have suffered from it has nearly made an old man out of me. Its plots and vile treachery have never allowed me good peace and quiet.²

We might regard this as a very petty complaint seen in terms of what we think of as geopolitics, but it has to be measured by the reality of the age. In the early twelfth century the French kingdom consisted of a collection of lands and rights scattered between Rheims and Orléans. The castle of Montlhéry com-

1 Sir Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable, 1942), 50. (194 n.38).

2 Suger, *Vie de Louis le Gros*, ed. H. Waquet (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1929), trans. R.C. Cusimano and J. Moorhead, *The Deeds of Louis the Fat* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), chapter 8.

manded the road between the most important royal centre of Paris and the city of Orléans on the Loire. Its possession by a turbulent and aggressive clan could, therefore, cripple royal authority. This was a major geopolitical reality for the French king.

But intellectualising such problems was not encouraged by the nature of rivalries and warfare in medieval Europe. Mackinder's dictum quoted above reflects the struggle between Germany and the Soviet Union for control of eastern Europe, a conflict between two well-defined and sharply contrasting political authorities. But medieval entities were rarely as defined and sharp-edged as that. The German Empire and the French monarchy, for example, did not meet across a sharply delineated frontier. Rather, each was frayed at the edges. Between the effective power of each ruler lay marches, zones in which there existed many powers, some of which essentially answered to neither, or to both. Thus, Cologne on the Rhine was firmly German, but controlled by its archbishop who might or might not be a loyal subject of the emperor. But beyond lay Hainaut, Louvain, and Flanders, each merging via marches into one another, and all owing allegiance to both the emperor and the king of France and, more importantly, to their own interests.³

In such circumstances, really the commonplace of political life in medieval Europe, personality and dynasty were all important geopolitical factors. Gilbert of Mons was the Chamberlain of the count of Hainaut and deeply experienced as a diplomat. But he often represents complex dealings in terms of personal relationships between great men. And in 1183 he records that Baldwin V of Hainaut switched from friendship with the count of Flanders to alliance with his enemy, Philip II of France (1180-1223), because the latter threatened to divorce his daughter, Elizabeth of Hainaut.⁴ This kind of rather personalised politics was inevitable in a world where the politically powerful were a very narrow range of people, mostly inter-related. Of course, such people were well aware of the disparities of wealth and power. When Prince Louis the Fat of France failed in war against the wealthy William II of England (1087-1100) his biographer explained:

King William quickly ransomed the English prisoners, while the French wasted away during lengthy captivity, and there was only one way to get free. They had to undertake knightly service for the king of England.

3 For the complexity of these relationships see Gilbert of Mons, *Chronicle of Hainaut* tr. L. Napran (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005). This author was the Chancellor of the count of Hainaut and prominent in the diplomacy of the area at the end of the twelfth century.

4 Gilbert of Mons, chaps 108-10.

Money talks, as always!

And from the 1070s a new reality was entering into political relationships. Of course, a belief in the Christian faith had long been inculcated in the social elite, but with the outbreak of the 'Investiture Contest' the politically powerful were increasingly presented with ideological choices. For Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) denied the sacredness of kingship:

Who does not know that kings and princes derive their origin from men ignorant of God who raised themselves above their fellows by pride, plunder, treachery, murder - in short by every kind of crime - at the instigation of the devil.⁵

This was a radical attack on kingship, and it was accompanied by an assertion of the right of the pope to judge all men and to act according to that judgement. Yet at the same time the popes offered a purification of the church, and, therefore, a better opportunity for salvation. This was a kind of choice which such men had never before had to make and it broke with the past, opening up new possibilities of change with real consequences. For now, religion entered the field of political action and ideological choices became important. William of Normandy had welcomed the gift of a papal banner for his conquest of England, but a few years later as king of England he rejected the claim that this made the pope overlord of the realm.⁶ A new intellectualism, for better or worse, was entering the world.

Medieval people were not entirely ignorant of the wider world in which they lived. Traders and pilgrims went far beyond the experience of most and brought back their knowledge. But their wider world was really the Mediterranean and the lands around that inland sea. This was the world of classical antiquity of which a relatively few learned men had real knowledge. Beyond that were wonders like Gog and Magog, where almost anything could happen. By the 13th century this knowledge had grown enormously. The crusades brought knowledge of the Levant home to Europeans. In the 1240s there was a great fear of Mongol invasion, and this provoked a very considerable response; in particular, the sending of missionaries and diplomatic delegations revealed a great deal about the inner Asia which was gradually assimilated into knowledge and

5 E. Emerton (ed.), *The Correspondence of Pope Gregory VII. Selected Letters from the Registrum* (New York: Columbia, 1990), 169.

6 R. Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 410.

thinking in the later Middle Ages.⁷ The world of Marco Polo (1254-1324) was immensely wider than that of William the Conqueror. Thereafter knowledge would widen immensely. By c.1340 Pegolotti's *Merchants Handbook* described conditions in far-flung places including Peking.⁸ Eventually we see the emergence of the kind of intellectual analysis which Mackinder and his like would recognize as geopolitical.

But the emergence of this kind of strategic thinking, although influenced by expanding knowledge, essentially came from a quite different root, which was crusading. And this in turn arose from the fact that medieval people saw the world in a rather different perspective from us. For them the material world was, in a very direct way, only part of a wider universe which transcended mere geography.

*Jerusalem is the centre of the earth*⁹

We would hardly recognise this as a geographic statement, though in its biblical context of the sixth century BC it revealed the importance of the city to the Jewish people. But a glance at the *Mappa Mundi* of c.1300 in Hereford cathedral does show it as the centre of the earth. This may seem like a distortion to us, but it represented a great reality to the people who first produced and contemplated it. They regarded the Bible as a source of truth, and that meant a source of all truths of all kinds. This map depicts the location of the garden of Eden, which seems equally unlikely to us.

Christian thinking, in fact, was dominated by the idea of a universe of salvation presided over by God and His saints. The actual physical universe was understood through the inheritance of the classical world as summarised in the work of Ptolemy.¹⁰ But beyond it lay the realm of the divine which directly impacted upon the lives of ordinary people. Heaven and hell were not physical places, but states of being which men could not understand. But people, as individuals or groups, enjoyed a place in this universe which varied according to their opportunities for salvation. But these opportunities could be very tangible, very much part of the material world, even if they were manifestations of the divine. For ordinary people the physical conveyed a reality far beyond what could

7 P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London: Routledge, 2014).

8 H. Yule (ed.), "Pegolotti notices of the land route to Cathay," in *Cathay and the Way Thither. Being a collection of Medieval Notices of China* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1866), 134-73.

9 Ezekiel 5:5 and 38:12.

10 B. Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (London: Arnold, 1986), 88-91.

be imagined of the divine. Hence there developed, often quite spontaneously, devotions to relics of holy men and women, often associated with spring and groves which had been the haunt of spirits in pagan times. In the early eleventh century the monk, Rodulfus Glaber, complained that peasants worshipped in such places, while those who know Carlo Levi's *Christ Stepped at Eboli* will recall his tale of peasant girls in the 1940s seeking out an ancient phallic symbol buried in a wall hoping to assure their fertility. These pagan remains represent part of that powerful urge to see the divine made flesh - or at least bone. It is unsurprising, therefore, that parts of the known world were conceived of as being closer than others to heaven. In particular, the shrines of saints were, as we might say, points of contact between the known and earthly world and the superior parts of the universe.¹¹

And of all these, one place towered above all others in the minds of western Christians - Jerusalem. The place where Christ lived and died was in itself a holy relic, with at its heart the empty tomb, truly an obsession, for here not only had God himself intervened in human history. It was also the place where the end of all things, the Apocalypse, would be enacted.¹² Jerusalem was not in itself a geopolitical focus. The city was far inland, away from the trade routes which linked Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean. It was not a major hub of economic activity, while the administrative centre of Fatimid Palestine at the time of the First Crusade was Ramla.¹³ Jerusalem became a geopolitical focus because of its enormous importance in the minds of western Christians, and, more specifically, western warlords who dominated society.

Jerusalem, of course, was a sacred place to all Christians, and, indeed, to Jews and Muslims also. It had been under Islamic domination since 638. In 691/2 the Dome of the Rock was built, commemorating the Night Journey of Muhammad, and asserting Islamic superiority. However, Christian pilgrimage was never discouraged by the Islamic powers because it was very profitable: pilgrims paid to enter the city. In the 1070s the Byzantine Empire in Anatolia collapsed creating grave difficulties for all using the Pilgrim Road from Constantinople through Anatolia to Syria and thence to Palestine. Brigandage and local wars had always plagued the roads the pilgrims took, sometimes making movement difficult. This became more frequent in the 1070s with the Turkish

11 S. Hamilton, *Church and People in the Medieval West, 900-1200* (London: Pearson, 2013), 251-318.

12 J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Athlone, 1986), 21.

13 M. Brett, *The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 42.

conquest of Palestine and the subsequent reassertion of Egyptian power by the Fatimids of Egypt.¹⁴ Eastern Christians were conversant with such difficulties, but a new fixation with Jerusalem had arisen in the West.

The emergence of Jerusalem at the end of the eleventh century onto the international stage, its geopolitical importance, was the result of an alliance between the papacy, the foremost spiritual authority in the West, and important leading elements of the European military aristocracy. By about the year 1000 western European society had become deeply convinced of the Christian religion. A contemporary noted:

Just before the third year after the millennium throughout the whole world, but most especially in Italy and Gaul, men began to reconstruct churches, although for the most part the existing ones were properly built and not in the least unworthy. But it seemed as though each Christian community was aiming to surpass all others in the splendour of construction. It was as if the whole world were shaking itself free, shrugging off the burden of the past, and cladding itself everywhere in a white mantle of churches. Almost all episcopal churches and those of monasteries dedicated to various saints, and little village chapels, were rebuilt better than before by the faithful.¹⁵

This programme of church construction was largely financed by gifts to churches from kings, princes and nobles, and represents tangible evidence, much of it still surviving, of two things: the increasing wealth of western society and the manifestly deep Christian commitment in all classes of society. But for the military aristocracy this posed special problems. For they owed their eminence to their fighting ability and leadership in war, and worshipped the values of comradeship, loyalty and bravery. Yet their religion always condemned killing as a terrible sin, as murder. This contradiction was thrown into sharp relief by the Investiture Contest in which the papacy claimed that warfare on its behalf was righteous and proper. The novelty of this claim merely added to the uncertainty about warfare and the salvation of those who practised it, particularly as the penitential system was not yet highly developed.

But one of the most important penitential acts was pilgrimage, and above all that to Jerusalem, which was seen as conferring special spiritual benefit upon its participants. Pilgrims to Jerusalem sometimes gathered in substantial groups. In 1026 Richard of Saint-Vannes led a party of some 700 to Jerusalem. Around

14 Ibid., 201-32.

15 Rodulfus Glaber, *The Five Books of the Histories* ed. J. France, N. Bulst and P. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 114-17.

the millennium of the Passion in 1033 Glaber commented on the large crowds taking the road to Jerusalem:

At this time an innumerable multitude of people from the whole world, greater than any man before could have hoped to see, began to travel to the Sepulchre of the Saviour at Jerusalem. First to go were the petty people, then those of middling estate, and next the powerful, kings counts, marquesses and bishops; finally, and this was something that had never happened before, numerous women, noble and poor, undertook the journey.¹⁶

In 1055 Lietbert bishop of Cambrai and his party were unable to travel further than Laodicea because of local violence. The great German pilgrimage of 1064-65 has been numbered in thousands, led by the archbishop of Mainz and the bishops of Utrecht, Regensburg and Bamberg. It was attacked by robbers and had to be rescued by the local governor.¹⁷ Despite such problems, western pilgrimage continued. The cost involved, and suffering entailed was seen as part of the price of liberation from the burden of sin. And the sense of sin amongst the elite was very real. Fulk the Black of Anjou (987-1040) went on three, perhaps four pilgrimages to Jerusalem because:

When he had shed much blood in many battles in many places, he was driven by fear of hell to go to our Saviour's sepulchre at Jerusalem.¹⁸

Fulk was a formidable and aggressive warrior who had built a great principality in the Loire valley at the expense of his neighbours. Such was his power and wealth that it is difficult to see any other reason for his trips to Jerusalem than the "fear of hell" suggested by Glaber.

But what propelled men who, like Fulk, were the leaders of society, to embark on a fighting journey to free Jerusalem from Islamic rule at the end of the eleventh century? The answer is that Pope Urban II (1098-99) at the Council of Clermont in 1095, made a direct offer of personal salvation for all who would journey to free Jerusalem from Islamic rule. This offer meant that the road to Jerusalem became the pathway to salvation. And this was to be achieved by doing what they regarded as their right and privilege, fighting, which had been so often condemned. This offer of a personal spiritual benefit was articulated in the most forceful and categorical terms by Urban II. His essential message was a blunt,

¹⁶ Glaber, *Histories*, 199-201.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Church and People*, 289; E. Joranson, "The Great German Pilgrimage of 1064-1065," in L.J. Paetow, (ed.), *The Crusades and other historical essays presented to Dana C. Munro by his former students* (New York: Crofts, 1928), 3-43.

¹⁸ Glaber, *Histories*, 60-61.

simple assertion that those who took up arms in this holy cause would be saved:

‘Whoever for devotion only, not to gain honour or money, goes to Jerusalem to liberate the Church of God can substitute this journey for all penance.’¹⁹

Urban had his own motives for demanding the liberation of Jerusalem, notably a desire to upstage his enemies in the Investiture Contest who still controlled much of Italy. But what mattered was the clarity and simplicity of his message. The warlords of the west were now being told what they always desired to hear - that fighting, their way of life, could be meritorious, indeed could earn salvation. Not all who heard of Urban’s message were pious and certainly not all responded to his appeal. But enough powerful men did so, and in a society which was dominated by pyramids of patronage that meant that large numbers of lesser people felt obliged to follow their lord.²⁰ And thousands did go, and after a remarkable sequence of events they did capture Jerusalem on 15 July 1099.²¹ This elevated this small Palestinian city from a holy place to a centre of geopolitical conflict on an enormous scale.

For possession of Jerusalem was inevitably contested. The Turkish lords who dominated Islam were not deeply religious - they retained pagan attitudes and tolerated large Christian minorities in many of their cities and territories. But the new western settlers had established small principalities and appeared not minded to settle into the mosaic of petty states which divided the Middle East. In fact, they were highly aggressive and seemed to be able to summon great resources from Europe. For the establishment of western Christian rule in Jerusalem seemed to create a new geopolitical situation in which western powers acquired a stake in the status of Jerusalem and its hinterland. This is, however, at once an understatement and an overstatement. No king went on the First Crusade, but its success generated such momentum that kings, who in any case shared with their subjects a deep preoccupation with the salvation of their souls, were drawn into the movement. In consequence the kings of Germany and France led the Second Crusade, of France and England the Third, while St Louis was the sole author of the Seventh and Eighth crusades.

19 R. Somerville, *The Councils of Urban II. 1: Decreta Claramontensia* (Amsterdam, 1972), 80 tr. J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1996), p. 29.

20 J. France, ‘Cutting the Gordian Knot. Urban II and the Impact of the Council of Clermont’, in G.E.M. Lippiat and J.L. Bird (eds), *Crusading Europe. Essays in Honour of Christopher Tyerman* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 73-92.

21 J. France, *Victory in the East. A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).



The world map of the atlas attached to Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis*. MS. Vat. Lat. 2972 at the Vatican Library. It was probably drawn by Pietro Vesconte in 1320. (Wikimedia commons)

On the other hand, kings had complex interests in Europe and elsewhere, so that the focus on Jerusalem could never be consistent. Moreover, as kingdoms cohered and became more bureaucratic in their structures, calculation of the costs became more and more important, as we shall see. But in 1099 all that lay in the future, and for the Turkish princes and their leading subjects the prospect of major and sustained interference in their affairs by European power was, to say the least, unsettling.

And the western eruption had stirred religious animosity amongst Muslims. Ambitious Turkish princes came to realise that they could strengthen and extend their dominions by playing the religious card, by leading the struggle against the Christian settlers. In this way they could tap the wealth of the cities to pay their armies and gain the support of the *ulama*, the religious leaders who enjoyed great popularity amongst the city populations. In this way the recovery of Jerusalem could be the key to acquiring a rule over a whole vast area in the

name of Islamic unity. This quasi-religious leadership was all the more possible in that the Caliph at Baghdad was deeply involved in eastern affairs, which left the pursuit of holy war, *jihad*, largely a matter for secular rulers in places like Aleppo and Damascus.

In this way the struggle in the Middle East was one between two opposed elites. On the one hand the western settler lords. Their lands were not vast: four small principalities, Jerusalem, Antioch, Tripoli and Edessa. However, their rulers, although they were often divided amongst themselves, could call upon resources from Europe whose peoples were convinced of the religious importance of Jerusalem. On the other the Turkish lords of Aleppo, Damascus and Egypt were deeply divided, and far from popular with their native populations. Ultimately Saladin achieved an ascendancy in the Islamic world by posing as the champion of Islam against the alien settlers, though in reality he spent more time fighting Muslims than those he proclaimed as enemies. And in 1187 he defeated the army of Jerusalem and recovered the Holy City for his faith.²² This did not, however, resolve the geopolitical strife over Jerusalem. It merely reversed the terms of conflict.

The problem for Saladin had always been that possession of the kingdom of Jerusalem rested on cities, but they could not be besieged as long as a hostile field army was present. By destroying the field army of Jerusalem at Hattin in 1187 Saladin unlocked this conundrum. But this was now precisely the problem that faced the Third crusade. With enormous effort the western crusaders established a base at the important port of Acre, but they could not destroy Saladin's army to the extent that they could besiege Jerusalem. But the leader of the crusade, while undoubtedly he shared the religious enthusiasm which drove men on to Jerusalem, had also developed different thinking about the whole conflict. Richard I of England (1189-99) approached the crusade as a military campaign understood within a geopolitical context. From the first he eschewed any mad dash for Jerusalem, such as the First Crusade had made. He saw military power as a means of persuasion. After his arrival in the Levant Richard established contact with Saladin and made proposals for a deal involving the return of Jerusalem. The western settler lords of the old Kingdom of Jerusalem had been prepared to deal with Saladin and other Muslim lords, but Richard was a western king and this approach seemed alien. He twice refused to press on to Jerusalem when it seemed to be at his mercy, because he thought that if captured it could not be held. His geopolitical stance showed, most clearly in his sugges-

22 J. France, *Hattin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

tion that Egypt, the heart of Saladin's power, should be attacked.²³ Richard has been much praised for these perceptions, but his army was wedded to the dash for Jerusalem and his refusal to accept this ruined its morale and heightened internal disputes.

But the failure of the Third Crusade prompted a hard look at the geopolitical possibilities in the Middle East. The Fourth Crusade had the very radical objective of attacking Egypt directly using a fleet raised by Venice. It was in the event diverted and captured Constantinople in 1204.²⁴ Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) was determined that his crusade should be properly controlled and directed. This is why the Fifth Crusade, having landed initially in Palestine, also attacked Egypt and despite divided leadership came very near to success.²⁵ The politics of power clearly harnessed crusading fervour and dictated the nature of these crusades.

But the degree to which geopolitics ruled was revealed by the subsequent crusades. After the death of al-Adil in 1218 the dynasty of Saladin, the Ayyubids, were divided, and generally speaking Ayyubid rule became something of a family federation ruling parcels of territory scattered between the Jazira and Egypt, with the senior branch taking control of Egypt and Palestine, usually, though not invariably, together with Damascus. However, this was by no means a friendly arrangement and warfare between the various elements of the Ayyubid patchwork was by no means unusual. This was the situation which a series of expeditions set out to exploit.

Frederick II of Hohenstaufen had ascended to the thrones of the German Empire and Sicily with the support of the papacy. He had taken the cross in 1215 and been expected to join the Fifth Crusade; indeed, his failure to do so had left much of the blame for its collapse at his doorstep. After long delays he married the heiress to Latin Jerusalem and finally set sail with an army in 1227 but was struck down by illness. The pope, for his own reasons, promptly excommunicated Frederick who nonetheless departed in 1228.

No one can doubt that Frederick shared the common enthusiasm for liberating Jerusalem, but his methods reflected a fine grasp of the geopolitics of the

23 There is no good single study of the Third Crusade, but see J. Gillingham, *Richard I* (London: Yale University Press, 1999).

24 D.E. Queller and T.F. Madden, *The Fourth Crusade. The Conquest of Constantinople* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1997).

25 James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade 1213-1221* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

eastern Mediterranean. As an excommunicate Frederick technically could not be a crusader; in Palestine the religious orders, the clergy and many of the lords kept away from him, and he had only a small army. But Sicily was a major Mediterranean kingdom and through his rule there Frederick was acquainted with all the powers of the area. In particular, he had long established a good relationship with al-Kamil, the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt, who was immersed in a family feud. In 1229, by the Treaty of Jaffa, al-Kamil agreed to concede a truce for 10 years and to restore much of the old kingdom of Jerusalem.²⁶ In a sense geopolitics had triumphed with a crusade which was no crusade succeeding where so many others had failed. By 1239 the Treaty of Jaffa was to expire, and the likely fate of Jerusalem was all too clear because the kingdom, centred on Acre, was weak and divided.

This called for a new crusade, but it faced great difficulties. The French monarchy was just coming to the end of the long minority of Louis IX (1226-70) which faced considerable difficulties with England whose king, Henry III (1216-72), however, had his own problems. Frederick II was immersed in a grand struggle with the papacy for dominion in Italy. The kings of Aragon and Castile were pursuing their own crusade, if we can give it that title, for the reconquest of Spain.²⁷ The papacy itself showed little enthusiasm for any expedition to the Holy Land because it was engaged in trying to shore up the feeble Latin regime installed at Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade. Urban II had hoped to reconcile the eastern churches to papal supremacy by the crusade, but after 1204 the papacy was pursuing a ruthless *realpolitik* of coercing Byzantium into supporting the crusade and the recovery of Jerusalem. It is a remarkable tribute to the power of crusading fervour that in these circumstances eminent lay lords were prepared to travel once again to the eastern Mediterranean in the name of Jerusalem. In fact, two entirely independent expeditions set out for the east.

In 1239 Theobald of Champagne sailed for Acre and in one way or another a force of something like 4000 knights joined him. They proved to be very undisciplined and incompetent soldiers, and in December of that year Jerusalem was reoccupied by the Muslims. However, war broke out in the Ayyubid dynasty and Theobald was able to negotiate a treaty with As-Salih Ismail of Damascus by which Jerusalem and much of the old kingdom was restored to Christian hands.

26 B. Weiler, "Gregory IX, Frederick II and the liberation of the Holy Land, 1230-9", *Studies in Church History* xxxvi (2000), 192-206.

27 J.F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

In 1240 Theobald returned home but the arrival of Richard of Cornwall with strong English forces meant that the terms of the treaty were fulfilled.²⁸ Clearly crusading fervour remained very much alive in Europe, but it was now channelled into what we may reasonably call geopolitical calculation.

But the successes of the Barons' Crusade did not last long. In July 1244 the Khwarazmians, mercenaries from the southern steppe in the service of As-Salih Ayyub, virtually destroyed Jerusalem. In October of that year an alliance between the western settlers and the Ayyubids of Damascus, Homs and Kerak was annihilated by the Egyptians and their Khwarazmian allies at the battle of Harbiyah (La Forbie). The battle was largely lost as a result of the tactics of the western leaders. It effectively destroyed the military power of the Latin Kingdom, which was now entirely at the mercy of outside forces.²⁹ However, the deeply pious Louis IX of France, recovering from a bout of sickness, and perhaps shocked at the turn of events in the east, took the cross in 1244.³⁰ This fired the enthusiasm of the French nobility and a great army was assembled. It took almost four years of careful preparation and vast expense before 1248 when the army landed in Cyprus where it found enormous stocks of food gathered for its subsistence. Jean de Beaumont, Chamberlain of France, writing from Damietta after its capture, claimed there were then 1900 French knights, plus 700 from Outremer and the Orders.³¹ Rothelin says the army that left Cyprus for Damietta had 2500 knights and 5000 crossbowmen, who he seems to have regarded as the heart of the army. Joinville says there were 2800 knights in the army which left Cyprus.³² None of these figures take any account of the troops which arrived with Alphonse of Poitiers in October 1249. Nor do they take any account of the 260 knights and nobles who died in Cyprus during the long wait for the army to gather.³³ Overall given the masses of equipment and the fleet which was used to carry it up the Nile a figure of 20-25000 men mobilised, including 3000 knights,

28 Peter Jackson, "The crusades of 1239-41 and their aftermath", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1 (1987), 32-60; M. Lower, *The Baron's Crusade. A Call to Arms and its Consequences* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

29 *Crusader Syria in the Thirteenth Century. The Rothelin Continuation of the History of William of Tyre with part of the Eracles or Acre Text*, translated by J. Shirley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 64-65 suggests the allies were heavily outnumbered.

30 Joinville, *Life of St Louis* in Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades* tr. M.R.B. Shaw (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 191.

31 Jackson, 85-86.

32 *Crusader Syria in the Thirteenth Century*, 69; Joinville, 201 and 269.

33 Jackson, 83.

is not impossible. Nonetheless, despite initial success, St Louis' crusade failed.

What is truly interesting and highly influential for the future is an examination of the full circumstances of the crusade. St Louis was personally deeply pious, by no means a common attribute of European kings, and that piety happened to focus on Jerusalem. Indeed, he died on a second crusade, oddly to Tunisia, in 1270. His personality commanded deep respect amongst, and even beyond his people. Because almost all the participants were his subjects Louis was able to impose an admirable discipline upon them, in marked contrast to, for example, the Barons Crusades which were appallingly divided. Equally to the point he had inherited a strong bureaucracy which could exploit the resources of his kingdom and make the king's will felt everywhere. Much of the realm was in the hands of the royal brothers, Robert of Artois, Alphonse of Poitiers and Charles of Anjou, who ably seconded the king. And France faced no real external threats. Henry III of England had ambitions to restore the old Angevin dominions but in 1242, faced with the invasion of the Poitou by Henry III of England (1216-72), Louis raised an army of 4000 knights and 20000 foot, including many crossbowmen. They overwhelmed Henry III, who proved to be a poor leader, and in any case had only about 1600 knights and 20000 foot.³⁴

This was a unique combination of circumstances which enabled Louis to mount a very well-equipped expedition, and the staggering cost, another factor in the geopolitics of crusading, could only have been afforded by his rich kingdom. Louis' expenses on the crusade came to 1.5 *livres tournois*, something like six times his normal annual income. The French church offered a tenth of clerical incomes, the towns of the royal demesne were mulcted, and Jews dispossessed.³⁵ The actual expedition, the king's ransom after his capture in 1250, and his continued residence in the Holy Land until 1254 were an incredible burden which only the drive of Louis himself, the wealth of the kingdom and the competence of the French administrative system could have sustained.

The price of Jerusalem had clearly escalated, and the course of events in the Middle East did nothing to reduce it. St Louis had not conquered Egypt, but his crusade contributed to the destruction of the Ayyubid regime in Egypt. Al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (1240-49) died as the French set out from up the Nile from

34 France, *Medieval France at War*, 164-68.

35 F.A. Cazel, "Financing the Crusades", in K. Setton and M.W. Baldwin (eds), *History of the Crusades* 6 vols (Philadelphia and Madison: University Presses of Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, 195586), 6:144-47.

Damietta to Mansurah.³⁶ His successor al-Malik al Mu'azzam was deeply suspicious of the commanders and governors in Egypt, and his poor treatment of the Mamluks, who had saved Mansurah from the French, led to his assassination by them. The Mamluk regime which emerged defeated the Mongol incursion into Syria at the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260 and went on to destroy the remnant of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291. Europeans were by no means indifferent to these events but were consumed by their own conflicts. In particular, the French crusade of 1264-66 had placed Charles of Anjou on the throne of the Sicilian Kingdom. His increasingly powerful position in the Mediterranean created an alliance against him. In 1282 the allies were able to profit from the anti-French revolt we know as the Sicilian Vespers. After this Italian wars raged by sea and land involving all the Mediterranean powers until 1302 and the Peace of Caltabellotta.³⁷

The whole geopolitical position of Jerusalem had radically changed since the time of the First Crusade. The Byzantine empire was a shadow of its former self and deeply suspicious of western activity, while the Middle East was now largely dominated by a single power, the highly militarised and efficient Mamluk regime in Egypt. However, crusading still had certain assets whose existence continued to keep it alive. The fate of Jerusalem still engaged western people and would continue to do so. Cyprus had been seized from the Byzantines by Richard I on the Third Crusade and it was a potential base for attack on the Mamluk dominions.³⁸ In addition, the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia remained a Christian outpost in largely Muslim territory.³⁹ More remotely there was the Christian kingdom of Georgia.⁴⁰ The Mongol domination, the Ilkhanid regime, in Persia, offered hope of an alliance against Islam.⁴¹ In 1299 news of Ilkhanid Ghazan's victory at Homs over the Mamluks aroused great enthusiasm in Europe. Moreover, European rulers were aware of political instability amongst the

36 Ibn Wasil, in Jackson, 133-34.

37 S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers. A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century* (Penguin: Harmondsworth 1960).

38 P.P. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades 1191-1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

39 T.S.R. Boase (ed.), *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia* (Scottish Academic Press: Edinburgh, 1978).

40 D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

41 D. Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare Volume: Muslims, Mongols and the Struggle Against the Crusades: Volume 2* (London: Hambledon, 2007).

Mamluks, though they probably overestimated this.⁴²

And those who urged the rulers of Europe to do something about Islamic control of this holy relic could count on one powerful relic of crusading zeal, control of the Mediterranean and, in particular of its eastern basin. Before the crusades the chief naval powers in the eastern Mediterranean were Byzantium and Egypt. The First Crusade and the early Latin settlements were supported by Genoese, Venetian and Pisan shipping. These fleets so dominated the eastern Mediterranean that Venice effectively conquered Constantinople in 1204, and while the fifth and seventh crusades fought in Egypt their seaborne communications were untroubled by any real threat. In fact, even much Muslim trade in the Mediterranean was carried by the ships of the Italian city states. There was little prospect of this changing for the Mamluks were land soldiers and, in any case, suffered from a shortage of timber, while Anatolia had become divided amongst petty Turkish principalities, *beyliks*, whose piracy never amounted to a major threat.⁴³

And by the end of the thirteenth century Europe was a markedly more literate world, and as a result a literature arose on the subject of recovering Jerusalem which can be directly regarded as geopolitical. Its purpose was to persuade the European monarchs to cooperate to recover Jerusalem and this led the authors to an examination of the political and military situation in the Middle East, a geopolitical analysis in fact. Modern historians used to dismiss these tracts as mere phantasies, because it was believed that after 1291 crusading in the Middle East was no longer a real possibility. However, it is clear now that the crusade was very much alive in the later Middle Ages and that on occasion circumstances arose which favoured a European reassertion there. Philip IV of France became very pious and deeply interested in Jerusalem in his later years. The cessation of the Hundred Years War after the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360 seemed to favour a real effort to recover the Holy City.

By the end of the fourteenth century the rise of the Ottoman Turks bred a real awareness of crusading.⁴⁴ These were serious tracts with a practical purpose. But the crusade was not merely a preoccupation in official circles. In 1320 an uprising in Normandy, the *Pastoureaux*, was led by a young shepherd who

42 N. Housley, *The Later Crusades. From Lyons to Alcazar 1274-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 22-23.

43 J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean 649/571* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

44 Housley, *Later Crusades*, is an authoritative examination of the crusade in this period.

claimed to have been inspired to help the reconquest of Spain. He raised substantial forces and, despite official opposition, marched south attacking royal centres and, above all, killing Jews. There is no doubt that in part this was a protest against royal taxation in a time of famine and poor harvests, but the form which it took clearly reveals the continuing popularity of crusading. In the event the movement was dispersed in northern Spain and its leaders executed.⁴⁵

One of the earliest tracts examining the prospects for a new crusade was that of Fidenzio of Padua who produced his *Liber recuperatione terrae sanctae* in 1291 for Pope Nicolas IV (1288-92). He was a Franciscan who had worked for much of his life in the Middle East. He advocated a new expedition, and discussed the various routes it might take, but he also recognised the need for a *passagium particulare*, a preliminary expedition to prepare for the final assault. Fidenzio discussed the tactics of Islamic armies and the best way to combat them. He was particularly concerned to mount a blockade of Egypt to cut off its profitable trade with Europe.⁴⁶ This work survives only in one manuscript, and appeared in the midst of the Italian wars, so it was probably little known.

Circumstances seemed more favourable after 1302 especially as Philip of France was now interested. His adviser, William of Nogaret, suggested that if the king was to lead a crusade, he should be given the product of heavy taxation of the clergy. Pierre Dubois, another Frenchman, was a publicist and lawyer whose tract on the recovery of the Holy Land was written in 1306, and also advocated French leadership in the holy war and domination of the papacy.⁴⁷

A rather more disinterested approach was taken by the great Catalan thinker and philosopher Ramon Lull whose espousal of crusading ideas in his writings led to his travelling to the French court before his death in 1316. This was a time of considerable discussion there of how Jerusalem might be liberated, in which the question of costs of any such expedition loomed very large. The fourteenth century saw a series of economic disruptions, creating an atmosphere which was not favourable to crusading. Despite this the French court gave much attention to the east, notably to assisting the Armenians of Cilicia. In 1323 the French

45 M. Barber, 'The Pastoureaux of 1320', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981), 143-66.

46 C. Bontea, 'The Theory of the *Passagium Particulare*: A Commercial Blockade of the Mediterranean in the Early Fourteenth Century?', in G. Theotokis and Aysel Yıldız (eds.), *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea: Aspects of War, Diplomacy, and Military Elites* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 202-219.

47 Pierre Dubois, *The Recovery of the Holy Land [De recuperatione Terrae Sanctae]*, ed and trans. W. I. Brandt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

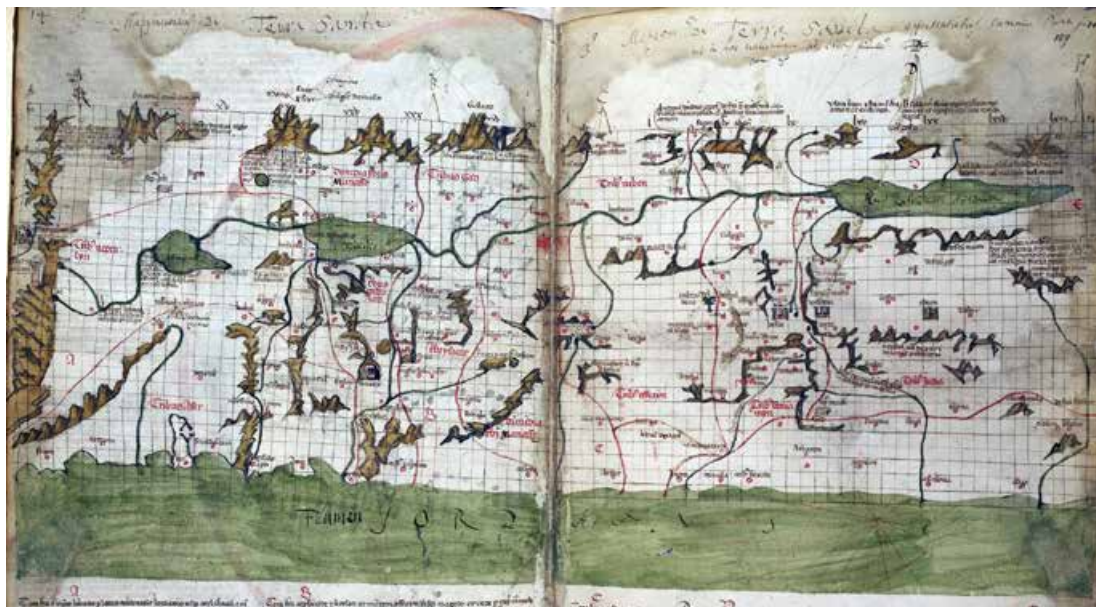
court was setting out carefully considered plans for an expedition to the east. By this time it was accepted that a *primum passagium*, an initial expedition was needed even before the major effort of the *passagium particulare*. The initial journey, they calculated was likely to cost 200000 livres, while the *passagium particulare* would run to 1,600,000 livres per year. These were frightening figures, and it is hardly surprising that French action was limited to involvement in a naval league in 1334. By 1337 relations with England had deteriorated, and what we know as the Hundred Years War had broken out. The French monarchy had a new preoccupation, and Jerusalem had slipped from its priorities.⁴⁸

But during this period one of the most ambitious of crusader tracts was produced by Marino Sanuto the Elder. He was an aristocrat, born into an important Venetian trading family, and had spent some time in Acre prior to its fall. He became an outstanding advocate of a new crusade, and his great work, *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* was widely circulated. It was first written in 1306 to 1307 but revised very considerable when it was presented to Pope John XXII (1316-34) in 1321. A French translation was shortly after sent to King Charles IV of France (1322-28). Sanuto knew the eastern Mediterranean well, and this informed his writing. His proposals were immensely detailed. He recognised the need for good financial backing and advocated a concerted attack on Egypt, for which he suggested a thorough blockade and sophisticated military tactics. A novel feature was the inclusion of a set of maps covering strategic areas. This treatise was immensely popular and survives in a number of copies.⁴⁹

Philippe de Mézières was a tireless advocate of the crusade. In 1346 he was a member of the successful expedition to Smyrna, and then went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, an experience which clearly marked him for life because he became a tireless advocate of its freedom. He produced a very substantial body of work, but his ideas were primarily worked out in his *Nova Religio Passionis* of 1367-68, later enlarged, the *Life of Peter Thomas* of 1369 and the *Songe du Vieil Pèlerin* of 1389. In 1360 he became Chancellor of King Peter I of Cyprus (1358-

48 Housley, *Later Crusades*, 29-37.

49 *Secrets of the True Crusaders to help them recover the Holy Land* translated by A. Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims Texts Society, 1896); A. Leopold, *How to Recover the Holy Land: The Crusade Proposals of the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); E. Edson, (2004). "Reviving the crusade: Sanudo's schemes and Vesconte's maps," in R. Allen (ed.), *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travelers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 131-155; C. Tyerman, "Marino Sanudo Torsello and the Lost Crusade: lobbying in the fourteenth century", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982), 53-73.



The map of the Holy Land by Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis*.
British Library, MS Additional 27376, fol. 188v-189r.

69) and participated in that king's very brief capture of Alexandria in 1365.⁵⁰ He was, therefore, a soldier experienced in the affairs of the eastern Mediterranean. After the murder of Peter I, Philippe became an advisor to the French monarchy

Like many contemporaries he deplored the fragmentation of Europe and its quarrels, but unlike others he recognised that the Middle East was highly fragmented, and he knew that Peter's success in 1365 owed much to the instability in Mamluk Egypt. All this he saw as offering real opportunities. As a soldier himself he recognized how vital and difficult to overcome was the discipline of the standing army of the Mamluks. His response was to advocate the formation of a fighting Order sworn to the liberation of Jerusalem. At its heart were to be 1000 knights and 2000 other horsemen with 6000 archers and crossbowmen, supported by 12000 other troops and 10000 sailors. His Order was quite unlike most of the Orders of the age in that it was not exclusively knightly. It was a temporary body with a defined purpose, for Philippe was realistic enough to recognise that in an international force a standing army was impossible. He

⁵⁰ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 151-69 argues that the expedition of 1365 was a response to the economic problems of Cyprus, albeit shrouded in crusading rhetoric.

estimated this would cost two million florins over 2 years, and this would be self-supporting with members paying their way. Of course this was not to be. Curiously he seems not to have been in any way connected to the largely French expedition against the Ottomans which ended in disaster at the battle of Nicopolis on 21 September 1396. His last work, *Epistre lamentable el consolatoire*, was clearly provoked by this terrible episode and asserted the principles of discipline and order which had been so ignored by that crusade.⁵¹

The word *geopolitics* was originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kiellén at the turn of the 20th century. Obviously medieval people had no such term, but not having the word is not the same as not having what it stands for. After all, strategy in the modern sense dates only from the very late eighteenth century, but soldiers had always been capable of strategic thinking. Medieval sources, however, rarely record the thinking which went into planning campaigns. The crusades, however, were wars on a quite different scale from the European norm. Despite the limitations of our sources we can usually gain some hint of the priorities of those who organized them. The collapse of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187 and the failure of the Third Crusade, the last “dash for Jerusalem”, prompted very careful thought which can be described as geopolitical, and this was intensified after the final destruction of the restored kingdom in 1291. The various proposals for a restoration of control over Jerusalem reviewed here were not fantasies, but serious proposals about a serious matter. The people who wrote them for the most part knew the eastern Mediterranean and produced carefully considered (and very expensive) proposals. These were taken seriously by policy-makers who shared their geopolitical and religious outlook. But circumstances never allowed the ideas to come to fruition - of course a common experience for geopolitical thinkers!

51 J. France, “Philippe de Mézières and the Military History of the Fourteenth Century,” in R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and K. Petrov (eds.), *Philippe de Mézières and His Age. Piety and Politics in the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 283-94.

Geopolitics and political language in the fourteenth-century Crown of Aragon

BY DAVID COHEN

On December 10, 1364, two armies faced each other across a wide plain in Spain's arid southeast. The plain was, appropriately enough, called "la Matança" (massacre)—because, as one of the kings leading the armies recalled later in his chronicle, "there had occurred there many great battles of great kings." This king was Pere III the Ceremonious (1336-1387), ruler of a collection of territories, mostly in the northeast of Spain, known together as the Crown of Aragon. According to his history, the two armies came to La Matança in starkly different moods. On his own side, "our Lord God put all our people in such a good heart that all went joyous and satisfied, especially because they thought there would be combat." Happily they marched into the plain and halted, ceremoniously one might say, to await the enemy. But among their foes, division and debate stalled forward movement. Their leader, Pedro I the Cruel, king of Castile (1350-1369), hated Pere and commanded, it seems, the larger force. Nevertheless he gathered a council of war and asked the assembled wise men what they thought of the day. One of them, said to have been bolder than the others because his sister was Pedro's favorite mistress, spoke up:

Sire, for a long time God has divided the House of Castile and the House of Aragon, so that, if the kingdom of Castile were broken into four parts and one had only one of them, it would be more land than the king of Aragon has, and still its ruler would be a great king. And God knows you are one of the three kings of the Christian world, and if I said the greatest, I do not think I would lie. Therefore I think you, lord, should go into the plain and offer battle to the said king of Aragon, and you may be sure, lord, this day you will conquer the said king of Aragon and his power, and you will be king of Castile and Aragon, and afterward, if it pleases God, emperor of Spain.

The rest of the council agreed. Then, oddly, Pedro called for a piece of bread. Grasping the loaf, he sneered at the gathering:

If I had with me those that the said king of Aragon has with him, and they were my vassals and my countrymen, then fearlessly I would fight all of you and all Castile, and even all Spain. And so that you may know what

I think of you, with this piece of bread that I have in my hand, I think I could feed all the loyal men in Castile.

With that—and, let us remember, all of this is according to Pere’s report—Pedro ordered a retreat. In an interesting coda, one version of the chronicle has several Castilian knights exclaim, after Pedro’s failure to accept Pere’s challenge, “that never had Castile taken such great dishonor.” Meanwhile, the king of Aragon (this being Pere’s senior title, often used to denote the monarch of the whole Crown of Aragon) and his men stood in the field four hours, “to our honor, awaiting our enemy.” After his opponent went away, two of his nobles opined, “Sire, you have completed what pertains to your honor, and now is the time that you may go.” Whatever slaughters once scarred that ground, no battle was fought that day at La Matança between Pere of Aragon and Pedro of Castile.¹

This story from a king’s chronicle offers an opportunity to look at something like geopolitics “before the term,” to borrow Professor Black’s phrase, in a source from the highest reaches of medieval government.² The Castilian baron’s statement³ seems indeed to anticipate the logic popularly associated, at least, with “classical” geopolitical argument and analysis. Geography, as both measurement of might and historical setting, exercises an almost compulsive force. Spain appears here as a unit, hence suited, the speaker seems to imply, to the government of one ruler—despite God’s apparent intention, at least in the past, that it should be divided among several kings. Land is power, and Castile’s king has more of it, far more, than any other monarch in Spain. He is bound, therefore, to win any fight he chooses to have against one of those other monarchs. In this case, he faces Aragon. Victory will add Aragon to Castile, and that will be enough to turn the latter’s lord into the Emperor of All Spain.⁴ The speech seems to expect its royal auditor to obey—that is the word—this simple situational logic as a matter of course.

- 1 All quotations in this paragraph are from Pere III, *Crònica*, vi.52; for the Catalan original see *Les quatre grans cròniques*, ed. F. Soldevila (Barcelona, 1983), 1147-8; in English, Pere III, *Chronicle*, trans. M. Hillgarth with introduction and notes by J. N. Hillgarth (Toronto, 1980), 564-7. My translations of chronicle passages follow the Hillgarths’ excellent work overall, but I have strayed sometimes to follow my own preferences in interpreting the Catalan and in orthography.
- 2 See J. Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, 2016), chs. 2 and 3.
- 3 Pere confidently identifies the speaker as the Master of Santiago, but Pedro’s mistress’s brother was in fact the Master of Calatrava, so the issue of the speaker’s identity is somewhat muddled. See the discussion in Pere III, *Chronicle*, Hillgarth trans., 565, n. 152.
- 4 Some previous kings of León, and León-Castile, had claimed this title for themselves; see Pere III, *Crònica*, vi.52; Hillgarth trans., 566, n. 154.

The baron's argument is crude—too crude by half, one is tempted to suggest. Should we trust Pere's report? He was, after all, an interested party, and the council scene seems suspiciously flattering of Aragonese valor—with a small hymn to it out of Pedro's mouth, no less! One can also sense, perhaps, a subtle damning of Castilian policy as both conscious of and blasphemously careless about God's evident design that there be more than one Christian king in Spain. On the other hand, Pere did claim to have heard from "persons worthy of credence" about what was said in Pedro's council "on the day we entered the plain."⁵ But whether such a speech was made or not, and whether the story emerged from Castilian court gossip or the imagination of Pere and his co-authors, or (probably) a combination of both, it demonstrates an essential point, which is the wide range of the thinkable and expressible in Pere's place and time, when it comes to the interrelations of geography, motive, power rivalry, and war—in a word, to geopolitics.

This essay's purpose is to examine the place of geopolitics in this sense in Crown of Aragon government documents during the rein of Pere III, and above all his 1356-1366 war with Pedro of Castile.⁶ The study relies on Pere's autobiographical chronicle, already cited, and relevant examples selected from the letters that were his major form of political communication. These letters survive in their tens of thousands in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon in Barcelona.⁷ In sheer quantity of writing produced in his name, Pere stands out in the Middle Ages, in part because his reign covers half a century. "In his name" is, of course, a problematic point. The king himself was not directly involved in all this written production; no one could have been. Chancery notations indicate, however, that he wrote many of the letters in his own hand and dictated and/or personally proofread many, many more, including almost all those cited here.⁸ In this read-

5 *Ibid.*, Hillgarth trans., 564.

6 On this war, see P. E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford, 1955), esp. ch. 2; M. Lafuente Gómez, *La guerra de los dos Pedros en Aragón (1356-1366): Impacto y transcendencia de un conflicto medieval* (Zaragoza, 2009); and D. Kagay and A. Villalon, *Conflict in Fourteenth-Century Iberia: Aragon vs. Castile and the War of the Two Pedros* (Leiden, 2020). For Pere's reign in general, the best work is still R. d'Abadal, *Pere el cerimoniós i els inicis de la decadència política de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1970); Black, *Geopolitics*, 38-9, provides a survey of references from Pere's sources, in relation to geopolitics.

7 Documents from this archive are cited here with ACA (for Archive of the Crown of Aragon), C (for chancery), and the register and folio numbers for the whole document where the cited material appears.

8 On Pere's participation in the writing of chancery letters, see *Epistolari de Pere III*, ed. R. Gu-

iness to work with words, Pere was typical of his family (and, as will be seen, a document from Pere's grandfather, Jaume II, will also provide us a well-known geopolitical reference). The House of Aragon and its governmental apparatus were not laconic institutions. The fourteenth-century Crown of Aragon thus attracts a study of political language by virtue of the immense quantity and, it is hoped this essay will demonstrate, quality of its primary sources.

The essay begins by suggesting ways the political structure of Pere's realm, and the political practice it seemed to require, helped shape his understanding of geography. The discussion then proceeds to consider the presence of geography and geopolitics in the king's sources, from typically humble, extremely local sorts of geographic references, to statements of a very general, overarching, almost "strategic" kind. The goal is to discover something of the nature of his geographical understanding and, especially, the way he used geography in his political communications with his subjects. The study concludes by looking at how two of his most sweeping and, in the classical sense, geopolitical statements—including the speech he attributes to a Castilian baron at La Matança—may express a deep change in Pere's geopolitical outlook, based on his experience during his war with Pedro.

It could be argued that an awareness of "the spatial dimension of power"⁹ was built into the very structure of the Crown of Aragon and the political practice that that structure seemed to demand from its monarchs. Pere ruled over, not a kingdom, but a sort of magpie accumulation of territories, a classic example of a medieval or early modern "composite monarchy."¹⁰ Pere's official title or style reflected this reality. He was, as his more formal documents announced him, "Pere, by the grace of God king of Aragon, Valencia, the Majorcas, Sardinia, and Corsica, and count of Barcelona, Roussillon, and Cerdagne."¹¹ Some of these titles (notably Corsica) were mere claims, and others bitterly contested, but even in the core lands of Aragon, Catalonia (officially, the "county of Bar-

bern (Barcelona, 1955), 8-23, and F. M. Gimeno Blay, *Escribir, reinar: La experiencia gráfico-textual de Pedro IV el Ceremonioso (1336-1387)* (Madrid, 2006). On his involvement in chronicle composition, see Hillgarth's introduction to Pere III, *Chronicle*, 47-68, and S. M. Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis: Les quatre grans cròniques* (Barcelona, 2007), 195-270.

9 Black, *Geopolitics*, 38.

10 J. H. Elliott, "A Europe of Composite Monarchies," *Past & Present* 137 (1992), 48-71, introduced the term, but there is a large bibliography on the overall subject, dating both before and after Elliott's article.

11 *Actas de la Cortes Generales de la Corona de Aragón de 1362-63*, ed. J. M. Pons Guri, *Colleción de Documentos Inéditos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*, vol. 50 (Madrid, 1982), 1. Late in the reign, the titles "duke of Athens and Neopatria" would have been added to this list.

celona”), and Valencia, the names reflected divisions of law and identity that were intensely and consciously held. In turn, these entities—Aragon, Catalonia, etc.—which appear so neatly distinguished by their names, were themselves awkwardly composite, with each town, church corporation, and noble family cherishing its rights and its pride, and clamoring for royal attention.

Such political fragmentation on both local and regional levels was quite typical of medieval western Europe. Kings of the period therefore commonly followed the practice now known to historians as “itinerant kingship”—and Pere did so as well.¹² The stay (short or long) in one place, the call to go and tend to another, the endlessly repeated packing and unpacking, the roster of stopping-places and routes between them: all these were deeply-known to Pere throughout his life. He did not shy from recording the details in his chronicle: “On the sixth day of the month of September in the year 1363 we entered the city of Zaragoza. We were in this city ten days and left on the sixteenth day of the month and journeyed toward the town of Perpignan, passing by Monzón, Barbastro, and Lleida, Cervera d’Urgell and Manresa, and by Ripoll and Camprodon, and entered Perpignan the twenty-third day of October”—so passed one sub-section of his chronicle, continuing thus for several more lines.¹³ Pere was clearly interested in this sort of thing forming part of his life’s record, although allowing a passage to devolve into a toll of way-points, and little else, was somewhat unusual.¹⁴ A mental map of memories emerges: the rough country linen he slept on at Vilafranca del Penedès; the ford of Pina by which one could cross the Ebro on the way to Zaragoza; the fig trees outside Perpignan, worth preserving from destruction by his troops even when the town was held by an enemy; the good hunting on the way to La Matança.¹⁵

Itineracy and the resulting knowledge of terrain and routes—whether personal to Pere, as it surely was in at least some cases, or as part of the institutional memory of his court—can be detected behind the geographical references and analyses that find their way into Pere’s wartime communications. These documents take us to the nexus of geographical perception and the politics necessary

12 References to itinerant kingship are frequent in the secondary literature on medieval monarchy; an exemplary focused study is J. W. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Germany, c. 936-1075* (Cambridge, 2002). Many questions about itinerant leadership seem unanswered, including why it looks so obligatory in some premodern societies and not in others.

13 Pere III, *Crònica*, vi.37; Soldevila, 1141; Hillgarth trans., 541.

14 Similar passages can be found at iii.15, v.42, vi.29-30, vi.38, vi.46-49.

15 Respectively, iv.12, iv.22, iii.76, vi.50.

to the conduct of war in a medieval society. Royal authority in the Crown of Aragon allowed only sparingly for unmediated command and obedience. The king could describe himself, in a formulaic way, as issuing “commands”—but he had to do so with arguments, threats, and inducements. The recipient might say no, the documents seem to imply. Even with court servants and men nominally under arms, let alone the privileged and propertied subjects from whom he needed to win grants of tax, Pere had to persuade.¹⁶ Spatial-locational analysis was one sort of argument he might use to wangle cooperation:

It is very necessary that the castle of Novillas be strengthened, and well-supplied with food and companies [of troops]; therefore we say to you and command that you fortify the said castle . . . because if the said place [Novillas] were taken by the enemy, which God not grant, it would be in a very bad spot because of the passage of the Ebro they would have, and because nothing could come from Navarre to Aragon, for which it is needful that the said place be provided for in such manner that it is secure.

Since we see that, if the enemy establish themselves in Cariñena it could turn to the great damage and peril of Zaragoza and the whole kingdom [of Aragon], we ask you affectionately that, in such a great necessity, you ensconce yourself in the said place with the whole company of Hospitallers, because we firmly believe that, with the help of God, you and the said company will know how to defend the said place, in which defense you will do us and our Crown a signal service.

The city of Lleida is a notable city, and the key to Catalonia from the region of Aragon; therefore the lord king wishes, ordains, and commands that all buildings outside the walls be razed for a space of fifty *alnes* . . . so that a moat may be made.¹⁷

These statements were in no way unusual during the war with Pedro. Pere spent most of that grueling clash on the defensive, and his letters from that time are full of how the loss of one castle or town threatens others.¹⁸ Danger loomed over

16 For a comparison of Pere’s language with that of a government rhetorically more oriented toward terse monarchic command, see J. E. Lendon and D. A. Cohen, “Strong and Weak Regimes: Comparing the Roman Principate and the Medieval Crown of Aragon,” in *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. J. P. Arnason and K. A. Raaflaub (Chichester, 2011), 85–110.

17 Respectively, ACA, C, 1381:166v; 1384:172r; *Documents historichs catalas del segle XIV*, ed. J. Coroleu (Barcelona, 1889), 17. An *alna* is approximately a meter.

18 ACA, C, 1384:82v–84r; 1385:109r–110r; 1385:119v; 1386:6v; 1386:18r–v; 1387:13v; see also the extended quotation from a speech of Pere’s at Black, *Geopolitics*, 38. Significantly, all these are from the first half of 1363, when Pedro was conquering a great swath from the bor-

vulnerable routes in the landscape. Thus, for the king, one use of geographical reference was as part of a rhetoric of urgency to spur action from slow subordinates and tax-shy subjects. This rhetorical aspect of the use of geography in Pere's communications is heightened by the way it could be combined with other themes to the same persuasive purpose. "With great pain at heart," he wrote to the urban leaders of Catalonia in March 1363,

we tell you that we have had certain news that the place of Magallón has surrendered, because of which we see Borja, Tarazona, and all the places of those parts in great danger, and consequently the whole kingdom [of Aragon], which means that soon we must fight the said king [of Castile, in a pitched battle], since we love better to live or die a king than to lose all we have little by little; wherefore, with as great a feeling of heart as we can, we pray and advise your very faithful natural loyalty that you send hurriedly some company of foot, crossbowmen and spearmen, to be with us in the said battle.¹⁹

The king's aim here is to goad the audience to identify with his sentiments: his sense of danger, his grief at loss, his defiant desire "to live or die a king." Monarchic emotion had, in effect, the same legitimacy in public discussion as analysis of the meaning of the enemy's location in space. In another letter from the same month, he tried to inspire some officials negotiating an advance of tax payments by describing the danger to Borja and other places, and then added "our whole fortune is at stake, and the urgency of doing it [negotiating the advance] is such that speed is life to us and delay is death . . . so great is the danger that in writing we cannot express it."²⁰ Thus spoke Pere as the king in pain, right alongside the king who uttered plain facts like which castles and towns led to which.

Pere was, however, a prolific and experienced communicator operating from a long, multifaceted tradition, and a complex personality besides, and so he had other tones—or, if one prefers, masks—that still had a role for geopolitical argument. He could play the serenely rational, wisely-choosing statesman-monarch who takes in information and brings forth considered judgments. This deliberative image is often associated in medieval studies with the ruler as font of justice, but Pere brought its lineaments to his role as leader of politics and war, where one can see dilemmas among spatially-defined options described, and

ders of Aragon to the coast of Valencia. Pere's wartime language was not constant, but changed its themes as military circumstances and the king's preoccupations changed. That said, there are examples from other phases of the war, e. g., ACA, C, 1381:116v, 1381:163v, 1387:69r-v.

19 ACA, C, 1386:3v-4r.

20 ACA, C, 1385:119v-120r.

choices made about where to place limited resources. When in 1360 the city council of Barcelona asked that a parliamentary grant be spent on galleys for maritime defense, Pere answered that it could not be, because he had to save all for the war on the land:

as you know, in times past, seeing that the king of Castile made his effort more by the sea than by land, we . . . turned our face toward the business of the sea, not avoiding danger or labor for our person, nor for our subjects, as is known to all the world.²¹ Now by reason of the city of Tarazona and the other castles and places of its neighborhood [in inland Aragon], which by the work of our lord God who pursues our justice we have, as you know, received and taken recently from the hand and power of our said enemy king, it is necessary that we turn our face more to the war on land and especially in this region, than to the business of the sea, because this war is extremely profitable and honorable to us and our Crown and to our kingdoms and lands . . .

And so on at some length Pere went, describing where Pedro was in the region, and which captains Pere had sent against him, and who was leading the army of Aragon's flanks, and how near they were to Pedro, all to show that "the business of the land today, as the present deeds show us, is to us a greater honor, and it is more necessary and profitable to conduct this war on land and turn our face and all our intention toward it than to the matter of the sea."²² Pere could get prolix when in good-judgment mode, because showing himself taking in information, mastering it, and wielding it in decision-making was part of the point.²³

In the chronicle, the king seems to have taken pleasure in drawing out a good council scene, with him starring as a skilled resolver of quandaries.²⁴ A lovely example is set at the moment in 1347 when he was simultaneously confronted by the rebellion of the "Union" in Aragon and an invasion of Roussillon by his cousin and bitter enemy, Jaume III of Majorca, whom Pere had recently deposed from his island throne. Which threat to confront first? Officials from Aragon

21 In 1359 Pedro had led a seaborne attack on Barcelona—driven back, according to Pere, by his flagship's bravura employment of a single cannon; see Pere III, *Crònica*, vi.24.

22 ACA, C, 1169:90v-91r.

23 For a similarly detailed, wordy argument about the choice of sea vs. land, see ACA, C, 1382:17r-18r.

24 The instance described here is the one where geopolitical considerations are most distinctly present, but council scenes as a type are basic structural elements in the chronicle: each of the five chapters (denoted here by Roman numerals) dealing with Pere's own reign depicts near its beginning a council that sets much of the agenda for what follows: ii.4, iii.11-13, iv.12, v.3, and vi.4.

clamored with elaborate reasons why he should see first to their kingdom. “And having heard this report,” the king wrote, “we called a council” to decide the question of priorities. Advisors opined on both sides. As Pere listened, “our Lord God put it into our understanding” that he should go first to Barcelona and secure it, and then “all Catalonia” would follow him, and with Catalonia he could defeat both his cousin and the Union. Then he spoke to his bickering counselors:

You are all in debate, and some hold that we should go to Aragon, and some that we should oppose our enemy, En Jaume . . . who has entered or is about to enter our land. Therefore we have decided that it is best to go to aid Roussillon to resist our enemy, who intends to lay waste our land, than to go to Aragon now, since the disagreement between us and those of Aragon is about franchises, privileges, and liberties that they say we have broken, so that, if we grant them these things, in any case we can come to an agreement with them, and we cannot do that with En Jaume.²⁵

One can see in Pere’s thoughts to himself—or between himself and God—an estimate of Catalonia’s value as a base of power and of the political role of Barcelona in holding Catalonia. The king’s actual address to the council, which follows, argues forcefully that cousin Jaume should be the first target. Pere combines political and geographical circumstance to show himself the divinely-inspired and wise assessor and chooser of policy, as well as the welcome decider of quarrels.

One can cite other passages in this vein, some terse or vague, others full of circumstantial detail.²⁶ When an uncle, placed in charge of Valencia’s defense, tried to get Pere to move his main army to that kingdom, the king refused, saying he should not do it, “because damage could follow to our kingdom and dishonor to us . . . since the kingdom of Valencia is not a land from which we can attack Castile powerfully, because the hinterland [*comarques*] and the borders are in such disposition that it cannot be done—and if [we are only there] to defend, and not to attack, it would not be well to be in Valencia, consuming our own and the food of that kingdom, of which there is no great abundance”—a

25 *Crònica*, iv.12 (Soldevila, 1093-1094; Hillgarth trans., 399-400). My interpretation of Pere’s plan for pacifying Aragon differs from the Hillgarths’, who have Pere suggesting he grant them their liberties, but revoke the grants when the time is ripe. Such deceit seems to me entirely in keeping with Pere’s character and his self-presentation in the chronicle, but the translation I have adopted seems to me to make better sense of the Catalan.

26 In 1364 Pere sent an official to tell a Cortes being held in Zaragoza that he had determined to leave off a siege in Valencia and instead invade Castile, “and this for many reasons as the said Lope de Gurrea [the servant in question] can explain to them, as one who is well-informed about it” (ACA, C, 1386:95v-97r). Even Pere could tire of long written explanations.

quick assessment of both terrain and logistics in that southern kingdom.²⁷ Told by two of his officers that, if they had cavalry, they could besiege Pedro in a Valencian castle, he brushed them off with the line, “if they were there, it would not be wisely done, because there he [Pedro] can be resupplied quickly.”²⁸ In documents like these, one can see again the familiarity with his kingdoms’ terrain, bred by a lifetime of travel.

The foregoing should demonstrate sufficiently that geographic and geopolitical modes of argument and analysis were quite familiar for Pere and his audience. Two problems should already be visible, however, with using geopolitical discourse to understand war as fought by the fourteenth-century Crown of Aragon. First, what one might loosely call geo-talk comes embedded in a whole range of other, often quite different themes. These other themes and the “geopolitical” arguments generally complement one another without much perceptible tension. Thus when Pere tells a commander of Hospitallers that holding tight to Cariñena will protect the rest of Aragon, and adds that by this act “you will do us and our Crown a signal service,” he is simply describing the same task in two different but quite harmonious ways. Likewise, when he tells his uncle that he (Pere) could suffer “dishonor” if he were to go to Valencia, he means the very shame that would arise from foolishly placing his army in a bad place for its maintenance and from which it could not attack. At other times, non-geopolitical terms appear to contradict directly, or simply to stand alongside of without interacting with, geopolitical ones. Thus, in the scene at La Matança with which we began, Pedro of Castile’s counterargument, presented as devastating to the outspoken baron’s purely geopolitical analysis, is that Pere’s people fairly burst with a feudal loyalty to their sovereign that his own people do not feel toward theirs, and this fact makes considerations of size and geographic destiny irrelevant. Meanwhile Pere, waiting across the plain, and Pedro’s own knights, assess the day’s outcome in terms of honor and dishonor resulting, in a very direct, concrete way, like points on a board, from one king’s hours-long display of a willingness to fight, and the other’s failure to show the same zeal for battle—an honor result that Pere as narrator happily insists upon, and that seems blithely detached from the heavy, unsubtle determinism of the Castilian baron’s speech. One might add that honor-talk did not serve Pere simply as some public smokescreen behind which a geopolitical *arcanum imperii* skulked; in fact both rhetorics could be found equally present in both public communications and in those intended for

²⁷ Gubern, *Epistolari*, 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

the inner sanctum of his government. For example, in the same month that Pere mused to the Barcelona city council about fighting on the land or sea, he wrote privately to his queen, Elionor of Sicily, one of his closest advisors, to say that he would approach the Castilian town of Alfaro when it was about to fall, “because certainly the honor of it [being present at the capture] would be worth having,” with no other motive mentioned, as though that settled the matter.²⁹ A lengthy and equally private 1357 letter to Pere’s uncle and namesake, the Infant Pere, defends both the decision for war with Castile, and the desire to seek a pitched battle, almost entirely using honor and honor-adjacent arguments.³⁰ All of this shows that geographical and geopolitical speech was possible, and present, but only as one of a number of themes, and that it was not necessarily the most prominent, or viewed as particularly decisive over all others.

The second problem is that, in the documents we have seen, Pere’s resort to geopolitical rhetoric seems typically confined to “small picture” uses, circumscribed in time and/or space. Pere’s geopolitics remains mostly on what a modern analyst might call the “operational” level of war: a particular city’s ease or difficulty of resupply; the imminent danger of losing a certain ford; a unique coincidence of rebellion on one front and invasion on another. Pere doesn’t say *any* power in northeastern Spain *must always* base itself in Catalonia; he says Catalonia is the place for him to be in the circumstances in which he finds himself at that particular moment, in 1347. Devotees of “classical” geopolitics might scorn this close peering at little places and evanescent dilemmas. Modern geographical science’s whole purpose, they might say, was to move beyond such ground-level ephemera of the past; it sought the stratospheric heights whence Mackinder could boast: “For the first time we can perceive something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world, and may seek a formula which shall express certain aspects at any rate, of geographical causation in universal history.”³¹ One could say it is worth showing again that, at all events, some level of geographical awareness in relation to politics was possible before there arose a self-conscious school of geopolitics (recognizing

29 ACA, C, 1147:48v; see also ACA, C, 1147:87v-88r to another very close advisor, the noble-turned-Benedictine Bernat de Cabrera, discussing similar matters also largely in honor terms. These letters were in no way unusual. Pere was as preoccupied with honor in private as in public.

30 Gubern, 139-55. *Infant* means “prince” in Catalan, cognate with the more familiar Castilian *infante*.

31 H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal* 23 (1904), 422.

that Mackinder himself disliked the term). Nevertheless it is a worthy question: what evidence from Pere's world is there of foreshadowings, at least, of something like that grand-scale, god's-eye view?

This essay has, of course, already much discussed that utterance ascribed to a Castilian baron in his king's tent at La Matança, which might fit the grand-scale category. Two other fourteenth-century statements from the House of Aragon are also worth noting: one from 1311 by Pere's grandfather, Jaume II (1291-1327), and one by Pere himself in 1380. These documents take us from affairs on Aragon's landward side to the dramatic expansion of the Crown and its people into the Mediterranean, which began with Jaume I's conquest of Majorca in 1229 and culminated in the fall of Naples, in 1443, to Alfonso the Magnanimous (1416-1458).³² In 1311 this story was at a point where cadet branches of the House of Aragon held Sicily and the Balearics, while the head of the main line, Jaume II, was recovering from a failed campaign against Granada and pondering the conquest of Sardinia, to which the pope had given him title. From a solemn church council, Pope Clement V (1305-1314) intruded with a call for a great crusade to the Holy Land. Jaume answered with an embassy that was to dangle before the Holy Father the benefits of resuming the effort against Granada instead, and entreat for condign tenths and indulgences in support. As was customary for such missions, the king prepared for his envoys a script, the final item of which suggested the ease, once Granada had fallen, of taking Morocco too, and then pointed toward distant fulfillments:

From there [Morocco], the Christian army, by proceeding to the East by sea, following always the Christian islands, namely Majorca, Minorca, Sardinia, and Sicily, from which could be had continual food and refreshment, and people to reinforce the aforesaid army and populate [conquered] lands, could in the end be brought, with the aid of God, to reach the Holy Land.³³

Vicente Salavert, who presented this passage to the scholarly world, saw in it a

32 A good survey in English of the Crown of Aragon's Mediterranean expansion and its context is D. Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms, 1250-1500: The Struggle for Dominion* (London, 1997). An introduction to the huge and still-growing scholarly bibliography on the topic can be had by following the notes to A. Cioppi and S. Nocco, "Islands and the Control of Mediterranean Space," in *The Crown of Aragon: A Singular Mediterranean Empire*, ed. F. Sabaté (Leiden, 2017), 337-52. It should be noted that "geopolitics," both as term and as interpretive method, has been prominent in this literature since J. Vicens Vives helped introduce the term to Spanish publishing with *España: geopolítica del Estado y del Imperio* (Barcelona, 1940), in which see 105-14 for the Aragonese expansion.

33 ACA, C, 336:78v; the arguments about Granada can be found on ACA, C, 336:73r-74r and 77r-78v.

coherent vision of an island route (which has come to be known in the historiography as *la ruta de las islas*) across the Mediterranean. Salavert argued that the House of Aragon meant to hold these islands as a string of way-stations to serve the profit of Catalan commerce; he said rather less about the ostensible crusading context.³⁴ In any case it has to be admitted that Jaume shows here a readiness to imagine politics and war across a quite large scale of time and space, even if his immediate rhetorical purpose was to direct the pope's mind toward a rather more limited front in Spain itself. Imagining enterprise on such a level was, in fact, by no means unusual, especially when it came to thinking about crusade.³⁵

Pere III's letter of 1380 reveals an Aragonese monarch manipulating, not a pope, but his elder son and heir, who, as Joan I (1387-1396), eventually succeeded his father.³⁶ The young man had recently rejected his father's fervent quest for him to marry the heiress of Sicily, a scheme that would have snatched the island kingdom from the fearsome brink of union with an alien dynasty and brought it back to the metropolitan, that is Pere's, line (the young lady eventually did marry into the next generation of Pere's descendants). Afraid that Joan did not understand the islands' importance, and with Sardinia in the midst of one of its many revolts, the father warned his son,

If Sardinia is lost, Majorca, without its food supply from Sicily and Sardinia, will be depopulated and will be lost, and Barcelona will also be depopulated, for Barcelona could not live without Sicily and Sardinia, nor could the merchants trade if the isles were lost.³⁷

Here again one sees something like the *ruta de islas*. But the triumphal mood of Jaume II's 1311 message has been replaced by fear and a preoccupation with avoiding disaster. Hillgarth wrote that Pere's words to his son were "proof of a political vision acquired painfully over a long reign."³⁸ Much of that hard learning undoubtedly came to Pere from the war with Castile. Most instructive were those terrible years from the summer of 1362 to late 1365, when the Castilian

34 V. Salavert y Roca, *Cerdeña y la expansión mediterránea de la Corona de Aragón* (Madrid, 1956), i, 126-33.

35 Schemes of alliance with the Mongols of Iran, pursued on occasion by the kings of Aragon among others, are worth mentioning, on which see P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1210-1410* (Harlow, 2005), ch. 7; these in turn could feed grandiose fantasies that might mix the geopolitical and the millenarian. Columbus' Enterprise of the Indies is of course one example.

36 Joan is the Catalan version of John.

37 Hillgarth, introduction to Pere III, *Chronicle*, 35-6. Jaume II's ponderings had brought the Aragonese conquest of Sardinia to fruition in 1323; for the rebellion against Pere, Hillgarth, *Spanish Kingdoms*, ii, 219-20, which also quotes the 1380 letter.

38 *Ibid.*, 36.

king marched here and there, sometimes it seemed almost at will, across Aragon and Valencia, laying waste and besieging and taking. From time to time, Pere could stall his enemy with a brave display, as at la Matança. Pedro, however, consistently avoided battle; the non-fight at Matança was in fact quite typical. For him the key to victory lay elsewhere. As in much medieval warfare, this was a clash in which the apparatus of nourishment was one of the attacker's most important targets and often the defender's most vital armament. The registers of Pere's archive from these years are full of his scramble to get grain to targeted cities.³⁹ The interdependence that Pere described to his son could of course come into play during food shortages unrelated to war as well. Nevertheless the war with Castile must have, by the concentration of much danger in a short time, focused Pere's mind on the coastal cities' food vulnerability and the islands' role in alleviating that.⁴⁰

The war with Castile must have brought home another unhappy lesson: Aragon's weakness relative to Castile and other looming powers, above all France and England. "This king of Castile comes with so much equipment and attacks fortifications so powerfully, that so far no fortress we have prepared against him has been held," Pere lamented in one letter.⁴¹ His cry was symptomatic of the war as a kind of smashing of illusions for him. He had begun it in a spirit of vindicating his honor, one king to another, having felt himself insulted by Pedro⁴²; but by 1363-65, the doughty contest of honor had become a relentless grind for the survival of a lesser power against a much greater one. Though there was a long tradition in the House of Aragon of holding themselves brave underdogs, Pere may well have begun to sense a gloomier reality, a hard hand of fate: there were kings, and then there were "the three kings of the Christian world," of which he was not one.

In the event, Pere and the Crown of Aragon did survive. In 1366, Pere joined France and the papacy in backing Enrique de Trastámara, Pedro's half-brother

39 Plenty of such letters can be found in registers 1386 and 1387, both among the ten volumes labeled *Guerrae Castellae*.

40 Consider ACA, C, 1387:69r-v, in which Pere chides his troublesome uncle Ramon Berenguer for forcing a cog from Sardinia bearing grain for Valencia to discharge its cargo in his own lands, far from the fighting; Pere warned that "we understand that if it [Valencia], with the help of God, has enough food, its inhabitants will not have to fear being overwhelmed by the king of Castile."

41 ACA, C, 1385:119v-120r.

42 An excellent example is the 1357 letter, long, fervent, and in Pere's own hand, cited in n. 30 above. For this war as a severe, definitive shattering of illusions for Pere, see Abadal's perceptive remarks in *Pere el cerimoniós*, 200-216.

and rival for the Castilian throne, who had long fought at Pere's side, in an invasion of Castile with a large army of mercenaries (the same veterans famous in Hundred Years' War history as the "free companies"). Pere's war of survival became, first, a Castilian civil war, and then for more than two decades a theater of the great Anglo-French war. The turmoil continued long after Pedro I had been killed in 1369 and Trastámara had become Castile's Enrique II (1366-1367; 1369-1379).⁴³ The revelation for us is Pere's policy during this time. His path became twisty, ambivalent, and noncommittal. He might flirt with some proposed aggressive alliance, with extravagant cessions of Castilian territory sought (even from a Castilian king) as the price for his support, but other times he sent nothing but excuses: he needed to see his enemies act before he could promise anything; the Sardinian revolt demanded too much for him to think of anything else; his ambassador was too sick to travel. He could briefly let himself be puffed up with the thought that he might be a power among other powers. In 1366 there was mooted an alliance of himself, Enrique, and Charles V of France, and Pere crowed to Enrique that, "once they three were bound in support, there was no power in the world that could harm them, nor was there any king or kings in the world against whom they could not come out on top, to their great honor."⁴⁴ Other times he seemed disgusted with everyone involved. In 1367 he wrote to his representative at the French court to complain of the latter's failure to support him, and to declare himself now neutral between "the said kings Don Pedro and Don Enrique, who have given us such reasons that we wish to the one great evils and to the other little good."⁴⁵ By 1378 he could sound well and truly done with anything like war on the continent. In that year he wrote to congratulate Enrique II's heir, the future Juan I (1379-1390) on a victorious campaign in Navarre, but added that "it would have given us pleasure if God had so willed it that we had all been good friends and such a great disaster as this had been avoided."⁴⁶ In 1381 he forbade his younger son Martí to go jousting in Castile, because it might give the English the impression Aragon was preparing to ally with Castile against them—something he did not want, Pere declared, because "henceforth, we want no more war, because we have enough to do to attend to

43 The whole complex story can be followed in detail in Russell's monumental *English Intervention*.

44 J. Miret y Sans, "Négociations de Pierre IV d'Aragon avec la cour de France (1366-67)," *Revue hispanique*, 13 (1905), 91.

45 *Ibid.*, 122; Russell, 122-3.

46 Russell, 269.

our affairs.”⁴⁷

During these years after 1365, was Pere coming to terms with a bitter geopolitical lesson? “If the kingdom of Castile were broken into four parts and one had only one of them, it would be more land than the king of Aragon has, and still its ruler would be a great king.” And this was to say nothing of what might be thought of, for example, France! The chapter of his chronicle on the war of Castile was being composed at the earliest in the later 1370s and early 1380s. Perhaps he could not leave the great teaching out, even if he could not bear to put it in his own voice. In any case, if this assessment of Pere’s behavior after 1365 is correct, then we can actually see a king’s ideas about what he could and should do changing. The war with Pedro I and its sequel transformed Pere’s view of geopolitics and war. On some fronts at least, caution, restraint, and retrenchment became his way. Although this essay has shamelessly indulged a “fascination with discourse,” it has not sought to present either a “continuity of arguments” or a hegemonic mentality in Pere or his world.⁴⁸ Instead what we see is a space for change in geopolitical perception and strategic culture. According to a well-known stereotype, seemingly still flourishing even if much questioned in academia, geopolitics either finds paths of warlike expansion for great powers on the rise, or encourages aggressive defense in those that have already got there. Pere shows something more selective and subtle. He is one king, vain-glorious, prickly, and ever-grasping for honor it is true, who in his last years let experience—which at times he articulated in clear geopolitical terms—lead him elsewhere. Pere did not become a pacifist—indeed, far from it with reference to internal enemies and the all-important west Mediterranean islands. But on his landward side, against kingdoms he knew to be greater than his, he seems to have meant his word to his son: “henceforth, we want no more war.”

47 Coroleu, 80. On this episode, Russell, 308-9, and M. T. Ferrer i Mallol, “L’infant Martí i un projecte d’intervenció en la guerra de Portugal (1381),” *La Corona de Aragón en el siglo XIV. VIII Congreso de la Historia de la Corona de Aragón* (1973), vol. 3, 205-234.

48 Following Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 105-7.



Jaume Mateu (Before 1402 - After 1452), Pere IV the Ceremonious (1427),
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya,
Google Art Project, Wikimedia Commons



Ordinacion feyta [1353] por el muyt alto e muyt excellent princep e senyor el senyor don Pedro tercero Rey daragon de la manera como los Reyes daragon se faran consagrar e ellos mismos se coronaran [MS, Cancelleria Reial del rei d'Aragó] Gobierno de Espana, BV-PB Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliografico. Yeves, Juan Antonio. Manuscritos españoles de la Biblioteca Lázaro Galdiano. Madrid : Ollero & Ramos : Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, [1998], n. 515. CC BY.

Geopolitics of state-building, war and expansion in the Baltic region, 1400–1600, and its projection into Modernity.

BY VLADIMIR SHIROGOROV

The geopolitics of the Baltic region has not been attended to systematically. Profound explanations of the region's reputation as a knot of international rivalry are absent. The current essay calls to look at the period when the Baltic region turned the heads of the prospective great powers and the great powers that contested it emerged, dealing with the "Baltic question."¹ A study on the period provides expertise to recognise the Baltic's burning issues and predict and mitigate their negative trends. It also gives the "Baltic lessons" to geopoliticians ruling the world.

KEYWORDS: GLOBAL RIVALRY, RMA, REGION, CONFLICT, DOMINANCE, FUTURE PROGNOSTIC, OVERWHELMING FORCE.

PREFACE

N owadays geopolitics is a knowledge that tends to collect all geospatial fields such as physical geography studying resources, energy, landscape, and climate; human geography studying religion, culture, and ethnic groups; political geography studying location, position, and composition of states, their territorial organization, and urbanization; and the spatial dimension of international relations studying the states' zones of interest, alliances, spheres of influence, and strategies.² The impact of these factors and settings on the evolution of states and their relations is claimed to be an expanse of geopolitics.³ The scope looks hypnotic, but the current study focuses on geopolitics' narrower sense.

Geopolitics, a perspective on the conflict over power and existence.

Master historians Jeremy M. Black and Geoffrey Parker study geopolitics as a geospatial dimension of the struggle of the states over dominance in both

1 Walther KIRCHNER launched this term in: KIRCHNER, *The Rise of the Baltic Question*, probably repeating the title of Forsten's seminal work: FORSTEN, *A Baltic Question*.

2 CRIEKEMANS, "Introduction;" CSURGAI, "The Main Components of Geopolitical Analysis."

3 COHEN, *Geopolitics* 16; KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 23

its academic and practical usage.⁴ Geopolitics emerged “as a self-conscious and distinct subject”⁵ at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries as a reflection of European imperialism in the situation when the “closing” of the world and absence of unclaimed territories unleashed its redivision.⁶ However, “a practice [of geopolitics] exists before a concept.”⁷ Geopolitics directed the strategies and actions of rulers, the states, and social groups long before it was advanced as an analytical discipline, or forever.

Geopolitics is a geospatial perspective on the conflict of states and social groups over existence, aggrandizement, and supremacy. Geopolitics is also a statecraft to manage it. Geopolitics places power into the geographical compound.⁸ It does not function as an “objective” science that “exists independently of the motivations and power of states.”⁹ Everything is fluid in geopolitics and depends on the unfolding conflict. Colin S. Gray, a British-American strategist, stresses that “geography is anything but constant in its influence upon [...] particular conflicts at particular times.”¹⁰ Geopolitical characteristics of states, events, or situations are futile if they are irrelevant to the conflict.

The “state” or “nation” is a pillar subject of geopolitics, its actor, and the focus of scrutiny. The state is a social monopoly of force organized over the territory¹¹ by the internal power struggle under external pressure. Both conflicts are vital for the geopolitical analysis of the state under research. Other subjects of geopolitics such as “heartland” and “rimland,” “seapower” and “landpower,” and so on are similar provisional and fluid products of the conflict at the crossing coordinates of the historical situation and geospatial position.

While Jeremy Black focuses on the geopolitics of interstate “quest for dominance,”¹² Geoffrey Parker studies “the geopolitical structures of those states which have attained positions of dominance.”¹³ Their perspectives compose the geopolitical dimension of the rise and decline of the states, which is a manifest conflict over power and existence. Michael Mann, a top authority in historical

4 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*; PARKER, *The Geopolitics of Domination*.

5 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 117

6 PARKER, *Western Geopolitical Thought*, 4, 7, 11

7 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 15

8 KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 24–25

9 GRYGIEL, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, 24–25

10 GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 41

11 WEBER, *The Vocation Lectures*, 33

12 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* 18; BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, P. 5

13 PARKER, *The Geopolitics of Domination*, Preface.

sociology, emphasizes the “military-geopolitical type” of the rise and decline of states¹⁴ or the geopolitics of state-building, war, and expansion.

Geopolitics of war deals with the conflict over power and existence that turned into an armed clash. Jeremy Black points out that “the spatial dimension [...] is the key setting of war, the setting that provides for the geopolitics.”¹⁵ It counts the state’s location, its natural, economic, and demographic resources, topography, and climate as the geographical determinants of the state’s military organization, objectives, and actions.¹⁶

In its practical sense, the geopolitics of war explores the “set of strategic problems” that geography imposes on the states,¹⁷ providing a spatial guide to strategy. Wrestling the territory and resources, setting the military potential over the territory, and utilizing the territory for military operations are the most important geopolitical issues of strategy.

Jakub J. Grygiel stresses that the “location of resources [...] and the lines of communication linking them” are “two variables [that] assign strategic value to locations [of the states].”¹⁸ The composition of the state and its social, political, and military layout is another determinant of its geopolitical situation. It enables mobilizing and moving the economic, demographic, and military resources over the state’s territory and outward. The geographical determinants and composition of the state condition its power aggregation and projection, or, in other words, state-building and expansion.

From denial of geopolitics to regionalization of force.

At the turn from the 20th to 21st centuries, geopolitics returned to war after abandoning it in the preceding quarter of a century. Since the late 1970s, some prominent military visionaries have downgraded geopolitics due to the appearance of the weapons that seemingly overcame the geographical limitations of traditional warfare and its spatial operational logic. The so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) unfolding since the 1970s obscured them with such terrific game-changers as intercontinental nuclear missiles, space-based weapons, and cyberwarfare against data-dependent facilities.

Since the combination of long-range airpower and atomic bombs was em-

14 MANN, “Introduction: Empires with Ends,” 1

15 BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, Preface.

16 BLACK, “Geographies of War: the Recent Historical Background,” 22

17 SONDHAUS, *Culture and Ways of War*, 20

18 GRYGIEL, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, 26

ployed for power projection, the gravediggers of geopolitics claim that geography is not a matter to reckon with anymore.¹⁹ The differentiation between landpower and seapower waned since the land forces turned out being able to strike everywhere over the sea and vice versa.²⁰ The novel vehicles of war allegedly soar over the seas, mountains, and other topographic determinants of past warfare and penetrate unlimited distances through all obstacles. They can shift in the blink of an eye the balance of conventional forces in the theatre of operations and reverse war's spatial logic that dictates to deal with the enemy's army and fleet before assaulting its vital political centres.²¹ War has turned inside out, disregarding geography. Geopolitics shifted to non-military matters of economy, natural resources, trade routes, and other "soft power." It also focused on the world-scale affairs, and "globalization" was invented to accommodate it.

In parallel with the development of military capabilities and military thought the sphere of "critical geopolitics" emerged. Its prominent thinker, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, disclaims the influence of geographical factors on international relations while stressing geopolitics' function to describe the organization of power and conducts of the ruling elites in geographical terms.²² The French circle around the magazine *Hérodote* and its leader Yves Lacoste presented geopolitics as a justification for colonialist ambitions and aggression. However, Lacoste in a way predicted the return of geopolitics to the military sphere and its descent on the regional level.²³

Geopolitics was ostracized by geographers and the military. It almost perished, but the regional upheavals have revived it. Following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the focus of international relations suddenly fell on the regional level, where the geopolitical pattern is working spectacularly. The troubles in the Russian Caucasus and NATO's eastward expansion, Al-Qaeda's charge against the West and Western intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia's consolidation of its loyal post-Soviet neighbourhood and the "colour revolutions" in the disloyal one, the Arab Spring and migration onslaught on Europe, the rise and fall of the so-named Islamic State (ISIS), and renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian fighting – all of these international

19 BLACK, *Rethinking Geopolitics*, 88

20 GRAY, "Geography and Grand Strategy," 113

21 See a seminal work on this phenomenon: SOKOLOVSKY and CHEREDNICHENKO, "Military Art on a New Stage." The current author is grateful to Mark Charles FISSEL for bringing the Soviet ideas of RMA to my attention.

22 KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 55–62; Ó TUATHAIL, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics," 108

23 LACOSTE, *La Géographie*.

conflicts from the last decade of the 20th century to the first decades of the 21st century had not the global but regional dimension.

The wars that are associated with them have burst not along the virtual confrontation lines between the global great powers but in the regional pockets where the outlaw “rogue states” and dysfunctional “failed states” generated a range of various threats to the international order and stability, from terrorism to cybercrimes.²⁴ The wars in the troubled borderlands have been waged not with strategic weapons that can neglect geography but by the conventional forces that must respect it. Lawrence Freedman, a strong operational historian of a regional conflict, the Falklands War in 1982, explains that such geopolitical factors of fighting as time and space have changed their play due to the “ability [of RMA weapons] to strike with precision over great distances” and attack distributed targets “immediately and together.”²⁵ But in no way do they disappear.

War has not mutated to some “extra-geographical, homogenised combat capability.”²⁶ A volume *Future Wars*, edited by Virgilio Ilari, analyses dozens of futuristic scenarios of warfare that neglect the geographic constraints.²⁷ None of them have proved true. “Unilateral paradigmatic realities, such as the first deliverable thermonuclear device,” obscured the “variations [...] rooted in terrain, resources, and strategic culture” only “temporary.”²⁸ The strategic forces have withdrawn.

The forces with small arms, armed vehicles, and artillery acting on the local landscape have overrun the representation of the current conflicts. The airpower has returned to the tactical scale.²⁹ The most glamorous novel weapon, unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, is strictly subordinated to the geographical environment.³⁰ The fashionable military concept of “hybrid warfare” that reigns in minds today submerges deep into the regional geopolitics and looks as a play of the regional geographical factors with the military forces reorganized to suit them.³¹ War has regionalized, and geopolitics has followed it.

24 BLACK, *Rethinking Geopolitics*, 110–13

25 FREEDMAN, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Chs. 1,3.

26 GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 211

27 ILARI, *Future Wars*.

28 FISSEL, “Introduction,” 17

29 LAMBETH, “Air Power, Space Power, and Geography.”

30 VICENTE, “The Dilemma of Human Interference in War.”

31 See volumes FRIDMAN, KABERNIK, and PEARCE, *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare*; MURRAY and MANSOOR, *Hybrid Warfare*; WEISSMANN, NILSSON, PALMERTZ and THUNHOLM, *Hybrid Warfare. Security and Asymmetric Conflict*, with its two essays on hybrid warfare in the

Geopolitical regions.

The brand-name figure of geopolitics, Halford J. Mackinder, a British geographer, operated not with states or geopolitical regions but continents. He launched “grand geopolitics,” counterposing the Eurasian mainland heartland to its maritime “inner or marginal crescent” that was later defined as “rimland” by another prominent figure of geopolitics, Nicholas J. Spykman, an American geographer. The play was borrowed for the doctrines of the Cold War.³² The USA’s geopolitics of the epoch was packed with terms like “heartland” and “rimland,” meaning “East” and “West,” explaining the USSR’s behaviour by its geopolitical position and looking for spatial coordinates to constrain it.³³

Observing the scene of the definitions, an American geographer Donald W. Meinig, one of the early critics of geopolitics as a worldview, declared that both “heartland” and “rimland” are only “cabalistic catchwords” of a pseudo-science if being used without proper analytical diligence. The true ground of conclusion is the “functional orientation” of the state and not simply its “position in relation to land and sea.”³⁴ The “functional orientation” of the state is evident through its interaction with its environment.

The geopolitical region where the states are integrated by a particular conflict or cluster of conflicts embraces the state’s immediate circle of contenders and allies.³⁵ Geopolitical regions were a subtle but strong component of Western geopolitics in the 1950s and 1960s, viewed as the scenes for “communism’s rollback.” It is a priceless memory. Andrew F. Krepinevich, a leading American military futurist who had focused on the Cold War’s Global-scope weaponry,³⁶ retrieved his influential study on the Vietnamese War³⁷ and returned to the regional scope. He has authored the book on seven oncoming conflicts, of which five military clashes have a regional geopolitical scale, while two of the predicted global upheavals are non-military, they are pandemics and economic turmoil.³⁸ The term “geopolitical region” has been revisited in the 2000s and studies on regional geopolitics have resumed.

Baltic. See also the current Russian theoretic interpretation in: GERASIMOV, “A value of science is its foresight.”

32 BLACK, Jeremy, *The Geographies of War*, P. 5

33 KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 52–53

34 MEINIG, “Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History,” 555–56

35 SPYKMAN, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” P.II, 213

36 KREPINEVICH, *The Military-Technical Revolution*, 27–32

37 KREPINEVICH, *The Army and Vietnam*.

38 KREPINEVICH, *7 Deadly Scenarios*.

Geopolitical issues of the Baltic region.

The head of the geopolitical think tank George Friedman has devoted to the regional conflicts most of his scenarios to the 21st century. In Europe, besides other prophetic flashpoints, he points out the south-central Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which are often generalised as the Baltics, as being the most probable focus of a clash between the West in general or United Europe and Germany in particular, and resurging Russia.³⁹ Some of Friedman's deliberations present the Baltics' geopolitics as a brinkmanship at the edge of war between Russia and the Western block, for both of which the opponent's control over the Baltics is an existential threat. Friedman frequently repeats the historical insights to make his conclusions manifest.

Colin S. Grey demonstrates the military futurists' oscillation between the grandiose panorama of the superpowers' confrontation and the gnawing reality of regional conflicts. While discussing the threatened position of the Baltics, he points out the regional character of its conflict with Russia determined by the population's composition, overlapping location, and troublesome mutual history. At the same time, he stresses the global confrontation of Russia and NATO, into which this conflict tends to transform.⁴⁰

Studying geopolitics in its historical perspective and precedents, Jeremy Black emphasises that "the geostrategic interests of the great powers have been very important for the Baltic/Nordic region and have helped direct its geopolitics."⁴¹ Black widens the geopolitical conflict from three Baltic republics to the entire Baltic region. His definition of the Baltic region through conflict is maybe its sole existing geopolitical definition, while its multiple geographical definitions are controversial.⁴²

Being a geographically northern fringe of Eastern Europe, the Baltic region easily fits into the classical geopolitical heartland-rimland construction. However, its accurate location within the construction is itinerant. Mackinder considered it to be one of the areas of "German conquest and forced Teutonicisation of the later Middle Ages" in Eastern Europe where the "Slavonic" and "Teutonic" elements wrestle supremacy. Being "essentially a part" of the Eurasian heartland, Eastern Europe is in "the fundamental opposition" to the Western Europe that belongs to the "coastland."⁴³ However, developing his concept on the back-

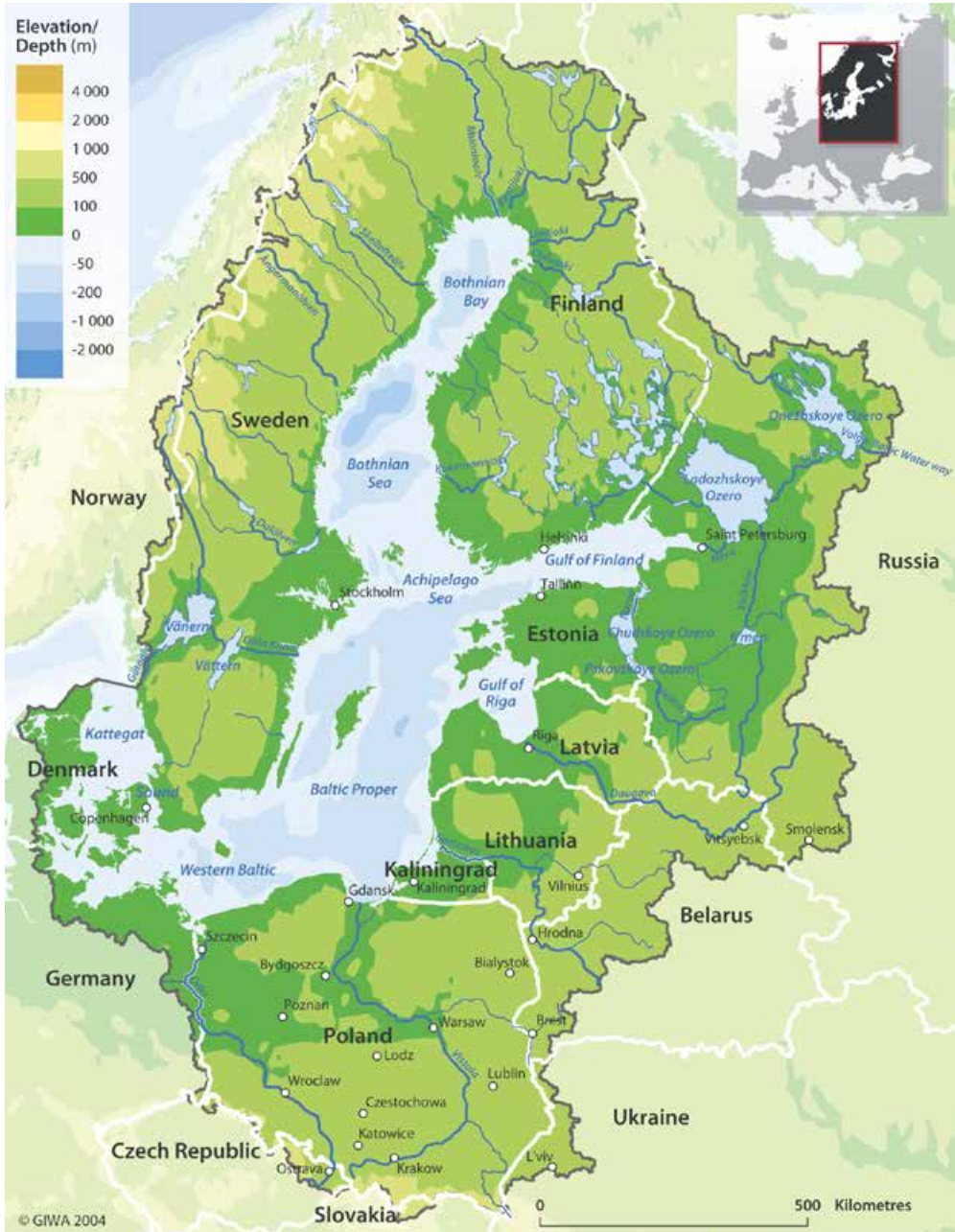
39 FRIDMAN, *Flashpoints*, p.11; FRIEDMAN, *The Next 100 Years*, 6,73,111–118

40 GRAY, *Another Bloody Century*, p.2

41 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 274

42 MACIEJEWSKI, "Introduction – how to study a region."

43 MACKINDER, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 154–55,160–69,179



Map. 1. The Baltic catchment with the Baltic Sea and its sections, major rivers and lakes. © GIWA, Andersen, "Introduction," 5.

ground of the grand geopolitical changes in the first half of the 20th century, Mackinder became less sure about the Baltic's location and lost it in a "grey zone" between his geopolitical superstructures. Mackinder's Russian follower Aleksandr Dugin develops his erratic location of the Baltic into a definition. He claims it to be a part of the tectonic rift between "Eurasia" and "Europe" from the Black Sea through the Baltic Sea to the North Atlantic Ocean. The Baltic's destiny is to be rivalled and sometimes crashed by them.⁴⁴

In the 1960s, these kinds of areas were named "shatterzones," adding one more quasi-mystical definition to geopolitics. In the 1990s, an American geographer, Saul B. Cohen, placed the Baltic region in the shatterzone that broke away from "the Eurasian continental Russian heartland" and was merged by "the Atlantic and Pacific [...] maritime realm".⁴⁵ This manipulation describes the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union using geopolitical terms, but it explains nothing about the Baltic region.

COMPOSITION OF THE BALTIC GEOPOLITICAL REGION.

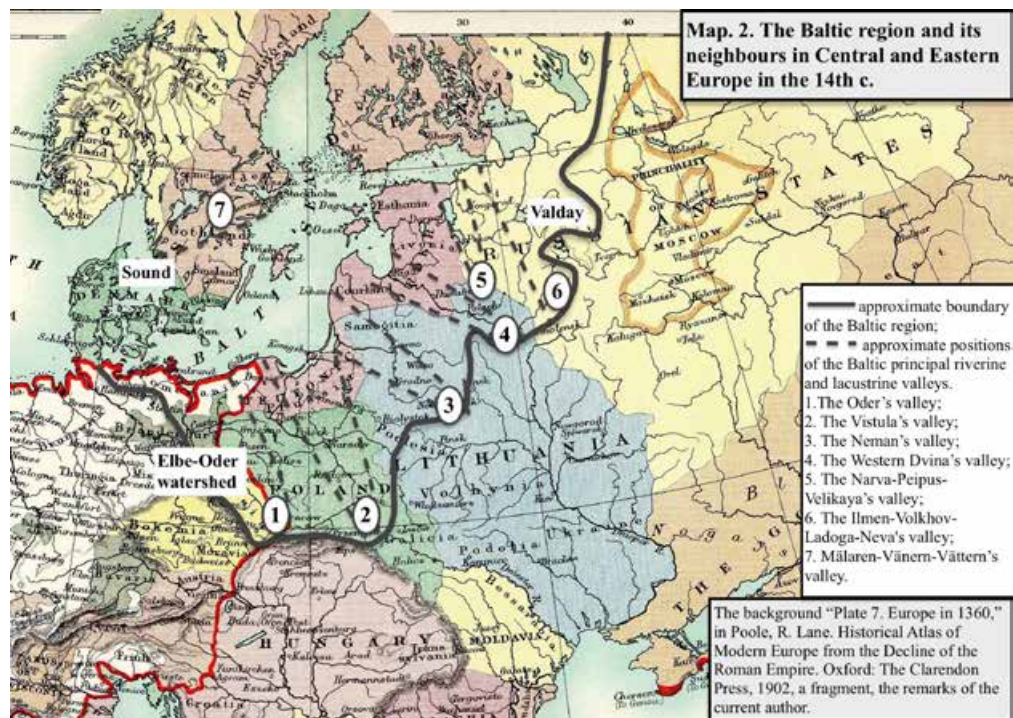
The Baltic Sea and its geopolitical gravitation.

The Baltic region is integrated by the Baltic Sea, and at the same time, the Baltic Sea splits the Baltic peninsular and mainland subregions apart. In their turn, the Baltic subregions cleave the Baltic Sea into naturally separated sectors. They also wedge it tightly, leaving just a few narrow straits to the North Atlantic Ocean. The limited oceanic access is a feature that the current geographical descriptions of the Baltic Sea emphasise as its main characteristic. They classify the Baltic Sea as a "marginal" or "inland" sea that is an outskirt water area of the ocean mostly encircled by a landmass. However, this universal definition is conditional. The world's seas obtained their current characteristics in the 18th and 19th centuries from the theoretical and practical adepts of the "blue water" seapower or navies of the open oceans. According to the "blue water" perspective, some of the seas are geographically defective, being deprived of free ocean access. The four most recessed of them, the White, Baltic, Black (with its outlet of the Azov Sea), and Caspian Seas, enclose Eastern Europe.

The oceanic navies were a novel branch of arms in the 18th and 19th centuries. Their strategy of control over oceanic communications expressed the im-

44 DUGIN, *Last War of the World-Island*; DUGIN, *Foundation of Geopolitics*.

45 COHEN, *Geopolitics*, 40



portance of the European overseas colonial ventures and commerce. The contrasting naval history existed some thousands of years before that fascinating epoch of sailing ships and armoured steamers. A new period of seapower exists a hundred years since the "blue water" epoch finished. Nevertheless, the world's seas are still measured by the instruments of the "blue water" epoch, and geopolitics took in the "blue water" concept as its pivotal methodology.

During the longest era of navigation that preceded the "blue water" concept of the 18th and 19th centuries, the value of a sea was measured not by its link to the open ocean but by its entry into the continent's interior and its access to the hinterland. According to this estimation, the White, Baltic, Black, and Caspian Seas are first-rate bodies of water. They are superior over open oceans because their navigable catchment systems penetrate deep into the East-European interior.

The grand rivers flow to the East European seas, and their branchy tributaries pierce Eastern Europe in all directions. If Western Europe might be imagined as an aggregation of narrow coastal areas of the North Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, Eastern Europe is a subcontinent of vast sea-catchments. The Baltic region is one of them.

The riverine and lacustrine basins. Formation of the Baltic sub-regions.

The Baltic Sea was the unique component of the East-European subcontinent because it is not the Baltic region's natural limit but its natural heart. The heart position of the Baltic Sea is the influential input of physical geography into the Baltic region's geopolitics. The separate riverine and lacustrine basins of the Baltic catchment are tied up by the large rivers flowing to the Baltic Sea, their tributaries, and throughflow lakes. They formed the Baltic sub-regions. Their river valleys were the natural ways of state-building, economic cooperation, social consolidation, and warfare.

The Baltic sub-regions were full of these kinds of activities during the Middle Ages because the period's statecraft, administrative technique, military capabilities, and means of transportation matched their physical geography and territorial size. Distances were manageable, the areas were well within the troops' operational range, and the rivers were navigable for the kind of ships in use. Many of the Baltic sub-regions became the areas of political consolidation while turning out ethnically and religiously homogenous.

The specificity of the rivers of the Baltic catchment in comparison with the rivers of other East European sea-catchments is their limited territorial reach. The avenue rivers of the Black Sea catchment, the Dniester, Dnieper, and Don, and the avenue river of the Caspian catchment, the Volga, traverse enormous distances, tying up the geopolitical regions of Eastern Europe by their tributary networks entirely. Unlike them, the rivers of the Baltic catchment – the Neva, Narva, Western Dvina (Düna and Daugava), Neman, Vistula, and Oder (Odra) – are sub-regional vessels of segregated parts of the Baltic region. The inner water systems of the Baltic peninsulas of Jutland and Scandinavia are unsubstantial. Only the lacustrine system of the grand Swedish lakes, Mälaren, Vättern, and Vänern, has the large drainage basin to integrate the Swedish hinterland.

At the same time, the watersheds between the Baltic riverine and lacustrine systems were the natural barriers sufficiently strong to segregate state-building, military conquest, social and ethnic consolidation, and economic gravitation within one large catchment from another. Two features of the watersheds between the Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins supported their isolation. The watersheds' denial of transit between the basins was one of them. Their rise as the political, ethnic, and religious boundaries was another.

Although the ridges of the Baltic watersheds are relatively low, mostly not higher than two hundred meters, they are vast and full of water, composing large swamps, webs of small rivers streaming in deep boggy ravines, and big forests with dense undergrowth. The upper reaches of the rivers of different catch-

ments while being close were often non-navigable. Some portages existed, but they were laborious and of low transportation capacity. No technique of reliable roadbuilding through the watersheds of the Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins existed in the Mediaeval and Early Modern Periods. The roads were seasonal, of low throughput, and easily blocked.

The Baltic watersheds imposed the political and military inertia to segregate the sub-regions within the major riverine and lacustrine basins. The inertia was no less important than the failure of the current technology to traverse the watersheds. Similar geographical conditions of the Baltic sub-regions brought about universal logic⁴⁶ to keep state-building and war within the riverine and lacustrine basins. The politics and ethnic groups aggregated within the sub-regions, and religions spread within them. The rulers and military commanders imagined the limits of their realms and conquests on the surrounding watersheds.

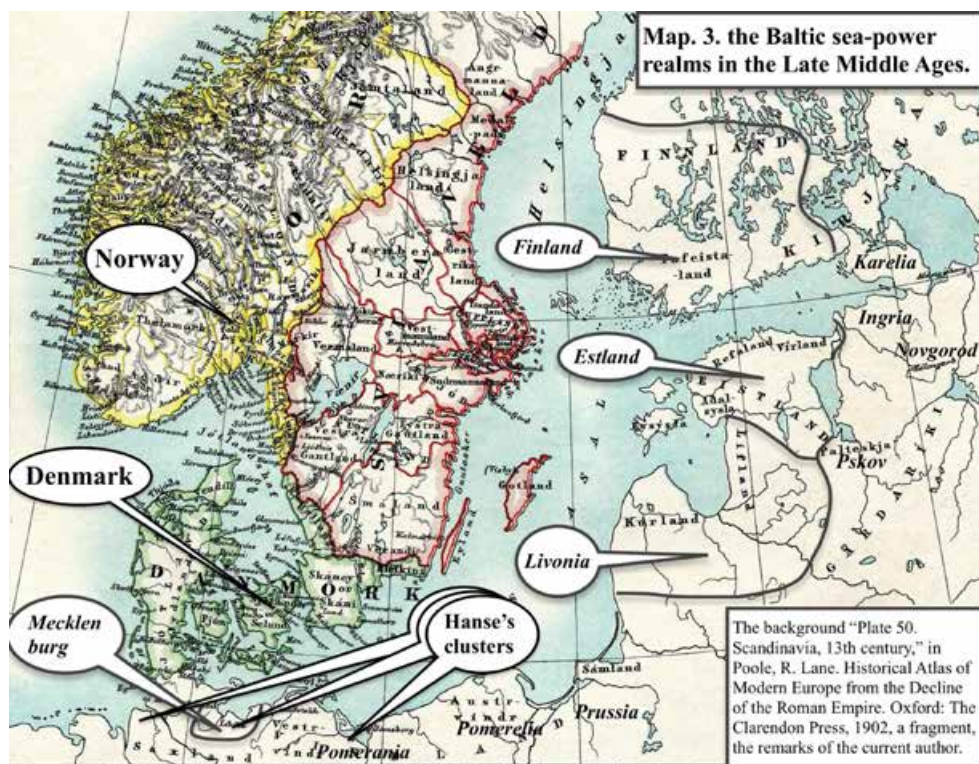
The Baltic geopolitical arrangement was fragmented into a subregional pattern. The states spread along the basins upstream or downstream from their nuclei according to the unavoidable logic of expansion that required possession of both the estuary and upper reaches of the riverine and lacustrine systems. The “forces moving upstream” clashed with the “forces moving downstream,” while the watersheds’ topography and the pressure of competitors from the sides blocked the transfer of expansion over the watersheds. In the Middle Ages, Spykman’s fluvial law⁴⁷ directed domestic and international relations within the Baltic region and its interaction with the outer world.

THE SEAPOWERS PATTERN OF BALTIC STATE-BUILDING.

The rule of state-building in the Baltic geopolitical region along the major riverine and lacustrine basins had its exclusions. Six of the sea onshore polities emerged in the coastal districts of the Baltic Sea where the substantial riverine and lacustrine drainage basins were absent. Two of them were the products of natural consolidation, one was the product of economic development, and three of them were the gains of conquest. They represented a minority of the cases of Baltic state-building but the influence of its seapower pattern was growing with the development of transportation, military, and administrative techniques. By the end of the 16th century, it looked like an attractive pan-Baltic alternative to the isolation of the Baltic sub-regions in their riverine and lacustrine basins.

46 GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 110

47 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy,” P.II, Ch. III



The coastal realms of Denmark and Norway.

The kingdoms of Denmark and Norway were two natural coastal realms in the Baltic region. Their location more or less coincided with the territories of the namesake modern nations. Both of them were successors of the stunning seapower Viking or Varangian civilization. Neither Denmark nor Norway have dominating riverine and lacustrine valleys. Their interior is dominated by the seashore, although in different ways. Denmark is a geographical Janus with one face looking at the Baltic Sea while another looking at the North Sea, an open segment of the North Atlantic Ocean. However, the geographical duplicity of Denmark did not have an important influence on its geopolitics in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods. The attempts to drag Denmark and Norway into association with England to create some North Sea empire from the 10th to 12th centuries invariably collapsed. The Baltic affiliation of Denmark prevailed.

The Danish seashore represents an aggregation of peninsulas and islands that are divided from each other by the narrow straits. They cluster mainly in the Western Baltic sector of the Baltic Sea between the southeast of the Scandi-

navian Peninsula and the northeast of the Jutland Peninsula. The sea gorge from the North Sea to the Baltic Sea consists of the sectors Skagerrak and Kattegat. Skagerrak is a passable gulf dividing the southwestern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and the northwestern part of the Jutland Peninsula. Kattegat is a similar passable gulf of the Baltic Sea between the southeastern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and the northeastern part of the Jutland Peninsula.

The further passage to the southeast into the Western Baltic sector is dammed by the cluster of Danish islands with their deep-cut shores and tricky straits. The Sound Strait between the island of Zealand and the district of Scåne or Scania on the southern tip of the Scandinavian Peninsula is the widest of them. Besides the Sound, two other straits connect the Western Baltic and Kattegat. They are the Great Belt between the islands of Zealand and Funen and the Little Belt between Funen and Jutland. Kattegat and the Western Baltic in front of the Little Belt and Great Belt are spotted with the number of *skerries* that are bare rocks in the sea littorals.

This layout functioned as a substitution of a riverine basin for state-building. The Danish islands and peninsulas had the natural conditions, distances and shape that the transportation, administrative, and military techniques of the Baltic region in the 10th to 12th centuries were able to manage, providing consolidation and cohesion of the realm. The Danish navy of the time consisted of Viking-style longboats that were unable to command the large “blue water” space like the North Sea or traverse the Baltic Sea around the year. However, they excellently operated within the straits and lagoons between the Danish islands and peninsulas for economic, administrative, and military needs.

A longboat was not adequate to ship the cavalry to sweep large territory and the siege machines to take strongholds. However, it had sufficient capacity to ship mailed Nordic infantry that was able to conquer and occupy the limited coastal districts where strong fortifications were absent. The Danish rulers chained the Nordic martial vigour to the consolidation of the Danish realm instead of being spent for plunder and mercenary service over Europe as far as Spain and the Byzantine Empire. Heavy cavalry and stone castles that were the features of Western and Central European feudalism spread over Jutland and adjacent islands simultaneously with the consolidation of the Danish realm. They were adopted from continental Germany as well as the feudal structure of power. The martial estate of aristocracy and nobility emerged. It dominated over peasantry and urban communities. Being a geographical Janus, Denmark became also the political hybrid of Central European continental and Nordic seapower state-building.

The seashore kingdom of Norway had substantially different natural conditions than Denmark, but the transportation, military, and administrative techniques of the time turned them to be highly similar. From a geographical point of view, Norway is not a Baltic but an adjacent country. The southern part of Norway where its state-building took place faces Skagerrak. Its seashore is deep-cut by long inlets or *fjords* of which the biggest, Oslofjord, is 120 kilometres deep. Norway's statehood developed in the territorial pockets around the *fjords*. The *fjords* were suitable for the same transportation, military, and administrative techniques that commanded the straits between the Danish peninsulas and islands. The stone castles and heavy cavalry were imported to Norway from Denmark due to the close ties between the two countries during the consolidation of their realms.

The climate of Norway is much more severe for agriculture than the Danish one. It restricted the resettlement in Norway of the Central European feudal arrangement that was based on the extortion of revenue by the nobility from the peasantry. The Norwegian nobility remained small and weak, and the Norwegian peasants who combined agriculture with fishing, forestry, and hunting remained socially strong. The weakness of the Norwegian nobility determined its dependence on the Danish partners. The dynastic unions of the two realms were a feature of the Norwegian state-building. Cooperation of the Danish and Norwegian realms brought about the feeling that the Baltic Sea might have functioned not as a separating but uniting body of water for the Baltic polities.

Mecklenburg, the first Baltic coastal polity of conquest.

It was not strange that this prospect was first explored by the crusaders because the crusades were the most daring ventures of the European state-buildings and expansions. The first seashore polity of conquest in the Baltic region was the Duchy of Mecklenburg. Mecklenburg was created by the Saxonian crusaders in the middle of the 12th century in cooperation with the Danish seaborne crusaders in the lands of the West-Slavic tribes or Wends on the seashore of the Baltic Sea between the neck of the Jutland Peninsula and the river Oder's estuary. While the Saxonian overland venture conquered the Wendish territory inland, the Danish navy destroyed the Wendish seapower and accomplished an onshore conquest. Mecklenburg's vast interior plateau of "thousand lakes" reminds the topography of the Danish coast. It provided an environment for the Danish amphibious invasion.

The West-Slavic clan of Nikloting became the dynasty of Mecklenburg's dukes. The duchy was incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire. Its territory

was settled with the Germans, and its political constitution was shaped according to the German pattern. The empire was a non-Baltic state from a geopolitical point of view, but its powerful position in Europe supported Mecklenburg's stance as a significant Baltic power.

The Danes also captured the island of Rügen that dominated the waterway to the Oder's estuary through the Stettin lagoon. The capture of Rügen established the Danish naval domination over the Western Baltic. According to Spykman, the Danish crusading had been an early example of "transmarine expansion" that differed from the "circumferential" overland enveloping of the Baltic Sea that Poland, Sweden, Brandenburg, and Russia practiced later.⁴⁸ It was a performance of seapower that mutated due to technological and social changes.

The Hanse and the pan-Baltic perspective.

The geographical factors of the Baltic Sea together with the political factors of the Holy Roman Empire's constitution and technological factors of ship-building produced the geopolitical phenomenon of the German *Hanse* in the 13th century. Sharp changes in ship architecture took place in Northwestern and North-Central Europe from the mid-12th to mid-13th centuries. They produced stout, large, and agile roundships, or *cogs*, that pioneered around-the-year navigation over the open sea. The invention was demonstrated in the crusaders' circumnavigation around Atlantic Europe into the Mediterranean. The *cog* was a tool of the Danes to wrestle the naval superiority from the Wends in the Western Baltic Sea. It was an innovation that initiated the geopolitical transformation of the Baltic Sea from being a natural barrier to a corridor of expansion.

It increased the volume of trade in the Baltic region, changed its character to more bulky goods, and moved its maritime routes from the littorals to the open-sea lines between the staple ports. The latter move pushed ahead the creation of the specific Baltic urban landscape that soon became one of the geopolitical factors. The new urban centres changed former Viking-style seafarer settlements. They combined the material facilities of a castle, cathedral, and downtown with a port, town hall, and market square, and urban organisation with professional guilds and burgers' self-rule. The *Hanse* was propelled into existence by the introduction of the *cog*. It was an association of the urban centres of the new type focused on seafaring and commerce.

The constitution of the Holy Roman Empire supported urban self-rule and self-styled foreign policy. The *Hanse* united the traders of 70 large and more

48 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 602,610–11

than 100 smaller towns, representing their economic interests, social identity, and political position. The so-called Wendish towns located in Mecklenburg were its core. The leading city of the *Hanse*, Lübeck, was founded in the middle of the 12th century at the deep inlet of the sea into the mainland interior that is formed by the estuary of the river Trave. The inlet exits to a large sea-bay at the conjunction of the Jutland and Mecklenburg coasts. Despite its infirm character, the *Hanse* ran the union diet in Lübeck and a network of trading posts, or *Kontores*. Four of them in London, Novgorod, Bruges, and Bergen were large.

The export of East-European raw materials and agricultural products to North-Western and North-Central Europe was the *Hanse's* economic basis. The goods were transported by combining sea, rivers, and overland routes. The *Hanse* was an aggressive actor of Baltic politics. Lübeck and the *Hanse* learnt to recruit large and effective professional military forces. The broad layer of the free knightly nobility, or *Ritterschaft*, emerged in Germany instead of dependent *ministeriales* in the 12th century. They came to the military market and composed the bulk of the *Hanse's* forces. The urban groups supplied the specialised marines, pikemen infantry, crossbowmen, siege engineers, etc. The *Hanse* used its mercenary forces to intervene in the Baltic states and implant its colonies to secure "possession of points [...] dominating established communication routes."⁴⁹ The *Hanse* became a seapower quasi-state with naval power projection. Its activity provided the Baltic region with the integrating vigour of a true geopolitical community. The conflict between subregional state-building and pan-Baltic expansion emerged.

The maritime geopolitical turnover of the 15th century.

By the turn of the 14th to 15th centuries, the market for Baltic goods grew fast in North-Central and North-Western Europe. The traditional luxury products of the Baltic export, like fur and wax, remained in strong demand. At the same time, the demand soared for the products of agriculture and forestry, such as grain, hemp, skins, and lard. They were bulky, and their wider customers of the urban population and industry required bigger volumes. The new means of transportation were needed, and the ships of the *carrack* type came to change the *cog*. The *carrack* cargo capacity surpassed that of the *cog*, and it was suitable for navigation in the rogue North Sea. The new kind of ships changed the balance of power on the Baltic Sea, propelling the new contenders into the Baltic trade and Baltic political-military relations.

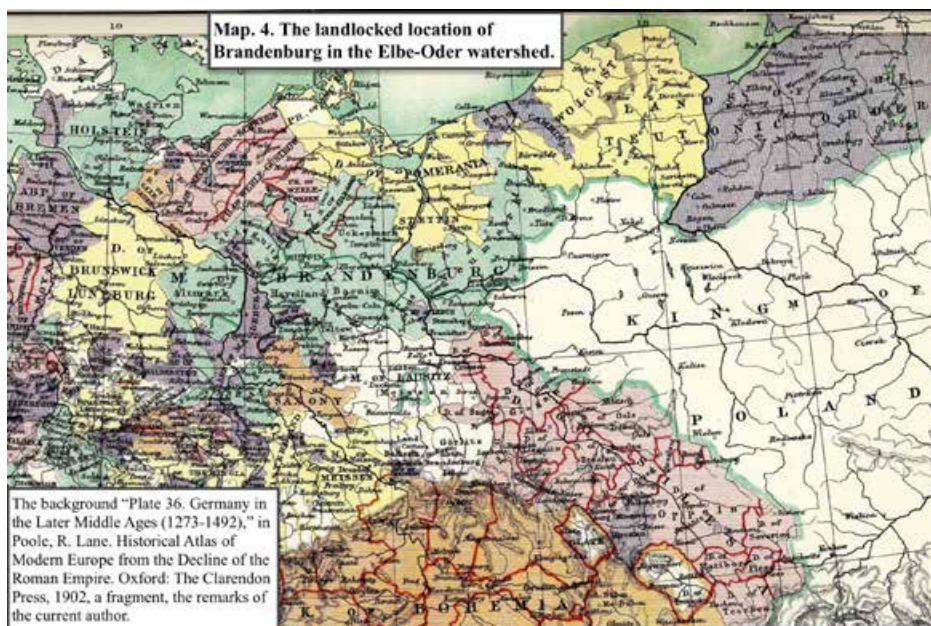
49 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 602

The ancient *Hanse*-held route of the Baltic export went along the Baltic littorals to the neck of the Jutland Peninsula at Kiel, where the goods were unloaded for the overland transport to the Elbe's estuary at Hamburg. Other ships carried them from Hamburg to the Netherlands along the North Sea littorals. It was a well-arranged way, but it did not provide transportation of bulky goods in large volumes. A new route through the Danish Straits and around Jutland to the open North Sea was traced. It was the direct link from the Baltic suppliers to the customers in the Netherlands. The Netherlands were the aggregation of provinces of the Holy Roman Empire, the Kingdom of France, and the Duchy of Burgundy with specific political constitutions. In the 14th and 15th centuries, they favoured the urban social class, vesting the towns with self-rule, strong militias, and freedom of overseas commerce.

The stout ships of the open sea navigation from the Netherlands arrived in the Baltic. First, they were loaded on the Sound's bank in the Scåne province by the *Hanse*'s merchants. Soon the Netherlandish ships explored the staple ports of the Baltic goods directly without the *Hanse*'s mediation. Their appearance was met with enthusiasm by the *Hanse*'s opponents and the opponents of Lübeck's dictate within the *Hanse*. The *Hanse*-controlled Baltic maritime routes were contested. The *Hanse* became aggressive; it turned to defend its commercial monopoly by military means. Lübeck's relations with the regimes of the Baltic states turned aggressive. It became a willing actor in the domestic power struggle in the Baltic states. It introduced tools of trade war like restrictive tolls, trade bans, prohibition of goods, refusal of ports, privateering, and naval blockades. The *Hanse* operated a thousand ships at the end of the 15th century and was a force to reckon with. From 1438 to 1441, the *Hanse*'s Wendish towns and the Dutch towns fought their first naval war over the shipping on the Baltic Sea. The *Hanse* monopoly was breached but not destroyed since the shift of this scale required a longer time and a broader solution than control over navigation.

The maritime geopolitical situation in the Baltic region and the Baltic region's geopolitical position in Atlantic Europe were overturned. The Baltic states adapted their economies to meet the West-European demand. The Baltic grain cultivation and forestry boomed. The Baltic region became a partner of the North-Western European economy of prime significance. The Baltic trade was maybe the largest single source of revenue in North-Western Europe. Its financing of political and military changes like the Dutch revolution in the last third of the 16th century was decisive.

THE LANDPOWER PATTERN OF STATE-BUILDING
IN THE BALTIC SUB-REGIONS.⁵⁰



A stiff cluster of the Elbe and Oder basins. Brandenburg and Pomerania.

Ten Baltic polities emerged within detached riverine and lacustrine drainage basins. The complex of states of the Holy Roman Empire in the basin of the river Oder (Odra) was the westernmost of them and the one that belonged not to Eastern but Central Europe. The Duchy of Pomerania and the Margraviate of Brandenburg were the Baltic states of the Oder complex while others had different affiliations. Pomerania and Brandenburg were the products of crusading activity, Germanisation, and Christianisation of the West-Slavic population, which is scholarly defined as the Wends and Polabian Slavs. Their proto-states and social structures were destroyed by the German crusaders from the 10th to the 12th century, and their territories were annexed by the Holy Roman Empire and thoroughly Germanized. The duchy of Pomerania was established in the 12th

⁵⁰ See for the facts, sources, and literature on the epoch in: SHIROGOROV, *Ukrainian War. Vol. I, Melee of Rus.*

century over the lower reaches of the river Oder, and the port town of Stettin (Szczecin) was founded at its estuary in the Baltic Sea. The social and political constitution of Pomerania was modelled after the German one. Pomerania was colonised by the German settlers while local Wendish chiefs and the princely dynasty of Griffin were assimilated into the German culture.

Pomerania was established simultaneously with the recovery of the Northern March, a frontier polity launched at Elbe's and Oder's middle reaches a couple of centuries before and soon lost to West-Slavic resistance. It was re-established as the Margraviate of Brandenburg. Brandenburg became the sole state of the Baltic region, with its political core located not in the riverine or lacustrine valley but in the watershed. Brandenburg's location corresponded to Geoffrey Parker's requirement on the location of the dominant state. Its core emerges at a crossroad of parent German Christian culture and different West-Slavic pagan culture in the marcher periphery at the lower reaches of the Elbe's right tributary, the Havel. Then it moves upstream the Havel and its tributary the Spree into the hydrographic centre in the watershed with the Oder basin named Mittelmark, where the city of Berlin was founded.

The watershed between the middle reaches of the river Oder flowing to the Baltic Sea and the river Elbe flowing to the North Sea at the neck of Jutland was the crossroad of North-Central Europe, and it was Brandenburg's emplacement. Brandenburg's core transformed into a nation-state "located astride the original and conquered territories," working to increase their homogeneity by melting them together.⁵¹ From a geographical point of view, this range of the Elbe and Oder watershed had the most favourable landscape for the administrative and military connectivity among other watersheds of the Baltic riverine basins. From the political point of view, the particular location of Brandenburg's core is explainable by the fact that it was not a "natural" Baltic polity but an implant of the external interventionist, the Holy Roman Empire, that established it as a crusading and colonising hub in the West-Slavic lands. The abnormal geographical position of Brandenburg's core in the watershed and its unnatural political position as the Holy Roman Empire's implant determined Brandenburg's jammed geopolitical situation.

At the same time, the watershed position of Brandenburg's core forced its rulers to learn the unique technique of expansion not along the riverine and lacustrine basin but in and over the watersheds that other polities imagined as

51 PARKER, *The Geopolitics of Domination*, P.4

being their logical boundary.⁵² It was non-Baltic statecraft that originated in state-building practice in mainland Western and Central Europe; nevertheless, Brandenburg fruitfully relied on watershed expansion in its Baltic ambitions.

By the middle of the 15th century, Brandenburg's expansion was disabled by the constitution and balance of power of the Holy Roman Empire. Its move to the North Sea along the Elbe was blocked by the imperial states, the Mediaeval Duchy of Saxony and its successors, including the Duchy of Saxe-Lauenburg or Lower Saxony, "the free imperial city" of Hamburg, and the County then Duchy of Holstein. Holstein occupied the lower neck of the Jutland Peninsula and was closely associated with the Duchy of Schleswig, which occupied its upper neck and was a part of Denmark. The Duchies of Holstein and Schleswig were dynastically associated, and Holstein gravitated toward Danish politics. Brandenburg's advance to the south along the Elbe was blocked by other Saxony's successors, including the Duchy of Saxe-Wittenberg or the Electorate of Saxony.

Brandenburg's move to the Baltic upstream of the Oder was blocked by Pomerania. Brandenburg was wrestling Pomerania insistently. But whenever it gained control over Pomerania, either vassalising its dukes or conquering some substantial Pomeranian territory, the Holy Roman Empire interfered and cancelled Brandenburg's gains. Pomerania was the dead end of Brandenburg's advance to the Baltic Sea. Silesia, located downstream the Oder from Brandenburg, was a possession of the kingdom of Bohemia from the middle of the 14th century. Bohemia was tied by its location and political adhesion to Central Europe. It became a pillar realm of the Holy Roman Empire, being reigned by the imperial dynasties of Luxembourg and Hapsburg. The status of Bohemia in the Holy Roman Empire denied Brandenburg's move to the southeast along the Oder basin. By topography of its upper reaches, the Oder belongs not to the East-European variation of rivers that have their sources in marchlands but Central and West-European variation of rivers that have their sources in the high mountains. The Oder's sources are in the Sudetes Mountains, and its upper reaches have strong natural limits. It was a dead end of fluvial expansion.

Some large political earthquakes in the Holy Roman Empire were needed to stir the still cluster of polities in the Oder and Elbe basins and unseal Brandenburg's potential to its Baltic destiny. It happened in the middle of the 17th century when the Holy Roman Empire was dismantled as an integrated polity, the Baltic map was reshaped, and the Baltic military balance changed decisively. Brandenburg moved to the Baltic Sea along the Oder. It was Brandenburg's

52 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 595

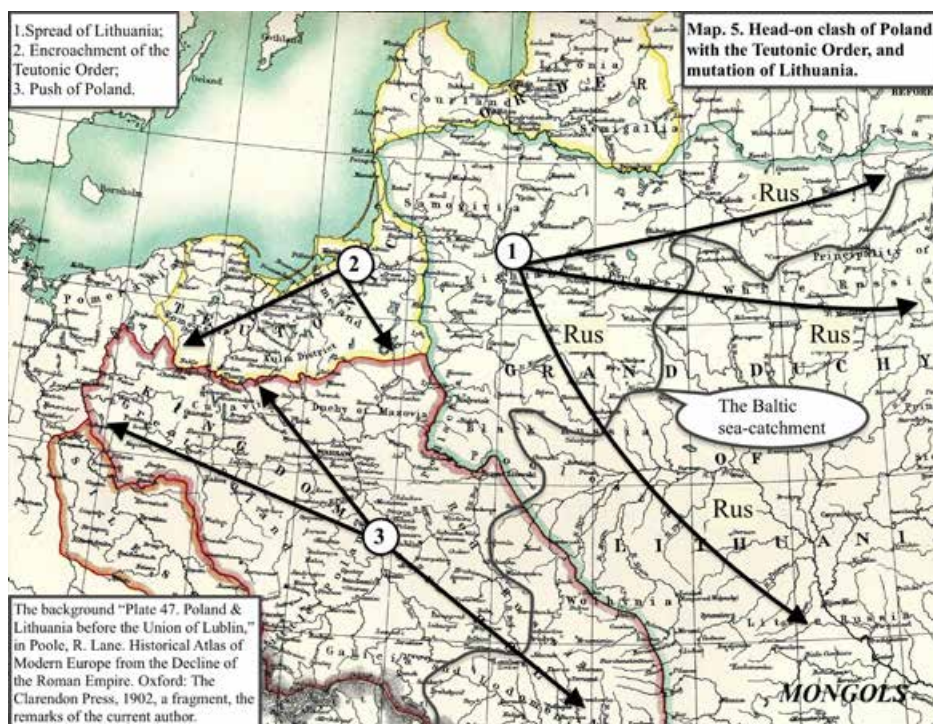
state-building with the Baltic accent. The moves to the Jutland's neck downstream of the Elbe and moves upstream of the Elbe and Oder followed in the 18th century. They matched the Baltic standard of the river-valley expansion. However, Brandenburg's moves to the east and west with its feature technique of watershed expansion in the 19th century became decisive in consolidating the German Empire as one of the European superpowers.

A head-on pair in the Vistula basin. Poland and the Teutonic Order.

The Vistula sub-region lies to the east of the Oder basin. At the end of the Middle Ages, it was shared by two states that represented two different geopolitical constructs. They were Poland in the Vistula's upper and middle reaches and the state of the Teutonic Order in its lower reaches and estuary. The Teutonic Order started in the Baltic as a normal crusading military-religious venture in the second third of the 13th century. It was a part of the overland crusading movement that was promoted by the rulers of fragmented Poland, the dukes of Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, and Mazovia, and supported by the princes of the Holy Roman Empire, the dukes of Austria, kings of Bohemia, and margraves of Brandenburg. A chain of crusading orders was placed along the Polish frontier with the pagan Prussian tribes of the Baltic linguistic group according to the well-tried Palestinian pattern. Soon, the Teutonic Order acquired its colleagues, deploying superior resources and numbers.

The Prussian territory occupied an eastern fluvial adjunct to the giant Vistula's delta associated with the Vistula Lagoon of the Danzig Gulf. It was around two hundred kilometres long and from a hundred to three hundred kilometres wide. The Teutons conquered it by the end of the 13th century, advancing as far as the easternmost river of the Vistula's association, the Pregel (Pregola), in the mouth of which in the Vistula Lagoon they founded their stronghold Königsberg. Some important innovations in weaponry and military architecture worked for the success of the crusading mission in Prussia. They were the equestrian armoured knight, crossbow and stone-throwing machine trebuchet, and stone tower fort. They determined the course of the conflict that formed the geopolitical situation in the Vistula basin together with innovations in military organisation and tactics.

The Prussian venture was granted the status of the "permanent crusade" that attracted the afflux of the "guest" crusaders from Western and Central Europe. The crusaders deployed the fighting array of the "wedge" that broke the Prussian tribal crowds. They arranged the conquered territory according to the cas-



tle-based organisation that provided the suppression of the Prussians. Contrary to the practice in Palestine, the Teutons evaded transferring their gains in Prussia to some lay territorial princes of Poland or the Holy Roman Empire. They administered their conquest on their own.

In the first decades of the 14th century, the Teutonic Order took over the Slavic lands in the western part of the Vistula delta, Pomerelia or Pomorze Wschodnie. Historical Pomerelia included the coastal district of the city of Danzig (Gdańsk) and the Chełmno Land or Kulmerland with its central town of Thorn (Toruń) around a hundred and a half kilometres inland. The city of Danzig became the order's most important acquisition. The West-Slavic lands of the Teutonic Order received the denomination Western Prussia, although they did not belong to Prussia from an ethnic or political point of view. The sudden consolidation of the Teutonic Order as a territorial state under theocratic government followed the political trends in Western and Central Europe from the corporative to statal consolidation in the Late Mediaeval Period. At the same time, it was an exemplary geopolitical state-building in the Baltic region that combined the geographical fluvial factor and the factor of the political and mil-

itary capabilities in the current conflict.

Conversion of the Teutonic Order into a territorial state happened simultaneously with the Late Mediaeval reunification of Poland. The kingdom of Poland and the Teutonic Order clashed, subordinating to the fluvial law of state-building in the major riverine and lacustrine basins of the Baltic catchment. The creation of the Teutonic territorial state was a political innovation that staged the geopolitical situation in the Vistula basin, and the Teutonic military superiority determined its unfolding. It was significant that the Teutonic Order obtained Pomerelia, countering Brandenburg's intervention in the Polish unification.

The move to the Baltic Sea along the Vistula was a strong impulse of the Polish state-building.⁵³ Brandenburg intervened in the Polish fray, exploring by-passing the Duchy of Pomerania along the Oder-Vistula watershed and breaking to the Baltic Sea at the Vistula Delta. Brandenburg acted against the unifying Polish king Władisław I Łokietek in alliance with his Polish opponents, targeting to take over Pomerelia, the ducal dynasty of which died out. The Teutons interfered in favour of Władisław I Łokietek. From 1308 to 1310, they defeated the Brandenburg troops and sacked Danzig, expelling the hostile burgers. However, the Teutons did not transfer Pomerelia to Władisław I Łokietek. They bought out the successor rights of the Brandenburg margraves to Pomerelia's ducal dynasty and annexed it.

Władisław I Łokietek followed the Baltic logic of the state-building along the riverine and lacustrine basins. By the 1430s, he had overrun the principal zones of the Polish statehood: Greater Poland with the city of Poznań in the basin of the Oder's right tributary, the river Warta, and Lesser Poland with the city of Cracow in the Vistula's upper reaches. Władisław I Łokietek spent three decades of the civil war rounding up the core areas of the Polish statehood in the Vistula and Warta valleys, contrary to the Baltic fluvial rule of the major basin's separation. The unification case of Władisław I Łokietek was much helped by the early Polish nationalism that he exploited with the fierce anti-German rhetoric and actions.

Despite Władisław I Łokietek's best efforts, the cohesion of Greater Poland and Lesser Poland remained feeble in the Early Modern Period. In case of some political and military concussions, like the Deluge in the second third of the 17th century, Poland tended to fall apart into Lesser Poland and Greater Poland. Poland was finished in the last third of the 18th century by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, dividing it into Lesser Poland and Greater Poland, and so on. Greater

53 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 597

Poland's position at the Warta put it under permanent threat of conquest and Germanisation from Brandenburg operating on the opposite, left bank of the Oder and possessing the strip of land on its right bank with the Warta's confluence.

The following Polish rulers who were sticky to Władisław I Łokietek's geopolitical tradition abstained from claiming lower reaches of the Oder with Pomerania, understanding well the non-Polish geopolitical base of its statehood. Poland did not move downstream the Oder. Poland obtained Pomerania with Stettin, the lower Oder, and the right bank of the middle Oder due to the Soviet-led geopolitical reshuffle of Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of WWII. It was not a geopolitical reality in the Mediaeval, Early Modern, and Modern periods.

Władisław I Łokietek descended on the Teutons following the fluvial logic of the Baltic state-building. It was corrected by the political cohesion and military force of the Teutonic Order. The Teutons crashed Władisław I Łokietek's army in the battle of Płowce in 1331 and successfully invaded Greater Poland in 1332. The heir of Władisław I Łokietek, Casimir III, ceded Pomerelia and the Vistula's delta to the Teutonic Order in 1433. As collateral, he also ceded Silesia in the Oder's upper reaches, to which the Polish kings had some hereditary claims, to the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1435. Despite their military victories, the Teutons did not proceed upstream of the Vistula because their expansion was directly correlated with the German colonization. The Teutonic attempts to integrate the unassimilated Polish population and nobility failed. They sold their unassimilated Polish lands back to Poland, focusing on their estuary gains.

The Teutons resettled Pomerelia, the Vistula's delta, and Prussia with the German farmers. They created the German urban communities and a class of the landed German gentry. Their state combined the theocratic government and well-defined lay social estates. The Teutons developed a prosperous economy, opening the potential of the Baltic trade. They advanced the new kinds of goods to the Baltic trade, turning Danzig into a hub of the Baltic grain export. Around 100 towns and 1,400 villages were founded over the Teutonic state in the 13th and 14th centuries. Despite their achievements, the geopolitical position of the Teutonic Order remained fragile. It failed to accomplish one of the principal geopolitical rules, emphasised by Spykman. "Movement upstream is necessary for purposes of defence, since whoever controls the upper valley has a distinct strategic advantage."⁵⁴ However, the ethnic and political situation in the Vis-

54 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 407

tula's middle reaches was unsurmountable for the Teutonic Order to move upstream.

Being a great ruler, Casimir III understood that the Teutonic block to the Polish descent downstream of the Vistula to its estuary was abnormal. Abstaining from hostilities with the Teutonic Order, he analysed the strength of the Teutons to withstand the Polish pressure. It was not some geographic particularity but their administrative technique and military capabilities. Casimir III spent his long reign introducing to the Polish realm different social, political, and military innovations, many of which he adopted from the Teutons and adapted to the Polish traditions. His reforms corrected the course of the geopolitical conflict between the Teutonic Order and Poland in the 15th century.

Fluid wrestlers in the Neman and Western Dvina basins.

The Prussians were not a single aggregation of the pagan Baltic tribes on the coast. Their close relatives lived in the river Neman's basin from its watershed with the Vistula and in the basin of the river Western Dvina (Düna and Daugava) to its watershed with the basin of the river Narva, Lake Peipus, and river Velikaya where the territory of the tribes of the Finnish linguistic group began. The Teutons continued their conquest non-stop. They invaded the Neman's estuary and subjugated the local tribes of the Scalvians, whom they slew and exiled. In the eastern end of the Neman's lagoon, the Teutons founded the port town of Memel (Klaipėda) in the middle of the 13th century. It became an important station for navigation along the Baltic coast and to the interior of the Neman's basin. The Teutons also conquered the territory of the Baltic tribes upstream on the Neman's left bank, the Jatvians. They perished.

The crusaders crossed the Neman. The natural conditions of their conquest worsened. Marching from the Baltic coast deeper into the mainland upstream of the Neman, the Teutons entered a typical Baltic watershed. The local Baltic tribes lived in the marshy glens among dense forests on low hills divided by swamps and ravines. They were fiercely hostile to the crusaders. It is the country of Samogitia. Despite all of the difficulties, the Teutons were relentless. They were encouraged by the Baltic geopolitical logic of expansion along the major riverine and lacustrine basins. The Neman basin was one of them. It looked like the Samogitians were doomed to be conquered, slaughtered, baptised, and assimilated by the Teutons inevitably, although in a slower manner than the Prussians.

However, the Samogitians were associated with the Baltic tribes further in-

land, the Lithuanians. The Lithuanians differed from other Baltic tribes of the Baltic region by their fast-strengthening pagan statehood. It was the political factor that overturned the conflict of the conquering crusaders with the local tribes. The state-organised Lithuanians demonstrated a military culture of much higher fighting capability than their conquered relatives had done. In the same geographical settings, Lithuania's emerging statehood and higher fighting capability unfolded the geopolitical situation that resulted, although in a rather slow manner, in the downturn of the Teutonic Order. It also destroyed, in two hundred years, the abnormal Teutonic model of state-building in the riverine estuaries, contrary to the typical Baltic logic of political formation over the major riverine and lacustrine basins.

Two geopolitical factors pushed ahead the formation of the Lithuanian statehood and the strengthening of the Lithuanian military. One was internal for the Baltic geopolitical region, and another was external. Lithuanian statehood emerged according to the general Baltic rule in the valley of the river Neman and its right tributary Neris (Veliya) up to its watershed with the next major Baltic riverine system of the Western Dvina. In the middle and upper reaches of both Neman and Neris, the Lithuanian lands overlapped with the territories of Rus. Rus was the East-Slavic ethnic body and mighty East-European state with its main cities of Kiev, Polotsk, Novgorod, and Vladimir. Polotsk was located in the Western Dvina middle reaches and functioned as Rus' foothold for expansion into the south-central Baltic. Rus had a political and military culture on the level of the advanced Central and Western European states. Its influence spread over the Neman and Western Dvina basins. Many of the local Baltic tribes were dependents of Polotsk.

The Lithuanian rulers adopted and copied Rus' political and military structures. They developed the castle-based administrative organisation and martial estate that fought as mailed cavalry. Access to horses was an important aspect of geopolitics.⁵⁵ The Lithuanians developed excellent horsemanship. The typical Baltic tribes had neither castle-based administration nor cavalry. Facing the crusaders, they were politically weak and militarily doomed. The mounted Lithuanians were not soft prey. By the 13th century, the Lithuanians entered the political period of the "early military state." They raided everybody around, the Baltic-language and Finnish-language tribes, Rus, Poland, and fresh appearance, the crusaders.

55 BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, P. 5



Fig. 1. The Lithuanian wedge between the Teutonic Order in the Vistula delta and the Livonian Order in the Western Dvina estuary. Das Deutsche Ordensland im 14. Jahrhundert, Deutscher Verlag und Propyläen, Berlin, 1930 r.
<https://www.deutschorden-kommende-sancta-maria.de>

The second factor that changed the geopolitical situation in the Neman's basin originated and unfolded outside of the Baltic geopolitical region. It was the Mongolian invasion of Rus. In the 12th century, Rus had disintegrated, and the Mongols destroyed it in the 1230s and 1240s. The communities in Western Rus looked to the Lithuanians for alliance and protection. The Lithuanian rulers subjugated some of them and enrolled their troops, adopting administrative and fighting skills such as written law, princely court, urban organisation, composite bow-shooting, and tactics of the close array. The main political development consisted of the Lithuanians' alliance with the Mongols. In the 1250s, the Mongols arranged them as a police force in conquered Rus and auxiliary troops for their expeditions to Poland. At the same time, the Mongols provided their support to the Lithuanians against the Baltic crusaders.

Livonia, the second Baltic coastal polity of conquest.

The crusading Teutons were not alone in the Baltics. Three decades before their crusade on the Prussians began, at the turn from the 13th to 14th centuries, other crusaders had appeared in the mouth of the Western Dvina in the Baltic Sea. The Western Dvina's lower reaches were inhabited by the next group of the Baltic language tribes, of which the Latgalians were most numerous. The crusaders forced them into an alliance and subjugated the Livs, who belonged to the Finnish language group of the ingenious population. The Livs provided their name to the forming military-political entity, Livonia.

The Livonian crusade differed from the Prussian crusade in its military technique. The overland routes to Livonia were absent, and the Livonian crusade was an amphibious venture. It represented the way of state-building and expansion in the Baltic region that was alternative to their concentration in the segregated major riverine and lacustrine basins of the Baltic catchment. It was not surprising that the conquest of Livonia was pioneered by the German crusaders of Mecklenburg and the Danish crusaders, who utilized the shipping capabilities of the *cog* navies. They were associated with the growing *Hanse* and operated on the old trade route along the coast and the Western Dvina. The German crusaders invaded the lands of the Latgalians and Livs. The Danish crusaders operated further east in the watershed between the Western Dvina and the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basin.

The German crusaders formed the Sword Brotherhood, which was modelled after the Templar Order. This arrangement narrowed it down to a hundred and a half brothers. The Sword Brotherhood commanded the militia of the allied Baltic and Finnish tribes. In the last decades of the 12th and first decades of the 13th centuries, the Sword Brotherhood secured the mouth of the Western Dvina, established the port town of Riga and multiple castles, and clashed with the advanced posts of the Polotsk princes, who moved to the Baltic shore downstream the Western Dvina. It was the third component of the conflict that shaped the geopolitical situation in the Western Dvina basin. The Sword Brotherhood transferred most of the conquered territory to the local bishoprics, of which the archbishopric of Riga was the main one.

The Danish crusaders invaded the lands of the Finnish tribes Eesti, or Ests, from the last third of the 12th to the first third of the 13th centuries. The Western Dvina flows in the Riga Gulf divided from the open Baltic Sea by the Moonsund Archipelago. Its biggest islands are Ösel (Saaremaa) and Dagö (Hiiumaa). The Western Dvina watershed with the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basin has a triangle

configuration. Its wider part between the estuaries is a coastal country traversed by smaller rivers going to the Baltic Sea. Only its eastern strip contains the tributaries of Lake Peipus. The territory was favourable for seaborne amphibious conquest. The Danish crusaders captured the Moonsund Archipelago and landed on the mainland shore. They suppressed the Ests' resistance and founded the port town of Reval (Tallinn). Denmark declared the conquered territory to be its vassal Duchy of Estland.

The Livonian crusaders consolidated the substantial territory due to their reliable sea communications with the German lands in the Western Baltic and Denmark, superior weaponry and equipment, religious dedication and professional military organisation, and smart use of the local alliances. The German and Danish crusading ventures joined. Moving east, they clashed with the polities of Northwestern Rus, the principality of Novgorod in the basin of Lake Ilmen, river Volkhov, Lake Ladoga, and river Neva, and its dependent principality of Pskov in the basin of the river Narva, Lake Peipus, and river Velikaya. The famous Battle on the Ice in 1242 displayed the conflict that shaped the geopolitical situation in the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basin for three centuries.

The Livonian crusaders moved inland on the Samogitians, who were supported by the Lithuanians. The factors of Lithuania's strength influenced the conflicts and reshaped the geopolitical situation in the Neman and Western Dvina basins. The Sword Brotherhood and the foot militia of its dependent tribes clashed with the Lithuanian cavalry. In 1236, the Samogitians and Lithuanians annihilated the Sword Brotherhood in the battle of Saule near the modern city of Šiauliai. Almost all of the brothers and thousands of their auxiliaries were killed. The Sword Brotherhood merged with the Teutonic Order to save the crusading case and was converted into its branch, the Livonian Order. However, the Lithuanians turned to the Mongols, their power sponsors. In the major battle at Lake Durbe in 1260, the forces of the Teutonic and Livonian Orders were utterly destroyed by the Lithuanian army that was strengthened with the troops of Rus and the Mongols.

Teutonic and Lithuanian mutation. Call for external contenders.

The character of conflict over state-building and expansion in the Western Dvina and Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basins changed dramatically. It was no longer a clash between the advanced political and military culture of the German crusaders and disintegrated primitive pagan tribes. The crusaders clashed with the equally developed capabilities of Rus and the fearsome external contender,

the Mongols. The Mongols commanded Rus, sponsored Lithuania, and dominated Eastern Europe, representing the Eurasian nomadic strategic culture that was not inferior to the European one in its efficiency.

The Lithuanians adopted Rus' social constitution and military arrangement. They built the centralised state and learnt to organize the territory according to Rus' pattern as the rural districts around the prince-held hillforts with the adjacent downtowns, *posads*. This pattern was much more resilient to the Teutonic onslaught than the former Lithuanian tribal layout.

The Teutons adapted their state-building to mobilise and channel the Holy Roman Empire's resources to the struggle against the mutating Lithuanians. They established a dedicated technocratic government and cultivated German-styled social estates to attract the German settlers of the nobility and urban class, who composed the mainstay of the Teutonic army. The Teutonic Order with its Livonian branch became a marcher outlet of the Holy Roman Empire. It was the well-known geopolitical phenomenon⁵⁶ that had been represented before by the empire's frontier marches. The Teutons capitalised on the empire's vast resources but became highly dependent on its ups and downs.

Being the Teutonic branch, the Livonian Order reconstructed Livonia according to the Prussian pattern, inviting the guest-crusaders to fight the pagans and Rus and settling the German land nobility to suppress the ingenious population. The Livonians established the urban communities of the German migrants. However, they did not change one of the main geopolitical characteristics of Livonia, its ethnic composition, in a way similar to Prussia and Pomerelia. Livonia's rural districts remained autochthonous. The Livonians advanced to the Baltic trade the new goods in the same way as the Teutons advanced grain that arrived in Danzig by the Vistula. The prosperity of Riga and Reval was provided by the transit of flax, hemp, skins, and other agricultural and forestry goods. The plenty arrived in Livonia from Lithuanian Rus by the Western Dvina.

The Holy Roman Empire was resourceful, and the Teutons were effective organisers. During the 14th century, they managed to mobilise and deploy sufficient forces to overrun Samogitia and Lithuania proper. They destroyed the army of Lithuania and Lithuanian Rus in the battle at the river Streva in 1348. From the 1370s to 1390s, they devastated Lithuania proper, occupied the Neman's middle reaches with the town of Kowno (Kaunas), and the Neman's upper reaches with Grodno and Novogrudok. They stormed the Lithuanian capital, Wilno (Vilnius). Wilno, Grodno, and Novogrudok were located in the con-

56 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 403

tact zone of the Lithuanians and Rus. The Teutons performed the conquest of the Neman basin, and Lithuania proper was finished. The crusading state of the Teutonic Order would convert the Neman basin into its fluvial heartland between the estuary districts of Prussia in the mouth of the Vistula and Livonia in the mouth of the Western Dvina. Only the shift of Lithuania's statehood to Rus maintained its survival.

The Lithuanians eagerly searched for new resources for their struggle against the Teutonic Order. It was the Lithuanian policy of "dynamic balance" that countered the Teutonic mobilisation of the Central and Western European potential against Lithuania⁵⁷ through crusading, advanced state-building, and import of military innovations. While the Teutonic onslaught was unfolding, the Lithuanians managed to annex Western Rus (Belarus now) and most of South-Western Rus (a northwestern part of Ukraine now) channelling their abundant resources to struggle against the Teutons. Then the Lithuanian grand prince Olgierd (Algirdas) envisaged incorporating under his control the North-Eastern polities of pre-Mongolian Rus. Olgierd vassalised the Grand Principality of Tver and moved to crush another successor of the Grand Principality of Vladimir, Muscovy. However, Olgierd's campaigns against Muscovy in 1368, 1370, and 1372 ended in a stalemate.

Olgierd's successor, Jogaila, turned to a traditional Lithuanian sponsor, the Mongols, and allied with the Golden Horde's ruler, Mamay. However, Mamay was defeated by the Muscovite grand prince Dmitry in the battle of the Don in 1380. Jogaila's co-ruler Vitovt (Witold, Vytautas) attempted to reverse the sponsor-client pattern of Lithuania's relations with the Golden Horde by promoting to the khan his ally Tokhtamysh. He was destroyed by Tokhtamysh's rival Emir Edige in the major battle of the Vorskla in 1399. Olgierd, Jogaila, and Vitovt explored to impose their protection on North-Western Rus, and take over Novgorod's immense financial and military resources but failed because it was staunchly independent and supported by Muscovy. The Lithuanian aggregation and mobilisation of the resources of Rus by subjugating it piece by piece came to the halt.

Racing for external resources for their conflict with the Teutonic Order, the Lithuanians dragged the vast non-Baltic parts of Rus into the Baltic geopolitics. Western and South-Western Rus belonged to the river Dnieper's basin of the Black Sea's catchment. Secluded conflict over state-building in the basins of the Western Dvina and Neman turned into an open-ended conflict to which both

57 GIEDROYC, "The Arrival of Christianity in Lithuania," 156–59; 174–76

opponents dragged their geopolitical sponsors. The Teutons pulled in the Holy Roman Empire with its pan-European resources of technology and manpower. The Lithuanians associated with the Mongols and pulled in Rus. Both the Teutonic Order and Lithuania mutated from being the Baltic contenders into the ex-claves of the external non-Baltic superpowers. A Baltic “chessboard” enlarged and diversified. Mutating Lithuania became more dangerous for the Teutons than Poland. If the Teutons knew the capabilities of Poland well, the external capabilities of Lithuania were for them an enigma.

The rooting of the Teutonic potential in Central and Western Europe and the glide of Lithuanian statehood from the Neman basin to Rus are stunning examples of the geopolitical technique of the Late Mediaeval Period. At the same time, the basins of the Western Dvina, the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya, and the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva, where the Baltic Rus was located, became the lines of assault of the external contenders on the Baltic region.

The Lithuanian lead and return of Poland.

Poland was a Baltic state, but its heartland of Lesser Poland was located far away from the Baltic Sea. It occupied the upper reaches of the Vistula basin. It was cut from Greater Poland in the Warta basin by Sieradz Land in its watershed with the Vistula and from the Teutonic Order in the Vistula estuary by Mazovia and Kuyavia in the Vistula middle reaches. Following the settlement with the Teutonic Order and Bohemia in the 1330s, King Casimir III exercised the south-eastward strategy. He expanded Poland along the upper Vistula basin. Casimir III annexed to Poland the north-western part of the Grand Principality of Galicia-Volhynia around the town of Przemyśl and Western Volhynia around Chełm and Bełz at the Vistula's tributary Narew from 1440s to 1460s. Pressing downstream the Vistula basin, Casimir III gained Kuyavia and vassalised Mazovia in the 1350s and merged Sieradz Land from the 1430s to 1460s.

The Vistula has features of both Central-European and East-European rivers. The Vistula and its major tributary, the San, have their sources in the high Carpathian Mountains and lead to a topographical dead end. However, another major tributary, the Western Bug, has its sources in the lowlands. Its middle and upper reaches did not have strong natural limits. Casimir III transferred the Polish expansion to the adjacent basin of Dniester belonging to the Black Sea catchment and took over Galicia in its upper reaches. He also envisaged taking over Podlasia and Eastern Volhynia in the Dnieper basin adjacent to Western Bug's middle reaches but was checked by Lithuania, Rus, and the Mongols.

Casimir III's annexation of Galicia and Western Volhynia determined the Polish novel position as a non-Baltic East-European contender in the northern Black Sea region. It existed until the Soviet-led reshaping of Eastern Europe in WWII's aftermath, when Galicia and Western Volhynia were transferred to the USSR's Ukraine.

While expanding Poland southward, Casimir III fought a series of wars against Lithuania that contested Galicia and Western Volhynia. Lithuania mobilised Rus and was supported by the Mongolian successor, the Golden Horde. Casimir III allied with his brother-in-law, the Hungarian king Charles Robert of the Angevin dynasty. He managed to bring to the Polish throne Charles Robert's son Louis I, who turned the Polish commitment to the south completely committing its resources to Bohemia, Hungary, Walachia, and Moldavia. However, neither Casimir III nor Louis I managed to convert Poland into a Black Sea state. Their efforts violated the geopolitical rule that Spykman observed. The location of the estuary of the grand national river, like the Vistula, determines the direction of the state's international commitment.⁵⁸ The river Vistula organised Poland as a state and led it in the Baltic direction.

The Polish warfare in the 14th–15th centuries was predisposed to the Baltic expansion. In the 14th century, Poland reshaped its military according to the pattern of the Teutonic Order. The Poles copied the Teutons' military organisation, fighting technique, and tactics as much as possible. The pagan Lithuania and the Golden Horde had ceased to be existential threats to Poland in the last third of the 14th century, and the Polish modelling after the Teutonic Order strengthened. It was the period when Lithuania was associated with Poland following the Catholic baptismal of its Lithuanian pagan population and the Lithuanian princely dynasty, the Jagiellons, ascended on the Polish throne. The Golden Horde ceased to be a doomlike threat due to its internal disarray. The Polish military organization, weaponry, and tactics of the late 14th century lost their edge against the southern and eastern enemies, but their northward efficiency grew. The Teutonic Order was reimagined as an arch-enemy of the Polish state and people.

The geopolitical failures of Olgierd, Jogaila, and Vitovt to drag Muscovy, Novgorod, and the Golden Horde into the Lithuanian struggle against increasing Teutonic pressure instigated the Lithuanian rulers to look for another geopolitical solution. It was a pattern of not the Lithuanian dominance but Lithuanian submission. Two relevant opportunities were at hand. Both of them looked like

58 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 229–30

alliances with stronger partners; however, they invoked different consequences. The merger with Muscovy was one of them, and submission to Poland was another. The Lithuanian grand prince Jogaila explored them both and chose the Polish option. Among different considerations, his comparative assessment of the Muscovite and Polish military potential was decisive. Jogaila took baptismal, married the Polish queen Jadwiga, and became her co-ruler as Władysław II Jagiełło. He subordinated Lithuania to Poland to turn its huge potential against the Teutons. Poland became a last stand of Lithuanian survival. At the same time, Lithuania directed Poland's return to its fluvial Baltic commitment.

The Polish turn to the Baltic in the 1400s was the Lithuanian and Jagiellonian initiative. While the preceding kings of Poland looked southward, the Jagiellons were Baltic-obsessed and fiercely anti-Teutonic. Władysław II Jagiełło and Witovt managed to bring the joint Polish and Lithuanian armies to Tannenberg (Grünwald) in 1410, where the Polish ironclad mass smashed the Teutons. The Teutonic Order was neither destroyed at Tannenberg nor pushed to irretrievable decline, as it is sometimes declared. It was only checked. Nothing new happened at Tannenberg. It was an outdated Mediaeval slaughter, a head-on clash that expressed the opponents' geopolitical resolution in the tactical form. Some new hardware and ideas were needed to destroy the Teutonic Order and sweep it away from the Vistula estuary.

Valday, a solar plexus of Eastern Europe.

Western Rus that Lithuania annexed was a Baltic polity only partly. Its districts Grodno and Novogrudok belonged to the Neman basin, and its districts Polotsk and Vitebsk belonged to the Western Dvina basin. However, the main bodies of Western Rus, South-Western Rus and North-Eastern Rus belonged to non-Baltic riverine basins. The main bodies of Rus were divided from the Baltic geopolitical region by the watershed between the Baltic comparatively narrow catchment and giant catchments of the seas that envelope Eastern Europe from the south, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea. The watershed is the upland country of Valday.

Valday is not only the watershed between the catchments of the East European seas. It is also the location of the sources of their bigger riverine basins. Valday contains the sources of the Baltic basins: the Western Dvina basin, the Velikaya-Peipus-Narva basin, and the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin. At the same time, Valday contains the sources of the river Volga, the bigger tributary of the Caspian Sea, and the river Dnieper, the bigger tributary of the Black

Sea. The Dnieper and Volga are two southward avenues of Eastern Europe that traverse its central and southern parts and guide its geopolitics to the south. They commanded the giant fluvial basins of the state formation and expansion. The conflicts in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea catchments dominated Eastern Europe and were the most important external factors of the Baltic geopolitics.

Valday is a geographical area that stretches like an arch, a thousand kilometres long and three hundred kilometres wide, from Lake Onega in Karelia two hundred kilometres south from the White Sea to Lake Ilmen two hundred kilometres south of the Baltic Sea. The Valday hills are not high and steep; their maximum height is just three and a half hundred meters over the sea level, and they are slope. However, the lowlands between the hills are broken by the ravines of the innumerable rivers and filled with impassable swamps. Valday is covered by a dense forest with fence-like shrubs and bushes. Navigation on the upper reaches of the rivers that start in Valday is difficult, and the portages between them are rare, laborious, and of low transportation capacity. From a hydrographical point of view, Valday is the southeastern border of the Baltic Sea's region and the North Atlantic pan-region as the superior water system to which the Baltic belongs.

Novgorod, an open-ended geopolitical monopoly.

The riverine and lacustrine basins that have their sources in Valday were exemplary areas of Baltic-styled state-building. Besides one of the starting pockets of Rus' statehood around Polotsk at the Western Dvina's middle reaches, Rus had two other pockets at the river Velikaya south of Lake Peipus and the river Volkhov north of Lake Ilmen. The latter had senior status in Rus' geopolitics and obtained unrivalled significance for the consolidation of Mediaeval Rus, its survival in the Mongol invasion, the formation of Early Modern Muscovy, and its transformation into Russia. Novgorod linked Rus to the Baltic Viking or Varangian seapower civilisation that became an important component of Rus' consolidation.

The legendary Varangian princes and their Novgorodian warriors controlled the riverine waterways from the Baltic Sea via the river Western Dvina or Neva-Ladoga-Volkhov-Ilmen system across the portages in Valday to the Black Sea by the river Dnieper and the Caspian Sea by the river Volga. They imposed their protection on the East-Slavic tribal associations in the middle Dnieper with the town of Kiev and the East-Slavic and Finnish associations in the upper Volga with Rostov. Although the descriptions of this activity are fabulous, it is clear that the power projection of Rus' state-building was directed southward from

the Baltic region.

During the period of Rus' disintegration from the 11th century, the Novgorodian principality got virtual independence. The 14th century was a period of its greatness. Geoffrey Parker classifies Novgorod as a city-state according to its structure of power.⁵⁹ From the geopolitical perspective, it was the territorial state largest in Eastern Europe after Lithuania and the largest one in the Baltic region. Its political constitution shifted to the "republican" pattern with the rule of the patrician oligarchy that guided the urban "democratic" institutions and hired a prince as a military figure. The Novgorodians created a prosperous Baltic-style economy combining agriculture and urban craft with the exploitation of the wildlife of the East-European North. The Novgorodians became rich and famous for exporting fur and wax. They also carried out "Eastern" transit from Persia, India, and China to North-Western Europe and carried in the West-European import to Rus, the Golden Horde, and its successor states.

Novgorod's military model combined Rus' legacy, self-styled initiatives, and adoptions from its Baltic neighbours. Novgorod built up three branches of arms with special fighting functions and organization. The first branch consisted of the court bands of the Rus and Lithuanian princes hired for particular campaigns. It determined Novgorod's balance of forces with its major neighbours, which were the grand principality of Vladimir and its successors, as well as Lithuania, Sweden, and the Livonian Order. The second branch of the Novgorodian arms consisted of the private bands of the Novgorodian family clans of enormous power and wealth, or *boyars*. Their bands were mostly mailed amphibious infantry. It was the expeditionary force that advanced the Novgorodian control northeast along the water system of Lake Ladoga, the river Svir, and Lake Onega, and over its watershed to the basins of the rivers Onega and Northern Dvina flowing to the White Sea.

The Northern Dvina basin, or Dvina Land, was the principal region of the Novgorodian expansion and colonization. It was the territory of the giant holdings of the Novgorodian boyars where they built up their wealth. It was the source of the Novgorodian export goods and the foothold of the Novgorodian plundering expeditions as far as Northern Eurasia, the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea. The third Novgorodian branch of arms was the mailed cavalry of the landed upper urban class. It was a military-social base of the Novgorodian republicanism and a mobilisational base that provided the numbers for the Novgorodian army.

59 PARKER, *Sovereign City*, P.12

The mercenary bands of the Rus and Lithuanian princes, amphibious forces of the boyars, and the Novgorodian mailed cavalry joined the large expeditions. In 1311 and 1318, they sacked the city of Åbo, the capital of Swedish Finland. From 1397 to 1398, they swept the Muscovite agents from the Northern Dvina basin and deployed many siege machines against their stronghold, the fortress Orlets, forcing it to surrender. In 1447, the Novgorodians destroyed the Livonian and Teutonic troops in the amphibious battle at the Narva's estuary. In 1463 the flotilla of Pskov, a Novgorodian dependent, brought the guns to the Livonian castle Neuhausen, bombarded it, and landed the assault party that stormed and sacked it.



The Novgorodian triad of arms turned Valday into a strong natural barrier against the external contenders of a kind that is accentuated by Spykman.⁶⁰ The Mongols, pioneers of the Eurasian consolidation, turned back on Valday while exploring the area of their conquest, even though Novgorod, the richest objective in Eastern Europe, lay just over the hills. The Mongols's successor, the Golden Horde, never raided Novgorod. The Novgorodian geo-strategists understood the validity of Valday well. Novgorod occupied not only Valday's northern slopes leading to the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin but also the hilltops where the fortress Torzhok controlled the main pass over Valday. However, Valday's southern slopes remained in the hands of the Grand Principality of Tver, Lithuania's dependent. It was the Novgorodian Achilles' Hill.

Utilising Valday as their geopolitical shield, the Novgorodians managed to keep in bay the external predators who envied their prosperity. Neither Lithuania nor the principalities of North-Eastern Rus achieved any success in subjugating the Novgorodian Republic until the second half of the 15th century. The power monopoly over the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin was the prime achievement of the Novgorodian state-building and military build-up. With stunning geopolitical grasp, all of the Novgorodian social groups and political factions united to maintain this monopoly, mobilising large armies to counter the outsiders and roll them back from any barren piece of land in Valday and other watersheds surrounding the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin that looked a waste place otherwise.

Being shielded by Valday, the Novgorodians accomplished the Baltic-style state-building in the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin, occupying it completely. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Novgorodians successfully defended their control of the Neva valley against the Swedish overland aggression from Finland and amphibious assaults by sea. They kept the Karelian Isthmus, which is an onshore district between Lake Ladoga and the Finnish Gulf. They also kept the right bank of the Narva and the coastal district Ingria (Izhora) on the southern shore of the Finnish Gulf, where the fortresses Koporye and Yam (Kingisepp) were built in 1237 and 1384, respectively.

In the middle of the 14th century, the large subsidiary of the Novgorodian Republic, the Pskov Republic, that occupied the right bank of the Narva-Peipus system and all of the Velikaya basin, split from Novgorod, forming its friendly bumper facing the Livonian Order and Lithuania. The Novgorodian Republic was a geographically complete, stable, and maybe the most resourceful Baltic

60 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 233

state with well-defined natural borders and a strong position in international relations. Nothing within Novgorod's geopolitical situation predicted its ongoing doom.

Peripheral conquest in geopolitics and entering of Muscovy.

Unlike Brandenburg, until the middle of the 15th century, Muscovy was not a state of the Baltic geopolitical region. Like Brandenburg, Muscovy had its state-building core not in some major riverine and lacustrine valley but in a watershed. Its reason for being located in the watershed was geopolitical safety. The river-valley polities of former Rus were either destroyed by the Mongols or captured by the Lithuanians, and often both. Muscovy started its ascension as a small principality in the middle reaches of the river Moskva that is a tributary to the river Oka, and the Oka is a confluent of the Volga in its middle reaches.

The slice of the Russian plain between the Volga's upper reaches and range of the Oka forms a "tong" of the Caspian catchment between the White Sea and Baltic catchments in the north and north-west, the Don basin of the Black Sea catchment in the south, and the Dnieper basin of the Black Sea catchment in the south-west. The city of Moscow is located right in the middle of the "tong." According to Spykman's "blue water" classification, Muscovy was a tightly land-locked state.⁶¹ However, in Mediaeval reality, it was well connected to the main commercial and political centres of Eurasia, like being "a port of five seas," which is a cute Stalinist hydrographic slogan of the 1930s.

The Caspian Sea, the destination of the Volga's flow, is a thousand and a half kilometres to the south across three different climatic and vegetation zones where the social and political heartland of the East European hegemon in the middle 13th to middle 15th centuries, the Golden Horde, was located. It was a space of enormous size and complexity. Muscovy's resources, its administrative, transportation, and military techniques at the turn of the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period were inadequate to envisage Muscovy's state-building downstream the Volga basin. The emerging Muscovite principality looked for manageable objectives. They lay in the Volga's upper reaches, unrolling from the southern slopes of Valday. The fragments of the former grand principality of Vladimir were located there. They became the first targets of the Muscovite expansion.

The hilltops of Valday were occupied by the Novgorodian Republic. Mus-

61 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 214

covy spread in the adjacent upper Volga. Muscovy fought over possession of North-Eastern Rus' senior seat, the Grand Principality of Vladimir, against Tver, a Lithuanian dependent. Muscovy defeated Tver and wrestled the southern slopes of Valday. It took over Vladimir's seat as well. Vladimir had some sovereignty claims over Novgorod. They worsened nothing while the utmost sovereignty over Rus was exercised by the Golden Horde, but since the late 14th century, the Golden Horde turned to decline. The Muscovite rulers used the opportunity to become the Golden Horde's agent for collecting tributes over North-Eastern Rus, including Novgorod. While other polities of Rus were desperately stressed by the Golden Horde's demands, Novgorod provided its share, a third of the collective tribute, smoothly, in cash, and without complaints.

The Novgorodian cash, revenue from its Baltic trade and exploitation of Northern Eurasia, attracted Muscovy to the Baltic region. Muscovy utilised its succession to the Vladimir grand principality to claim sovereignty over Novgorod and Pskov. It was a principal mistake of the Novgorodian geo-strategists to afford Muscovy's claims to root in its relations with Novgorod. Novgorod fiercely fought against the Muscovite political dictate and territorial encroachments, but it accepted the claim of superior sovereignty. The Novgorodians underestimated sovereignty as a geopolitical tool in situations when the military balance tended to fluctuate.

Muscovy's sovereignty claims over Novgorod became the leverage of peripheral conquest, which is a distinctive phenomenon of geopolitics. In theory, it is accomplished by a state belonging to a core of the international system over an objective that does not belong to it and lacks strong statehood.⁶² Geoffrey Parker emphasises the location of the dominant state, its vigour to exercise control, and the geographical "logic of unity" that provides success to the peripheral conquest.⁶³ Muscovy became the core of North-Eastern Rus, substituting the Mediaeval core of Eastern Europe, the declining Golden Horde. It demonstrated vigour to dominate. It expanded not into an area with feeble statehood but broke the accomplished state, the Novgorodian Republic, which was nevertheless peripheral in Eastern Europe. The Baltic region was not yet anticipated as an alternative political and military core of the international system.

In the middle of the 15th century, the Muscovite grand prince Vasily II advanced on the Novgorodian Republic following his victory in the quarter-century dynastic war in Muscovy to punish it for supporting his rivals. Novgorod coun-

62 MACDONALD, *Networks of Domination*, 19, 22–23

63 PARKER, *The Geopolitics of Domination*, p. 4

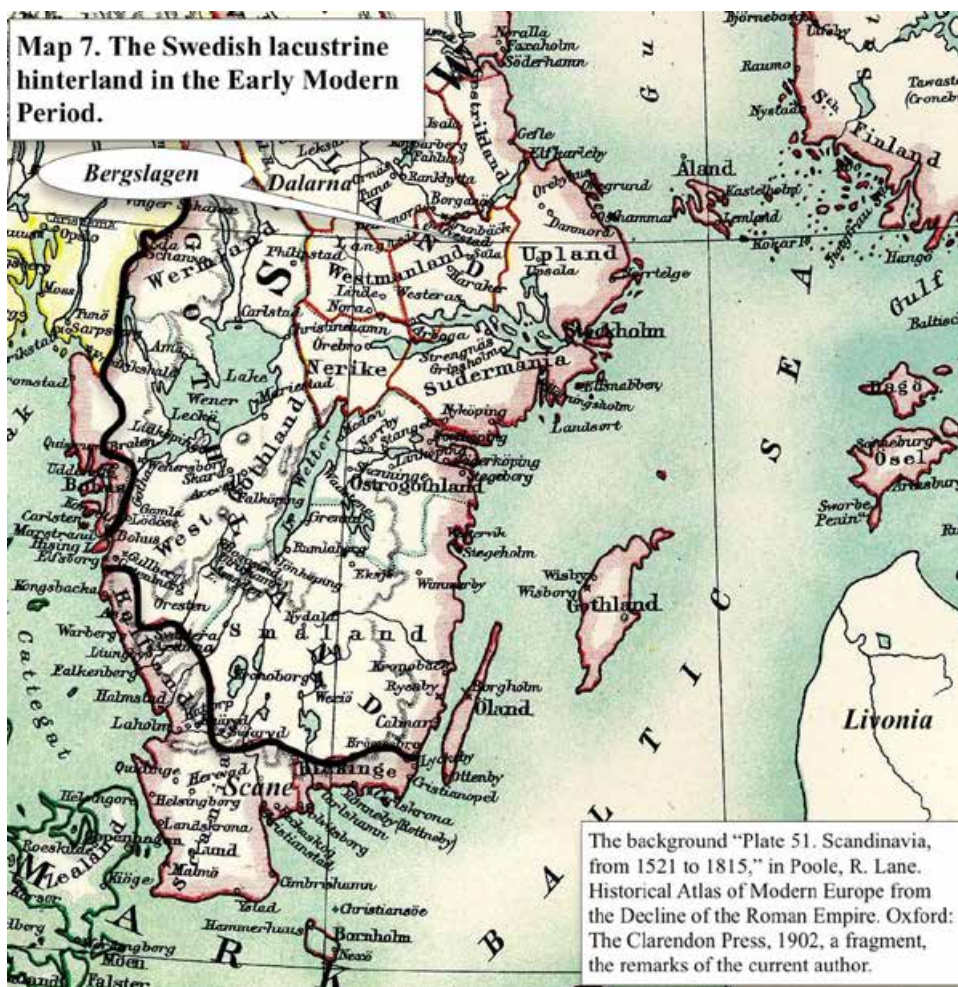
tered his ambitions by force. The Novgorodian army of the mercenary princely bands and urban mailed cavalry was superior over the Muscovite noble levy and militia a hundred years before. Now the military reforms of Vasily II changed the game. The Novgorodians were crushed by the new Muscovite household cavalry and Tatar mercenaries in Russa, the rich salt-boiling town on Valday at Lake Ilmen in 1456. Another Muscovite corps took by storm the Novgorodian fortress Molvotitsy that shielded a key pass through Valday. Novgorod was shocked and submitted to the Muscovite sovereignty. Muscovy gained its Baltic prospects without descending to the seashore by fighting on Valday.

Sweden, a geopolitical hybrid of seapower and landpower:

In the Middle Ages, the vast interior of Sweden consisted of a few poorly connected regions. However, its heartland in the Swedish lowland was compact and cohesive. It spread from the fortress of Älvsborg at the coast of Kattegat across the Scandinavian Peninsula to the city of Stockholm at the Baltic Sea. The Swedish heartland consisted of the Mediaeval provinces of Svealand and Götaland being from three to four hundred kilometres long and from two to three hundred kilometres wide. It was ethnically homogenous and well-tied by the large lakes and waterways between them. Svealand included the districts around Lake Mälaren, and Götaland spread east and west of Lake Vättern.

Stockholm is located in the middle of Lake Mälaren's hydrographic area and the littorals of the Stockholm Archipelago. Together they represent the maze of the islands and peninsulas around two hundred kilometres long. Lake Mälaren is naturally connected to Lake Hjälmaren, elongating this system another hundred kilometres westward from the Baltic Sea. The system of Lake Vänern and the river Göta Älv runs to the North Sea in another hundred kilometres west across an unexpressed watershed. It is one hundred and half kilometres long. Lake Vättern is located south of the watershed between Mälaren and Vänern basins. It is finger-shaped from north to south along the Scandinavian Peninsula and has a hundred-kilometre-long natural connection to a deep *fjord* of the Baltic Sea.

This geographic position of the Swedish lakes constitutes them as an integrated lacustrine, riverine, and sea-inlet water system orientated mainly to the Baltic Sea but also linked to the North Sea. The system obtained a similar function for the Swedish state-building as the riverine and lacustrine systems of the mainland part of the Baltic region had for the polities of North-Central and North-Eastern Europe. Unlike Denmark and Norway, which developed as coastal kingdoms, Sweden developed as an interior kingdom in the basins of its central lakes.



It explains the delay in Sweden's state-building in the 10th–12th centuries if it is compared with Denmark's. Sweden worked to integrate its land districts into one realm. At the same time, the interior nature of the Swedish state provided it with the gravitation core and expansionist vigour. The topography of Sweden's Baltic coast shielded it against the naval attacks, to which the narrow shape of the Baltic Sea predisposes according to Spykman's warning.⁶⁴ The naval threat to the Swedish shore was damped by the maze of the islands and peninsulas with

64 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 215

fiords and *skerries*. Only a few locations on the Swedish coast were assailable, and they were the well-fortified port towns like Stockholm.

The interior mainstay of Sweden's statehood in its central lacustrine basins was responsible for the Swedish Late Mediaeval constitution. Sweden was not a backward exclave of Western and Central Europe in austerity and wildness of geographic "nowhere." The Swedish particularity was caused by the self-made development of its social and political structures in the specific geographical environment of its lacustrine heartland. The strong self-ruling peasant communities with capable militias were the Swedish constitutional accents. The geopolitical situation of Sweden obstructed its assimilation into West-Central Europe. Sweden produced self-styled social and political structures and mentalities. The Baltic and not European geopolitical identity became the Swedish feature through the Early Modern Period.

While being an interior kingdom, Sweden was a successor to the Viking seapower civilisation similar to Denmark. Stockholm resides at the Archipelago Sea, which is a maritime crossroad of the Bothnian Sea leading to the Bothnian Bay in the north, the Finnish and Riga Gulfs leading to the estuaries of, respectively, the Neva and Western Dvina in the east, and the Baltic Proper leading to the Western Baltic in the south and to the Danish Straits through it. It was the best location for seaborne expansion over the Baltic region. At the same time, it was the worst location since it attracted the Baltic naval expansionists and marauders.

Finland, the third Baltic coastal polity of conquest.

The south-eastern shore of the Scandinavian Peninsula is not open to an unobstructed sea. Instead, the Finnish Archipelago with its largest cluster of the Åland Islands forms a kind of broken bridge from the district north of Stockholm to the frontal landmass of the North-Eastern European mainland. The Åland Islands are similar to the Danish islands and Stockholm Archipelago with their tight straits and mazes of fiords and skerries. In a situation when the Swedish kings, local lords, and communities had at their disposal the Viking-style flotillas of longboats, it was an inviting geographical situation for expansion via the Åland Islands to the coast of the North-Eastern European mainland that was inhabited by the Finnish tribes.

The coastal territories of Finland were conquered by the Swedish expeditions in the second half of the 12th century and early 13th century. Some of them were local initiatives, and others were declared crusades. Keeping of the coastal

strongpoints was the pattern of the Swedish expansion, while plunder and conversion to Christianity as a symbol of submission dominated the day-to-day practice. The Swedes moved to occupy the Finnish interior only in the second third of the 13th century. The Finns did not have an organisation over the tribal level. The conquest did not require big ventures. But it required to submit multiple tribal arrears secluded by unnumerable Finnish lakes, rivers, and swamps. The Swedes built a network of castles and founded the town of Åbo or Turku that worked as a hub of occupation.

Many Finnish tribal chiefs were assimilated and integrated into the migrant Swedish nobility. The resulting Swedish-Finnish nobility was more numerous as a share of the population than the nobility in Sweden proper. It was more cohesive and controlled the peasants more strictly. The Swedish-Finnish nobility became a social-military group, mastering seaborne expansion, amphibious conquest, and coercive occupation. The formation of the Swedish-Finnish nobility became a principal social geopolitical factor of Sweden's history in the Early Modern Period.

Wrestling the Karelian Isthmus.

Advancing along the Finnish littorals, the Swedes came to clash with the Novgorodians, who protected their monopoly over the Neva-Ladoga-Volkhov-Ilmen basin. The Karelian tribes, close relatives of the Finns, inhabited the Karelian Isthmus between the river Vuoksi that connects Lake Ladoga and Lake Saimaa and the Finnish Gulf. They were associated with Novgorod, and many of them were baptised to Orthodox Christianity. The Karelians were skilled in amphibious warfare with the longboats and deployed the mailed infantry of the Novgorodian kind. The Novgorodians advanced to support them, sometimes with their fully mobilised armies and frequently with their amphibious forces. Wrestling of the Karelian Isthmus was a principal geopolitical objective for both belligerents.

In 1292, the Swedes founded the fortress Vyborg at a fjord-like inlet of the Finnish Gulf in western Karelia. In 1294, the Swedish assault was rebuked from the town of Karela (Kexholm), the Novgorodian fort that controlled the Vuoksi's mouth in Ladoga. At the same time, the Swedish amphibious parties were hunted down in the Novgorodian province of Ingria on the southern shore of the Finnish Gulf. Ingria was inhabited by the Chud Finnish tribes relative to the Karelians and Ests. The Novgorodians protected Ingria from the Swedish incursions with special vigour, fearing the pincer move of the crusaders from Livonia

and Swedes from western Karelia that might have strangled the Novgorodian transit to the Finnish gulf via the Neva.

In 1300, the Swedes landed at the Neva estuary and built the fortress of Landskrona. The Novgorodians destroyed it the next year. Novgorod responded to the Swedish threat by refortifying Karela and Oreshek (Nöteborg, Shlisselburg) at the exit of the Neva from Lake Ladoga. Oreshek's location dominated the seventy-kilometer-long range of the Neva to its estuary in the Finnish Gulf. It also dominated the southern bank of Lake Ladoga between the Volkhov estuary and Neva exit, the principal waterway of the Novgorodian transit. The Novgorodians did not need a fort in the Neva estuary while possessing Oreshek and deploying the forces to throw away the Swedes. At the same time, Oreshek blocked the probable penetration of the Swedes into Lake Ladoga, endangering the Novgorodian existential economic interests in the Svir-Onega basin and the Dvina Land.

The location of Oreshek allowed the Novgorodians to utilise the riverine and lacustrine amphibious warfare, which they mastered, and evade the Swedish superior capabilities of naval warfare. The contest between Sweden and Novgorod in Karelia became a fierce frontier war with the raiding of each other's territory, destruction of each other's strongholds, and annihilation of each other's allies among the local population. The border was settled in 1323 for more than a century. It ran along the river Sestra west of Lake Ladoga and to Lake Saimaa. The Neva's estuary, Karelian Peninsula, Neva-Ladoga basin, and the trade route from Novgorod to the Baltic Sea remained the Novgorodian monopoly.

First try of Dominium Maris.

Seapower and landpower contest over Sweden.

The political constitutions of the three Nordic kingdoms were similar, representing the same social tradition. A strong monarchy was their axis. It dominated the military, civil administration, legislation, and religious affairs. Both Sweden and Denmark turned into elective monarchy during the 14th century, while Norway remained a hereditary monarchy. The feudal semi-sovereign polities were not constituted. The Duchy of Schleswig, a Danish fief, was the only exception due to its dynastic union with the neighbour fief of the Holy Roman Empire, the Duchy of Holstein. The nobility was not a privileged corporation but a service group, and the urban communities were undeveloped. The estate legislatures that were a feature of the Western and Central European Late Mediaeval politics were absent in the Nordic kingdoms. The aristocracy had some political position

in the royal councils with unshaped structures and obscure mandates. This kind of political landscape was inviting for state-building experiments.

Different forms of overlapping of the three Scandinavian kingdoms existed in the 14th century, including personal monarchical unions, dynastic intermarriage, migration of the aristocracy, joint bishoprics, sharing of the frontier provinces, military alliances, and joint regulation of shipping and trade. They created a ground for the integration of the sovereignty of the Nordic kingdoms by the Danish seapower tradition. From 1387 to 1389, Margaret (Margrethe), a visionary lady-regent of the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway, managed to obtain a similar position in Sweden by providing military support to the Swedish nobles rebelling against their king Albert (Albrecht) of Mecklenburg. Margaret's grand-nephew Erick (Bogusław) of Pomerania was declared a hereditary king of Norway in 1389, and in 1396 he was elected to the thrones of Denmark and Sweden. Constituting the union of the Nordic kingdoms, Margaret utilized their Late-Medieval ideas of elective monarchy and strong royal authority.

The joint meeting of the royal councils of the three Nordic kingdoms affirmed Erik's "Act of Coronation" in the Swedish town of Kalmar in 1397. It established the Kalmar Union as a hereditary unified monarchy with integral sovereignty. The three kingdoms joined their domestic and foreign affairs. The royal structures of power were transferred to Denmark. Only some local affairs were allowed for Norway and Sweden. They were run by the administrators of the fiefs around the royal castles or *lens*. The south-Scandinavian region of Skåne became the financial mainstay of the unified Nordic monarchy. Skåne's coast of the Sound was the principal location to sell the Baltic goods to the traders of North-Western Europe and reload them from the Baltic ships of littoral seafaring to the customers' ships adapted to the rough North Sea. The *Hanse* occupied Skåne in the 1360s and constructed a condominium over Skåne with Denmark in the 1370s–1380s. The *Hanse* ceded to it a third of Skåne's revenues in exchange for the status to "consult" the choice of the Danish king.

Erik's reign was a heyday of the Kalmar Union, however his authoritarian rule was not appreciated by the aristocratic factions in its kingdoms. In the 1420s, Erik rushed into the contest over the assets of the declining Teutonic Order. His ambitions were countered by Poland and the *Hanse*. Poland looked to annex the territory of the Teutonic state while the *Hanse* looked to take over its trade monopoly in the Vistula's and Western Dvina's estuaries. The *Hanse* fought off Erik's ambitions with its naval force and incited the Danish and Swedish aristocratic factions. The struggle with the *Hanse* exhausted Erik's reign and caused his expulsion. It triggered the downturn of the Kalmar Union.

At the same time, Polish and Hanseatic geopolitical egotism produced a feeling of deprivation and affront in Sweden. Its long struggle against Poland and the *Hanse* to revise the Teutonic legacy followed into the 16th and 17th centuries. It became one of the principal geopolitical issues of the Baltic region settled only in the aftermath of WWII.

The aristocratic factions of the Nordic kingdoms required the transfer of rule to the royal councils including control over the royal castles and administrative *lens* that was the foundation of the united monarchy. The separatist movement was strongest in Sweden, with its hinterland character and rural society of peasants and miners requiring a nearby king who could directly administer the taxes and justice. Erik's alienation of the *Hanse* violated the interests of the mining communities that were highly dependent on the *Hanse's* export of their products. They required returning to the national monarchy. The precedents of a popular levy against the "Danish" king appeared in the hinterland province of Dalarna (Dalecarlia) northwest of Stockholm, where the mining district Bergslagen was mainly located.

It was a moment when the hinterland geopolitical character of the Swedish statehood started to dictate its split from the Kalmar Union. The specific Swedish hinterland nationalistic monarchism was born. Following the deposition of Erik in all three kingdoms in the late 1430s, the Royal Councils of each of the three kingdoms took over the royal power. The office of the supervisor of the realm was introduced in Sweden. The maritime geopolitical character of Denmark and Norway was more favourable for the union with a split of sovereignty between the distant king and aristocracy onsite. They proceed with this pattern. The re-emergence of the separate government in Sweden transferred its sovereignty from the Kalmar Union to the native institutions. It was one of the factors that made up the critical mass for a radical reshuffle of the Baltic geopolitical region.

THE SUM OF THE BALTIC CONFLICTS IN THE MEDIAEVAL PERIOD.

The Baltic states had similar geopolitical resources. They were the agricultural lands, areas for forestry, fishing, and hunting; the urban settlements as the centres of commerce, craft, and administration; population or demographic potential; points of control over the trade routes; and outlets to external resources. Mineral resources and advanced technologies were not contested in the Late Middle Ages. The Swedish mining region, Bergslagen, and the Novgorodian outlet to Northern Eurasia, the Dvina Land, were probably the only exceptions

from this universal similarity of the resources over the Baltic region.

However, the intensity of economic activity became highly different by the turn of the 14th to 15th centuries. The concentration of the fur trade in Novgorod brought to it a cash flow of silver and gold that surpassed the revenues of all other states of North-Eastern Rus and maybe if being counted together with the revenue of Lithuania. The tolls and taxes on shipping and trade collected in the Jutland neck's crossings under Lübeck control and Danish straits made the Lübeck and Danish treasuries cash-excessive. The trade turnover, especially with grain and forestry goods in Danzig and Riga, was higher than the turnover of all other Baltic ports being taken together. Danzig was visited by a thousand ships annually in the late 15th century and twice more in the late 16th century. Most of them were Dutch ships while the trade with Danzig composed half of Amsterdam's commercial turnover. While all other cash-strapped Baltic rulers scratched the social armies of feudal levy, urban militia, and peasant crowds, Lübeck, Denmark, the Teutons, and Novgorod could afford to hire mercenaries who were expensive but most efficient troops. There were the things to envy in the common monotone picture of the Baltic and the things to fight for.

By the middle of the 15th century, several kinds of conflicts shaped the geopolitical situation in the Baltic region. They processed the geographical settings with military and administrative techniques, social and political tools, and visions of actors.

Conflicts of state-building within the major riverine and lacustrine basins.

The main conflict of the Baltic geopolitical region was the struggle over dominance within its subregions. The geographical characteristics of the terrain determine its suitability for military operations.⁶⁵ The riverine and lacustrine basins of the Baltic sub-regions were the scope and kind of terrain that the technique of the military operations was able to exploit on the eve of the Early Modern Period. At the same time, the watersheds between the major basins were the barriers preventing the transfer of conquest. The military of the time concentrated their activity within the major riverine and lacustrine basins that became geopolitical sub-regions.

Many of the Baltic sub-regions were characterised by a "classic" geopolitical split of the riverine valley to the polities of lower reaches and upper reaches. It

65 BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, Ch.3

was the geopolitical form of the conflict between Brandenburg and Pomerania in the Oder basin, the Teutonic Order and Poland in the Vistula basin, the Teutonic Order and Lithuania in the Neman basin, the Livonian Order and Lithuania in the Western Dvina basin, and the Livonian Order and the Pskov Republic in the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basin. While the states in estuaries were mostly defensive, the states in the middle and upper reaches were aggressive. The Baltic fluvial geopolitics confirmed Spykman's rule that "access to the sea remains a universal desideratum" of the hinterland states.⁶⁶

Was the river-valley consolidation of the Baltic polities also their intuitive drive to autarchy that allegedly attracted the geopolitical thinkers?⁶⁷ The Baltic examples demonstrated that this was not the case. The Baltic polities wrestled the territories with similar resources while increasing the deficit of the resources that they lacked. They were moved by the logic of state-building per se with its stakes to dominate or perish. They searched for the resources in shortage by dragging into their struggle the outer contenders such as the Holy Roman Empire, mainland Rus, and the Mongols. The intervention of the external contenders reshaped the geopolitical situation. Geopolitical autarchy was never envisaged. The Baltic geopolitics formed as an open stage.

Conflicts over the watersheds of the riverine and lacustrine basins.

Among the Baltic states with their cores in the riverine and lacustrine basins, only one had its core in the watershed. It was Brandenburg. Among the external Baltic contenders, only Muscovy had a similar position. It transformed into a Baltic state in the middle of the 15th century. Both Muscovy and Brandenburg were the frontier polities that had their state-building cores in the watersheds of the Baltic catchment with the adjacent sea catchments. Moscow had its core in the upper reaches of the Volga-Caspian basin and Brandenburg had its core in the middle reaches of the Elbe basin.

Brandenburg and Muscovy mastered political and military techniques to expand in the watersheds. Brandenburg had a watershed conflict on the Oder's right bank with Poland. Muscovy had a watershed conflict with Novgorod in Valday. In the middle of the 15th century, it was not clear whether the watershed technique of expansion was more efficient than the "classic" geopolitical technique of expansion along the riverine and lacustrine basins or maritime expan-

66 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.II, 601

67 GRYGIEL, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, 31

sion to coastal territories. However, the crisis in which it might have been tried was palpable.

Seapower assault on the river estuaries.

The Baltic states in the estuaries of the riverine and lacustrine basins were not the products of the natural emergence but the seapower conquest. They were either seapower implants like Mecklenburg, the Livonian Order, and Finland, or gains of overland conquest like Pomerania. The Teutonic Order and Sweden were two exceptions to this rule being the products of the natural state-building.

The Baltic Sea determined the state-building in the estuaries. Despite the low capabilities of the longboat navies, the seaborne assault was a smooth venture in the Mediaeval Baltic. There were only two examples of the successful defence of estuaries against the seapower assault. They were the Novgorodian defence of the Neva estuary with the Karelian Isthmus against Sweden and the Narva estuary with Ingria against the Livonian Order. They were provided by the superior military capabilities and statehood of Rus.

Contest over the coastal chokepoints.

Domination of the seapower implants in the riverine and lacustrine estuaries in the Baltic Sea emphasised the control over maritime communications. The littoral seafaring of the longboat navies was controlled by the coastal chokepoints. They had two key characteristics. First, they were located in the natural positions on which the navigation depended. Second, their natural position afforded capturing and defending them with amphibious force. The locations were not contested if they were too far from the shipping trails or unassailable and undefendable by seapower. The province of Scåna on the shore of the Sound Strait was a much-desired naval and commercial chokepoint. The Swedish attempt to establish a similar chokepoint at the Neva estuary in 1300 with a fleet of a thousand longboats was parried by Novgorod with a similar large fleet and strong land forces that annihilated the Swedes and destroyed their fortress Landskrona in 1301.

The Teutonic fortress port of Memel could not be developed as a significant staple port despite its favourable geographical position near the Neman estuary. The Teutons could not secure its adjacent interior, and Memel was under incessant Lithuanian pressure. The Swedish fortress port Vyborg did not grow as a large staple depot due to the Swedish inability to conquer the Karelian Isthmus and check the Neva. Both Memel and Vyborg remained mere military na-

val chokepoints. Unlike Memel and Vyborg, Narva became an important naval and commercial chokepoint, being impregnable to multiple Novgorodian and Pskovian attacks with numerous armies and siege machines. Narva's naturally strong position was timely fortified, and the adjacent left bank of the Narva was arranged as its geopolitical district. Novgorod and Pskov had to use Narva's bottleneck for their transit commerce. The castle-based technique of occupation provided defence of the coastal chokepoints against the overland attack. Danzig, Riga, and Reval became major chokepoints of trade and navigation in the 14th century, being well-protected by the Teutonic occupation of Prussia and Livonia.

At the same time, the development of the amphibious technique created new threats to the coastal chokepoints and turned some of them undefendable. It was a novel rule that the amphibious application of the gunpowder weapons brought in the 15th century. The introduction of the *caravel* by the middle of the 15th century and the development of the naval artillery to exercise deck-to-shore gunfire, and the spread of handheld firearms to the amphibious troops improved the efficiency of amphibious operations. Many of the coastal strongholds that had looked impregnable before became assailable from the sea.⁶⁸

Particularism of the sub-regions versus the integrating vigour of the Baltic Sea.

The geopolitical situation in the Baltic region was determined by the conflict between landpower and seapower, but in a special way. While landpower supported state-building and expansion in segregated riverine and lacustrine basins of the Baltic catchment, seapower spread over the Baltic Sea as the hub of the entire region. The Brandenburg, Polish, Lithuanian, Novgorodian charge to the estuaries along the riverine and lacustrine basins represented the Baltic sub-regional particularism. The Danish, crusading, Swedish conquests, and Hanseatic interventions utilised the Baltic Sea as an integral space.

These two patterns of expansion competed not only between the states but also inside the states, where they looked like different ways of state-building. Sweden was an exemplary polity, oscillating between the options. While one faction of the Swedish aristocracy looked for a seapower statehood cooperating with their Danish colleagues in the Kalmar Union, another faction associated

68 See on the gunpowder revolution in amphibious warfare in: SHIROGOROV, "A True Beast of Land and Water;" and SHIROGOROV, "Albuquerque at Malacca, 1511; Yermak in Siberia, 1582."

with the hinterland communities looked to establish a landpower national monarchy. Then a third group entered the fray; it was the Swedish-Finnish nobility that mastered seaborn amphibious conquest and occupation of the mainland interior. They clashed over the political priorities, mobilisation and utilisation of resources, structure of the realm, and its sovereignty. It was the projection of the geopolitical choices on state-building.

Break-in of the external contenders.

No external contenders entered the Baltic region on their own, being guided by some large-scale geopolitical considerations like Mackinder's move of the Eurasian heartland to its natural delimitation with the maritime outskirt. The external contenders were guided by the Baltic states. It was a guide of three kinds. First, the external contenders moved to the Baltic in a manner of peripheral conquest over the watershed between the Baltic catchment and the sea catchment where the prospective contender was located. It was a move conducted by Brandenburg and Muscovy. It could have different reasoning, ways, and characters. The Holy Roman Empire moved to the Baltic following its peripheral conquest of the watershed between the Middle Elbe and Middle Oder and organising its gains as the Margraviate of Brandenburg. Pomerania and Mecklenburg were the further fruits of this expansion.

Muscovy moved to the Baltic region, venturing a peripheral conquest in Valday. The impulse for the Muscovite advance came from its clash with Lithuania over the heritage of pre-Mongolian Rus. Muscovy countered the Lithuanian annexations by military force and wrestled the southern slopes of Valday controlled by the Lithuanian dependent, the Grand Principality of Tver. Then Muscovy interfered in domestic politics of the Novgorodian and Pskovian Republics, utilising both its Valday foothold and sovereignty claims. The next impulse for the Muscovite advance to the Baltic came when Muscovy achieved situational military superiority in the mid-15th century and turned the Novgorodian Republic into its dependent.

The second kind of guide for the external contenders to advance into the Baltic region was the mutation of a Baltic state into an external power. It was a way of Lithuania. Cooperating with the Mongols and merging Western and South-Western Rus that lay in the basin of the river Dnieper and Black Sea, Lithuania mutated from an aborigine Baltic state into a state with predominantly non-Baltic association. The transformation changed Lithuania's Baltic social structures and military by adopting non-Baltic patterns.

The third kind of guide for external contenders to advance into the Baltic region was the development of the Baltic trade, its goods, customers, routes, transportation facilities, and volume. The Baltics' geopolitics was highly sensitive to the demand of commercial markets and technological changes in shipping and naval warfare. The Netherlandish urban classes organised as commercial ventures and town alliances entered the Baltic Sea to wrestle the commercial domination from the *Hanse* by economic and naval means. There were no limitations for other similar contenders to follow the Netherlandish pattern and invade the Baltic region by sea, guided by the development of international trade and naval capabilities. England followed this pattern to enter the Baltic region in the 16th century.

The "Grand Games" of the great powers is a signature show of geopolitics.⁶⁹ The Baltics became its stage and bounty.

THE BALTIC, A SEPARATE GEOPOLITICAL REGION.

Growth of the Baltic region's integrity.

The geopolitical conflicts in the Baltic region formed three groups. Struggle within the secluded riverine and lacustrine basins belonged to the first one. Wrestling the watersheds between the basins belonged to the second group. Capturing the coastal areas belonged to the third group. While the first group split the Baltic into sub-regions, the third one worked for its geopolitical integrity around the Baltic Sea. The second group of conflicts strengthened the Baltic homogeneity.

The effects of the groups of conflicts enhanced the settings of the Baltic's physical geography. On the one hand, it divided the region by the rogue sea, great distances, and impassable watersheds. On the other hand, it tied the Baltic up by the marine and riverine navigation, similar natural conditions, and resources. The Baltic's political, social, economic, and military uniformity became another foundation of its performance as an integral and definite geopolitical region.

During the Middle Ages, the Baltic states developed similarities and compatibility in their social structures, political regimes, and military organisations. Being visibly different, the regimes of the Baltic states occurred stunningly the same. Their political feature was the oligarchic rule that equally resisted abso-

69 KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 180

lutist and estate legislative trends that increased in continental Central and Western Europe. Sweden and the Teutonic Order were oligarchic. The oligarchic regimes encroached on the royal power in Denmark-Norway, Lithuania, and Poland. They subjugated the popular assemblies in the Novgorodian and Pskovian Republics. They substituted the estate legislative in Brandenburg, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg. The oligarchs of these states understood each other well.

The oligarchies of the Baltic states consisted not of the inborn aristocrats with feudal land possessions and sovereignty rights, as in continental Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, but of the officeholders, military commanders, and urban merchants. The mercenary aristocracy was prominent in the Baltic states, unlike the continental dominance of the native aristocracy with feudal status. Among other conditions, the character of the Baltic oligarchies was created by the opportunities of the fast social lift that proposed the Baltic trade, shipping, and raiding. The Baltic was a space of opportunities and migration.

Monopolisation of the military service by the martial estates did not spread over the Baltic. The military service belonged to different social groups that organised it according to their structure. The Swedish peasant levy is a well-studied example of this Baltic feature. The Novgorodian mailed cavalry of the landed urban class is an understudied one. The Novgorodian, Pskovian, Teutonic, Livonian, and Hanseatic urban militias are other examples. The professional military of domestic hirelings and mercenaries was more prominent in the Baltic region than in continental Europe, where the armies were a function of the martial estates. Baltic warfare was based on amphibious operations, advanced naval techniques, and strong infantry. It contrasted with the armies of the European mainland that were based on cavalry and committed to land warfare.

The Baltic's security communities.

A few "particular [...] security communit[ies]" emerged within the Baltic uniformity. The security community is characterised by one or several distinctive "strategic and military cultures" associated with specific missions or geographical environments.⁷⁰ The geographic conditions and history of conflicts shape it.⁷¹ Five security communities consolidated in the Baltic region. The location of the security communities did not coincide with the border of states; sometimes the security communities included a few states and sometimes cut

⁷⁰ GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 28, 131

⁷¹ See on interaction of the technological, social, and geographical factors for the East-European "military revolution" in: SHIROGOROV, "Quo Vadis?"

the states in parts.

Brandenburg, Pomerania, Mecklenburg, Teutonic and Livonian Orders, and Danish Schleswig belonged to the German security community, while another part of Denmark and Norway belonged to the Nordic security community. Poland belonged to the West-Slavic security community expanding over Lithuania. The Pskovian Republics and Lithuanian Rus belonged to the East-Slavic security community. Sweden and the Novgorodian Republic belonged to an “amphibious” security community, maybe the most complex creature of the Baltic Mediaeval conflicts. The German security community, the West Slavic security community, and the East Slavic security community were relatively stronger in land warfare. The Nordic security community raced ahead in naval warfare. The Swedish-Novgorodian security community increased its amphibious capabilities. Adhesion of the Baltic security communities to different kinds of warfare responded to their geographical conditions and military traditions. At the same time, they were a vision of their strategists on the ongoing geopolitical engagements of their states.

The Baltic geopolitical chokepoints.

Different kinds of conflicts shaped and structured the Baltic’s geopolitics. A hierarchy of geographical chokepoints appeared. Some were the keys to dominance in the riverine and lacustrine basins. They often coincided with the political and economic centres of the states. Others provided control over maritime communications in the Baltic Sea. They migrated following the changes in transportation and naval techniques and patterns of power projection.

The Sound Strait changed the Kiel overland route as a gorge of the Baltic westward commerce. The Western Dvina-Dnieper portage was obscured by the Ilmen-Volga portage as the transit link from the Baltic to the trans-Eurasian caravan routes. Danzig took over the new-emerged commerce of grain and agricultural products, while Riga took over the new-emerged commerce of hemp and forestry goods. Being thrown off the Neva estuary, the Swedes established Vyborg to control the gouge of the Finnish Gulf by naval means. The new Muscovite fighting technique turned the Valday passes penetrable and Novgorodian fortifications assailable. The speed of the military changes increased with the diffusion of firearms on land and sea and the growth of professional warfare. It was also influenced by the political map on which the territories of the Baltic states and their relative strength were not stable. Human geography became a fluid pair to rigid physical geography.

Both of them were responsible for the appearance of the chokepoints of the Baltic regional importance, which became the joints that fastened together the region's geopolitical construction. At the same time, they were the hinges, which linked the Baltic region to the outer geopolitical world. Three of the principal Baltic chokepoints emerged and were apprehended for geopolitical practice. The Sound Strait and province of Scåne were one of them. It was a knot of the Baltic naval and commercial network and the Baltic link to the North Atlantic Ocean and thus to maritime communications and seapower of the Western Hemisphere. Valday was another one. It provided the corridor for overland power projection to the Baltic from the East-European hinterland. It connected the Baltic region to the Near East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The watershed of the Elbe and Oder became the third principal chokepoint of the Baltic region. It provided the corridor for the overland power projection to the Baltic from Central Europe. Central Europe was the hub of the European state building, where the fast economic and social development of the time produced excessive potential for expansion.

The Baltic principal chokepoints were not static locations to take over and possess. They were more like dynamic links of the Baltic interaction with the outer world and knots that tied up the Baltic integrity. The ties were functional like a collection of goods for export through the Sound, a tribute to Muscovite sovereignty through Valday, and following the German religious guide through the Elbe-Oder watershed. All kinds of resources came to the Baltic through the regional chokepoints, from the conquering armies, mercenaries, new weapons and fighting techniques to precious metals, political knowledge, engineering skills, and styles of architecture. The Baltic exported through them its plenty.

It was insufficient to take over and exploit one of these three chokepoints to dominate the entire Baltic region. It was necessary to control all. Large distances between the regional chokepoints and their adhesion to contrasting geopolitical pan-regions neighbouring the Baltic prevented them from being conquered by one of the Baltic contenders. Their belonging to the separate contenders excluded the Baltic hegemony. At the same time, it excluded the settlement between the Baltic contenders. Only once in the Early Modern Period did one of the Baltic contenders come close to possessing all three regional chokepoints. It was Sweden in the 17th century. However, possessing them became an unbearable burden for Sweden, and it collapsed.

THE LATE MEDIAEVAL RESHUFFLE OF THE BALTIC REGION,
THE 1450S TO 1520S.⁷²

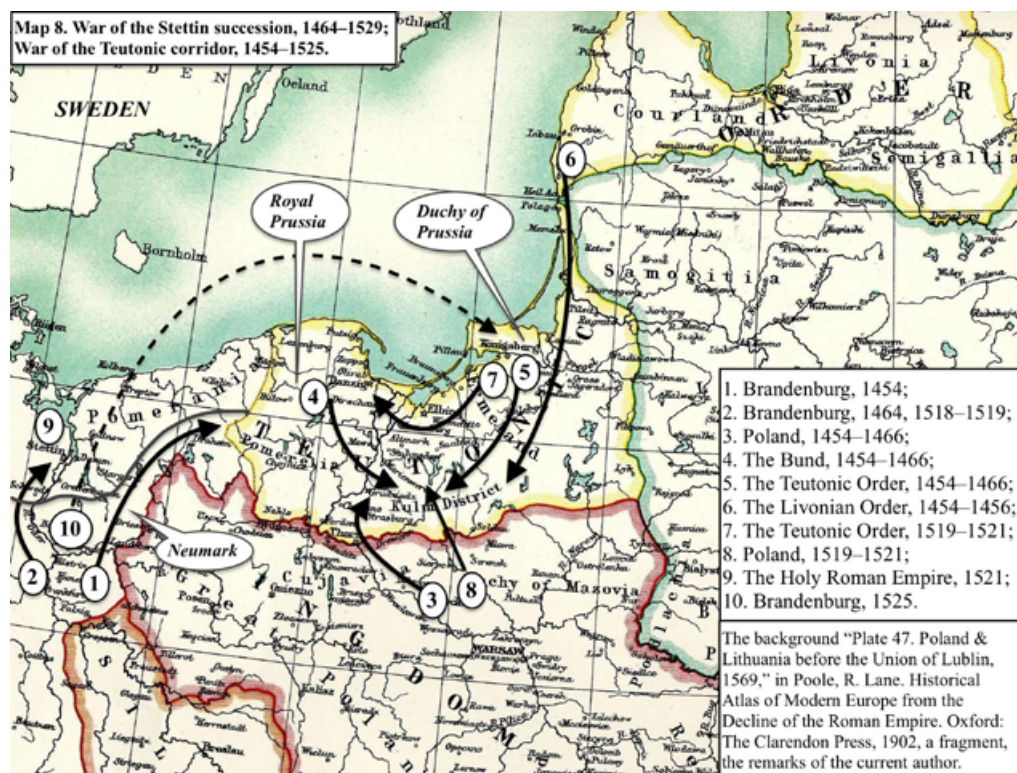
The geopolitical approach provides another classification of wars that ravaged the Baltic region during its transition from the Late Mediaeval to Early Modern Periods. The geopolitical perspective on them differs from the clichés of the nationalistic historiographies. The wars leave their nation-bound identification and gravitate to clusters around resolving certain large geopolitical issues. The conflicts in the Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins prevailed in the Baltic geopolitics. However, by the middle of the 15th century, the technique of land warfare changed sufficiently to turn the conflicts in the Baltic sub-regions from pushing forth and back the borders between contenders into the decisive clash over the entire basin and total elimination of the opponent.

War of the Stettin succession, 1464–1529.

Since the middle of the 12th century, the House of Griffin divided the Duchy of Pomerania into a few parts that came from one line of heirs to another according to an erratic inheritance pattern. In the middle of the 13th century, Brandenburg claimed sovereignty over some parts of Pomerania. In the 14th century, Brandenburg focused on Pomerania's central part, the Oder's lower reaches with the port city of Stettin. At the turn of the 14th to 15th centuries, the House of Hohenzollern ascended the seat of Brandenburg and reinvigorated its charge on Pomerania. In 1420, it annexed the southern Pomeranian province of Uckermark. In 1454 Brandenburg's *kurfürst* or prince-electors Frederick II the Iron-tooth bought back from the Teutonic Order its province Neumark alienated from Brandenburg as a mortgaged pawn half a century before. Neumark lay north-east of Brandenburg's possessions on the Oder's right bank at the Warta's confluence. Brandenburg enveloped the central part of Pomerania from three sides.

In 1464, Frederick II charged decisively claiming succession to the extinct line of the Griffins in the Duchy of Stettin. Other lines of the Griffins opposed his claims. The treaty of Prenzlau followed heavy fighting over Neumark, Uckermark, and the Stettin area in 1479. It granted Stettin to the Griffin dynasty but imposed Brandenburg's feudal sovereignty on it. None of the sides was satisfied with the outcome because Brandenburg looked for immediate authority

⁷² See for the facts, sources, and literature on the period in: SHIROGOROV, *War on the Eve of Nations*.



in Stettin and over the Oder's estuary, and the Griffins looked to avoid being Brandenburg's vassals. A series of clashes followed, including the riverine war over the free shipping on the Oder's lower reaches in 1518 and 1519. Finally, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V extorted Pomerania from Brandenburg's sovereignty, emancipating it to the status of an imperial fief in 1521. At the same time, he confirmed the Hohenzollern's succession to the Griffins in case of their extinction. It was a perfect arbitrage but not an accomplishment of Brandenburg's objectives.

Brandenburg remained cut from the Baltic Sea, and its next chance to advance on Pomerania would come only a century later. During this period, Brandenburg's international behaviour might have been explained by its efforts to resume the advance to the Baltic Sea east of the denied Oder basin. It was the direction through the watershed to the Vistula estuary contesting the lands of the Teutonic Order that were annexed by Poland but never recognised as a natural Polish possession until the Soviet-led reshuffle of Eastern Europe in the aftermath of WWII.

War of the Teutonic corridor, 1454–1525.

The introduction of usable firearms, the spread of the waggon-camp tactics of the Bohemian *Hussites*, and the growth of the professional forces decisively influenced the struggle over the Vistula estuary. By the middle of the 15th century, the social estates of the Teutonic state matured to challenge the Teutonic theocratic government over the issues of taxation, trade regulation, land law, and foreign policy. The dispute between the Teutons and the union of the estates, *Bund*, turned into rebellion, and the *Bund* applied for Polish support. The *Bund* and Teutons operated with the mercenary armies equipped and trained for the Bohemian waggon-camp tactics. Poland operated with an outdated noble levy of the Tannenberg's epoch. Facing the disastrous defeat at Konitz in 1454, Poland was forced to rebuild its army into a similar professional force consisting of the noble-based native hireling cavalry and mercenary German and Bohemian infantry. The reform increased the Polish capabilities and brought Poland and Bund victories in the land battle of Schwetz (Świecino) in 1461 and the amphibious battle in the Vistula lagoon in 1463.

The strong Teutonic performance prevented Poland from sweeping the Vistula estuary. The settlement in 1466 transferred to Poland the western part of the Teutonic state, Pomerelia, while its eastern part, Prussia proper, remained a self-ruled Polish vassal. Pomerelia was vested with the self-rule, and its Polonization was restricted. Poland did not smash the Teutonic Order completely. It did not push the Germans from Pomerelia because the Teutonic Order and Pomerelian German communities were protected by the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire interfered in favour of the Order. It promoted to the Teutonic grand masters the scions of the first-rate German dynasties, such as the Houses of Saxony and Brandenburg. The Teutonic Order survived as a Polish vassal in the watershed between the Vistula and Neman, confirming the inability of the geopolitical technique of the time to transfer the conquest over the watersheds dividing the major Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins.

The Holy Roman Empire had strong reasons to intervene in the conflict between Poland and the Teutonic Order. The collapse of the Teutons renewed conflicts in the Polish western periphery, in the watershed between the Vistula and Order. Facing the riot of the *Bund*, the cash-strapped Teutonic Order allowed Brandenburg to redeem Neumark. Brandenburg occupied Neumark, suppressing the pro-Polish sentiments of the local estates and rejecting Polish claims. Brandenburg's funds and mercenaries were the key components of the Teutons' initial landslide in the war against Poland. Considering Brandenburg's

ever-aggressive stance in Baltic affairs, its annexation of Neumark threatened to provoke a full-scale war with Poland directed by no less aggressive Lithuanian Jagiellons. The empire pressed Poland and forced the Jagiellons to cede Neumark to Brandenburg.

In the watershed of the Vistula's middle reaches with the Oder, in Silesia, the collapse of the Teutonic Order provoked a war over the Bohemian succession between the Bohemian native Hussite party that allied to Poland and Lithuania and the Hungarian king Matthew Corvinus. The sides fought a war from 1471 to 1474. It witnessed the massive Polish invasion of Silesia that Matthew Corvinus had occupied and the siege of its capital Breslau (Wrocław). Matthew Corvinus fought it back and decimated the Polish army. At the same time, he supported insurgents in the Royal Prussia and the Teutonic Order that resisted the Polish annexation of district Warmia from 1472 to 1478. The settlement that was mediated by the Holy Roman Empire in 1479 provided the Jagiellons with the Bohemian seat but deprived Poland of its main objective, Silesia. It remained in Matthew Corvinus's hands.

Poland did not spread its state-building to the Oder's basin, being deprived of its lower reaches by Brandenburg and middle reaches by Matthew Corvinus. The Polish gains were reduced to limited authority over the Vistula's estuary. Another Polish and Lithuanian setback consisted of the new position of the Livonian Order. Livonia was not included in the partition of the Teutonic state but was declared independent under the protection of the Holy Roman Empire. Lithuania did not sweep the Livonians from the Neman's and Western Dvina's estuaries. They remained locked for the Lithuanian state-building, the former until the aftermath of WWI and the latter forever. It was a hard geopolitical defeat of Lithuania that triggered a countdown of its existence.

From 1519 to 1525, Poland and the Teutonic Order fought the revisionist *Reiterkrieg*, or Riders' War. The Teutons deployed the effective military innovation of the massive squares of the pike and shot infantry. They imported it from Germany with the Muscovite subsidies and coordinated their operations with the Muscovite offensive in Lithuania. It was a malicious novation in the Baltic's international relations. Poland suffered defeats that endangered its possession of Royal Prussia with Danzig. It found a political solution to the conflict with the mediation of the Holy Roman Empire's *Reichstag* and Martin Luther, a seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation. The Teutonic state was secularised according to Lutheran doctrine and converted into the Duchy of Prussia. The last grand master of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and first duke of Prussia, Albert belonged to the house of Hohenzollern of Brandenburg's margraves.

It was a historical accident and a variation of the geopolitical rule at once. The Duchy of Prussia was located in the watershed of the Vistula estuary with the Neman. It was the position that suited the particular pattern of Brandenburg's state-building and expansion in the watersheds. Brandenburg deviated to the Prussian byway toward the Baltic Sea as the route of expansion along the Oder was denied by the Holy Roman Empire's regulation. The Duchy of Prussia became the geopolitical corridor of Brandenburg's march to the Baltic in the 17th century.

The war of the Teutonic corridor continued with interruptions from 1454 to 1525. On one hand, it secured control of the entire Vistula basin for Poland. On another one, it turned Eastern Prussia into an outlet of Brandenburg's statehood and blocked the Polish advance to the Oder's lower and upper reaches until the aftermath of WWII.

War of the Novgorodian legacy, 1456–1518.

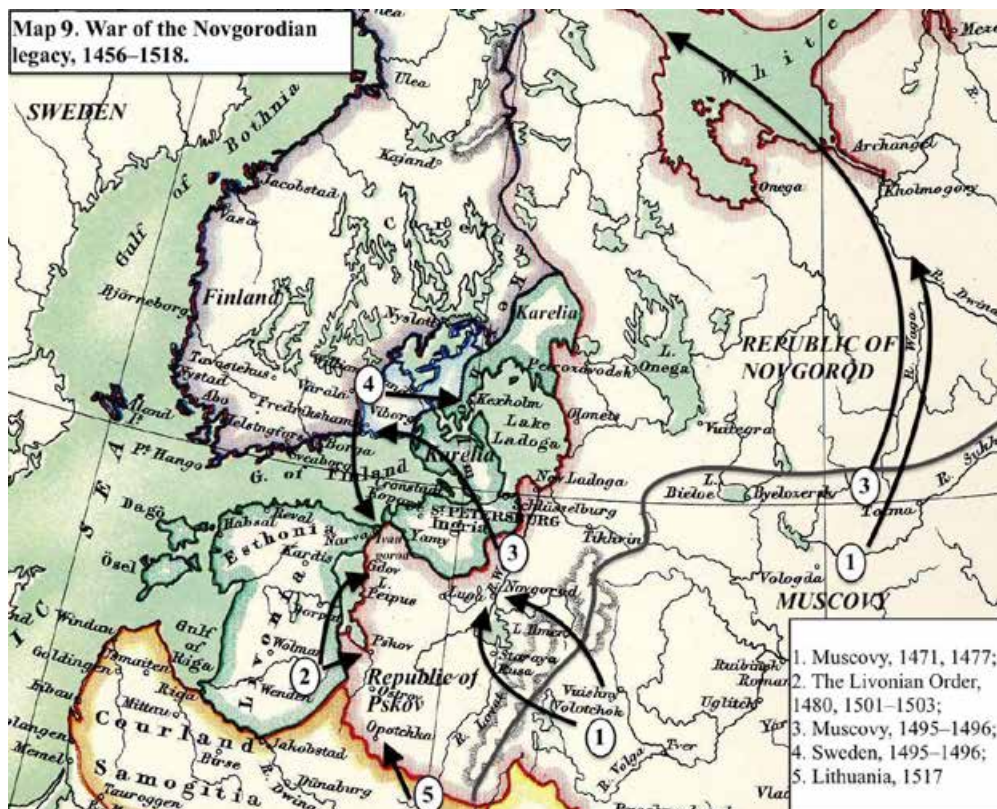
Natural obstacles and distances are the principal settings for military operations.⁷³ Invention of the marching and fighting techniques to overcome them or new operational ideas to fight among them might change the ratio of the belligerents' capabilities in the particular geographical environment or a balance between offence and defence in general.⁷⁴ It might also reconfigure the area of operations and shift their spatial focus. These changes might have decisive political consequences.

Strengthening of the Muscovite household cavalry and reorganisation of the Muscovite mass territorial cavalry to the orderly pattern, investments in artillery, and development of amphibious warfare increased the Muscovite superiority over the Novgorodian army in the specific environment of Valday. Following two entering episodes of the war of the Novgorodian legacy, the battle of Rusa in 1456 and the clash over Oreshek in 1462, Muscovy envisaged the invasion of the Novgorodian Republic targeting its destruction and occupation.

In 1471, the Muscovite troops destroyed the Novgorodian land army at the river Shelon in the pass across Valday and the Novgorodian amphibious forces in the combats on Lake Ilmen's banks. At the same time, the Muscovite amphibious forces defeated the Novgorodian counterparts at the river Shelenga, sweeping the Novgorodian possession in the Dvina Land and advancing to the Onega-Svir-Ladoga basin. Novgorod lost its self-rule and most of its economic

⁷³ BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, Chs. 4,5

⁷⁴ JERVIS, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," 194



potential. In 1472, the Muscovites defended their grip on Novgorod by fighting a shielding operation against Novgorod's protector, the khan of the Grand Horde Ahmed, at the river Oka south of Moscow.

In 1477, the Muscovite army traversed Valday and marched on Novgorod along the riverine corridors, clearing them by amphibious forces and cavalry. It encircled Novgorod, sieged and bombarded it, demanding the unconditional surrender of the republic. Novgorod was occupied. The Muscovite grand prince Ivan III grabbed the wealth of the extinct republic and invested the proceeds into territorial expansion and the buildup of the military forces. In 1480, the Muscovite army rebuked the invasion of the Grand Horde, the Novgorodian protector, in a confrontation at the river Ugra south-west of Moscow. Although it is normally presented as a decisive Muscovite move to independence from the Grand Horde, from a geopolitical point of view it was the defence of the Muscovite takeover of the Novgorodian Republic against the intervention of the Mongols' declining successor.

From 1488 to 1489, Muscovy cancelled the Novgorodian social constitution and expelled from Novgorod the social groups that it considered hostile to the takeover. The Novgorodian *boyar* clans were smashed and their leaders executed while the landed urban class of the Novgorodian mailed cavalry was dispersed to other Muscovite lands. Muscovy took over the Novgorodian heritage and vassalised the Pskovian Republic.

Muscovy annexed the Novgorodian heartland, the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin and its Ladoga-Svir-Onega outbranch with the adjacent districts in the Northern Dvina's basin without sharing the prey with other Baltic contenders. The Grand Horde did not maintain the existence of the Novgorodian Republic in the same way as the Holy Roman Empire did for the Teutonic Order. However, other Baltic contenders did not consider the outcome to be fair. Besides Lithuania, which aspired to impose its protection on the Novgorodian Republic, Sweden moved to take over the long-disputed Karelian Isthmus, and the Teutonic Order attacked the watershed between the river Velikaya and inner Livonia that the former Novgorodian dependent, the Pskovian Republic, inherited.

Lithuania planned to advance in alliance with the Grand Horde, but the Grand Horde's defeat at the Ugra in 1480 and Lithuanian domestic problems ruined the plan. The Livonian Order had recuperated after the Teutonic collapse and moved for its share of the Novgorodian heritage. The Livonians envisaged to press the Pskovian Republic out of the Muscovite vassalage and reinstall it as a buffer state under their protection. The Livonians coordinated their efforts with the Grand Horde's invasion and launched their offensive when Khan Ahmed engaged the bulk of the Muscovite army at the river Ugra. In 1480, the Livonian Order built up a strong army of German mercenaries and carried out three attacks on the Pskovian Republic. It advanced to the outskirts of Pskov and bombarded the city over the Velikaya. However, the Livonians lost the amphibious battle in the Velikaya's estuary, and their landing was rebuffed by the Pskovian and Muscovite troops.

Sweden did not enter the struggle over the Novgorodian assets in the 1470s and 1480s due to its simultaneous engagement with Denmark over the Kalmar Union. However, Sweden moved on in the 1490s, claiming the Karelian Isthmus and control over the Novgorodian transit via the Neva's estuary and Finnish Gulf, where the Swedes worked to convert their military chokepoint Vyborg into a commercial staple port. The war was fought from 1495 to 1497. It witnessed the heavy fighting over Karelia that included the Swedish raids on the Novgorodians strongholds Karela and Oreshek, the Muscovite siege of Vyborg and raids on Åbo on the side of land warfare.

On the side of amphibious warfare, of which both belligerents were the adepts, the war witnessed the Swedish naval assault on the fresh Muscovite fortress Ivangorod at the river Narva and the Muscovite naval raid over the White Sea to northern Sweden. The settlement between the belligerents secured the Muscovite undisputable takeover of the Novgorodian heritage. Sweden withdrew its claims, but only because it could not persist while waging a war over the Kalmar Union's divorce. Sweden kept its demands for a share of the Novgorodian heritage until the Great Northern War in 1700 to 1721.

The Livonian Order did not step back from its demands for a share of the Novgorodian assets as well. From 1501 to 1503, it fought a series of campaigns against Muscovy and Pskovian Republic. From an East-European geopolitical perspective, it was a part of the coalitional war between Lithuania, Poland, the Livonian Order and the Grand Horde on one side, and Muscovy, the Crimean Khanate, Kazan Khanate, and Moldavia on another. From the Baltic geopolitical perspective, it was a part of the wars over the Novgorodian legacy. The Livonian Order, under its landmaster Walter von Plettenberg, established itself as a strong geopolitical actor in the Baltic. Plettenberg managed to obtain the Holy Roman Empire's subsidy and mercenaries. The Livonian participation in the war over the Novgorodian legacy became the Holy Roman Empire's power projection to the eastern Baltic.

The Livonian mercenary army destroyed the Pskovian forces in the battle at the river Seritsa in the Velikaya-Western Dvina watershed south of Pskov in 1501. However, the Livonian amphibious assault on Pskov a month later was unsuccessful. The sides exchanged the Muscovite raid to the town of Dorpat (Tartu) east of Lake Peipus in Estland and the Livonian raid to Gdov west of Lake Peipus in Ingria. In 1502, the Muscovite and Novgorodian troops fought the Livonian mercenary army to a standstill at Lake Smolino in the Velikaya-Western Dvina watershed south of Pskov.

The campaigns of the Livonian Order distracted the Muscovite forces from Lithuania at a moment when the Muscovites destroyed the Lithuanian army and moved to finish Lithuania and take over Lithuanian Rus. Lithuania survived and managed to rebuff the Muscovite advance on Polotsk and Vitebsk in the Western Dvina basin, deploying the Czech mercenaries. They were another tool of the Holy Roman Empire's power projection to the Baltic region. However, the Livonian Order did not secure its objectives in the Pskovian Republic. In 1510, it was incorporated into Muscovy.

The struggle over the Novgorodian legacy in Valday and Lithuanian possessions in the Western Dvina basin resumed a decade later. In 1517, the Lithuanian

and Polish troops sieged the Muscovite fortress OPOCHKA in the watershed between Western Dvina and Velikaya and failed to take it. In 1518, the Muscovite army sieged Polotsk and did not take it. Both campaigns failed because the besiegers lost fighting over the watershed areas around their objectives. Their failures confirmed the inability of the states that consolidated within the Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins to spread over the watersheds. Conquest over the watershed remained unattainable for the geopolitical technique of the epoch. Military and political resources in the hands of the expansionists were too meagre to accomplish it.

A sole exclusion, the Muscovite grab of the Novgorodian legacy in the 1470s secured Muscovy's control over the entire Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin with its coastal appendices of the Karelian Isthmus and Ingria on the northern and southern shores of the Finnish Gulf, respectfully. It has been a keystone of Russia's statehood ever since.

War of the Swedish secession, 1471–1523.

After the death of the Kalmar Union's king Christopher of Bavaria in 1448, different kings were elected in Denmark and Sweden, Count Christian I of Oldenburg and the Swedish supervisor of the realm Karl Knutsson, respectively. Clans with strong links to the hinterland communities of peasants and miners grouped around Karl Knutsson. By the last third of the 15th century, the Kalmar Union needed to be either recharged or disassembled. While Christian I moved to install his rule in Sweden by arms preparing the intervention, Karl Knutsson and his retinue mobilised hinterland support for the nationalistic case. When Karl Knutsson died in 1470, his nephew Sten Sture the Elder came to lead the hinterland pro-independence party.

When the two parties met at Stockholm's suburb Brunkeberg in 1471, the character of their forces displayed their opposing geopolitical ground. While Christian I commanded the seaborne force of the warrior elite, the Danish and Swedish nobility and German mercenaries who were heavy cavalry, Sten Sture led the hinterland force of the plebeian social groups, peasants and miners, who were light infantry. Christian I's force was based on the large seafaring ships, while Sten Sture's troops operated with light lacustrine boats. The diffusion of firearms over the Swedish peasant levies and their purposeful reorganisation made them strong opponents to the Danish feudal and mercenary troops. It was a geopolitically motivated and shaped battle. Christian I was shot in the face by a handgun, and his forces were outmanoeuvred by Sten Sture's amphibious infantry and defeated.

Sten Sture the Elder was elected the regent of the realm. In the following three decades of his regency, he relentlessly strengthened his affiliation with non-aristocratic communal social groups of the lacustrine hinterland. In 1481, Christian I's eldest son Hans inherited the Norwegian throne and was elected to the Danish throne but not the Swedish one. In 1482 and 1483, the royal councils of the three realms schemed a deal, the Kalmar Recess, that could provide his election in Sweden while vesting the power in the aristocratic clans. Nevertheless, Sten Sture the Elder did not invite Hans on the throne. He suppressed the pro-union opposition by relying on the geopolitical separatism of the Swedish hinterland.

Sten Sture the Elder's agenda was determined by the geopolitics of his power. He developed mining and metallurgy, shipbuilding and fabrication of firearms, commerce, and export. He allied with the *Hanse* against Denmark utilising the *Hanse's* growing willingness to intervene in the Baltic states and keep its trade monopoly by naval force. He also turned his head to the collapse of the Novgorodian Republic, which was the most important Swedish counterpart outside of the Kalmar Union. It was impossible to revitalise Novgorod; however, Sten Sture the Elder considered the Muscovite selfish grab of the Novgorodian legacy as a challenge to Swedish interests.

Sten Sture the Elder looked to get a share of the Novgorodian heritage by taking over the Karelian Isthmus and the Novgorodian transit route via the Neva and Finnish Gulf. He had a ready staple port to resell and reload the Novgorodian goods; it was Vyborg. Sten Sture the Elder clashed with Muscovy over the Karelian Isthmus. He also harassed the Livonian route of the Novgorodian transit. Sten Sture the Elder attacked the new Muscovite staple port Ivangorod at the river Narva. The social-military group of the Swedish-Finnish nobility backed his aggressive ventures.

Sten Sture the Elder supplemented the peasant mass of the Swedish army with the professional core recruiting the Swedish nobles and non-nobles and German mercenaries. He equipped them with firearms and trained them for advanced tactics, including amphibious assault. He developed transportable artillery and commissioned naval ships to deliver his infantry and guns to faraway destinations better than traditional longboats did. Sten Sture the Elder's professional troops demonstrated high fighting capability, keeping Vyborg against the Muscovite siege and assaulting Ivangorod. They became an example of a decisive military variable in the geopolitical equation.⁷⁵ However, fighting for a share in the Novgorodian legacy, Sten Sture missed the Danish strike.

75 SPYKMAN, "Geography and Foreign Policy," P.I, 40

In 1497, King Hans landed at Stockholm, gathered the aristocratic opposition, and defeated Sten Sture the Elder's peasant militia at the village Rotebro that blocked the waterway from the Baltic Sea to Lake Mälaren, where the regent's powerbase lay. However, King Hans did not dare to invade the Swedish hinterland and settled with Sten Sture the Elder, giving him Finland as a *len*. The Finnish *len* was a dangerous creation because one of its centres, Vyborg, was a base of Sten Sture's professional troops and navy while another one, Åbo, was a hub of the Swedish-Finnish nobility that ascended as a vigorous nationalistic force.

Vyborg and Åbo were closely connected with the Livonian port towns of Riga and Reval, the *Hanse*, and Novgorod by the network of Baltic shipping and trade. It did not take a long time for Sten Sture the Elder to reconstruct his power. He rebelled against King Hans in 1500 and took over most of Sweden by 1502, when Stockholm surrendered to him. Sten Sture the Elder died in 1503, but the Swedish war against King Hans continued with the support of the *Hanse*. The *Hanse* fished in Sweden for the people and forces which could counter the idea of *Dominium Maris Baltici*, naval control over the Baltic communications, that sparkled in the Danish minds.

In 1512, Sten Sture the Younger, a distant relative to his namesake, utilised the support of the hinterland peasant and miner social groups to oust the aristocratic faction of the Kalmar Union's supporters from the Royal Council and grab the regency. King Hans died in 1513, and his son Christian II succeeded in Denmark and Norway. He ventured two seaborne amphibious assaults on Stockholm in 1517 and 1518 to get the Swedish throne, but both of them failed. The hinterland social groups supported the self-made regent, who summoned their representatives to improvise a legislative, or *Riksdag*. Their self-consciousness, organisation and vigour to pursue their particular interests grew.

Christian II was smart enough to conclude that he needed not a peripheral sea-power strike at Stockholm to gain the throne but the decisive crush of Sten Sture the Younger's hinterland powerbase. He needed to strike urgently until it consolidated. It was a geopolitical revelation. In 1520, Christian II's land-based army of German and Scottish mercenaries invaded Västergötland and met Sten Sture the Younger's peasant militia on the frozen lake Åsunden. The militia was annihilated, and the regent was deadly wounded. Christian II brought in his fleet and established control over Sweden, including Stockholm by the autumn of 1520.

Christian II was a troublesome geopolitical figure to the point that he was blemished for being crazy by his opponents. But he was the first to grab the hinterland nature of the Swedish statehood. He proposed himself to the Swedish peasant and miner communities and Stockholm burgers to be their king,

encouraging the mining and protecting the trade. He was the first geopolitician to envisage *Dominium Maris Baltici* as a system of naval supremacy, not in the coastal chokepoints but on the seafaring routes. After dealing with the forces of Swedish hinterland separatism, Christian II moved against the *Hanse*, which hindered his seapower ambitions. He rushed to strengthen the Kalmar Union's royal fleet and established the Kalmar Union's royal trading and shipping company to deprive the *Hanse* of its monopolistic position over the Baltic naval forces, shipping, and trade. He secured a verdict of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V against the *Hanse* and befriended Albert of Prussia, who attacked Danzig, waging his war against Poland from 1519 to 1521.

Christian II also moved against the aristocratic rule in Norway and especially in Denmark, where he successfully attracted the support of the wider nobility and urban class. However, the idea of popular monarchy was nowhere as strong as in the Swedish lacustrine hinterland. Feeling it by his power instinct, Christian II marched against the aristocracy in Sweden decisively. On his coronation, he extorted from the Swedish Royal Council the declaration of his hereditary kingship. A few days later, he beheaded dozens of Sten Sture the Younger's supporters in the so-called Stockholm Bloodbath.

Christian II removed the Swedish aristocrats from the Royal Council, appointing to it his Danish and German associates. It was his fatal mistake because the aristocratic clans that supported Swedish association with the Kalmar Union turned against him. The clan of Vasa was among the defectors. Christian II's policy and propaganda were smart, but he was unable to deter the geopolitical inertia that dictated the Swedish political development in the direction of the national hinterland monarchy. The massacre of the Swedish aristocracy unleashed peasant and miner communal separatism that was much more radical than the aristocratic encroachments.

Young Gustav Vasa was lucky to serve as a hostage in Denmark when a few of his family members were slain in the Stockholm Bloodbath. On hearing it, he fled from his confinement to Lübeck. Lübeck was pressed to extradite him and Gustav Vasa had no choice besides returning to Sweden, where he landed in 1520. He was hunted by Christian II's loyalists but found his shelter with Dalarna's miner communities that were infuriated by Christian II's plans to monopolise the mining business and export. Gustav Vasa recruited some survivors of Sten Sture the Younger's regime to his entourage. In 1521, the peasant levy of Dalarna elected him their captain. His campaign against the "Danish occupation" gained widespread support. He was elected the regent and took over control of the Swedish hinterland.

Gustav Vasa's election to the Swedish throne was accomplished by the assembly of the hinterland social estates, constituted as *Riksdag*, in June 1523. It was supported by the *Hanse's* commissars and German mercenaries. Stockholm surrendered to Gustav Vasa a few days later. He ruled the hinterland kingdom with a seaward outlet of Stockholm while the principal Swedish maritime provinces, the islands of Götland and Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea on-shore province of Bohuslän, and Scåne on the southern tip of the Scandinavian Peninsula remained in Danish hands.

War of the Hanseatic reduction, 1531–1544.

Gustav Vasa ascended the throne as the hinterland monarch, utilising the moment of the *Hanse* and Denmark's clash over the Baltic Sea dominance. However, the loyalist port towns of Stockholm, Kalmar, and Älvsborg were impregnable to the communal militias of his army. Gustav Vasa approached the *Hanse* and gained the support of Lübeck and Danzig. In 1522, they sent to his disposal the mercenaries and warships. The feverish naval and amphibious activity of the *Hanse* in Sweden curfewed a more dramatic action in Denmark. The *Hanse* used its connections to the Danish aristocracy to overthrow authoritarian Christian II who fled to the Netherlands in 1523. His uncle Frederick I of Holstein was elected the Danish and Norwegian king. Christian II befriended the *Hanse's* Dutch enemies. Being a grandson-in-love of the Hapsburg Holy Roman emperor Maximilian I and brother-in-love of Charles V, Christian II guided the Dutch and imperial intervention in the Baltic.

The *Hanse's* mercantile dictate to the Nordic kingdoms bound its position to the Kalmar Union's fate. In 1531, irreconcilable Christian II landed in Norway. However, he failed to take over the royal castle in Oslo, surrendered to Frederick I, and was imprisoned. From 1534 to 1536, the *Hanse* instigated some Danish nobles to fight a war for Christian II's restoration against Frederick I's heir Christian III. The Swedish troops and fleet decisively intervened in favour of the latter. Gustav Vasa's alliance with Christian III was pointed against the *Hanse's* maritime dominance. The Duchy of Prussia joined the Nordic monarchs, and their joint navy destroyed Lübeck's fleet in the Little Belt in 1535. It was the closing battle of the *Hanse's* demolition as the combined commercial hegemon on the Baltic Sea and naval enforcer in Nordic politics. In 1544, the Holy Roman Empire favoured its Dutch subjects and declared the Baltic Sea open for free navigation. "The decay of the *Hanse* as a political organization had been made manifest."⁷⁶

76 ROBERTS, *The Early Vasas*, 102

The Geopolitical reshuffle of the Late Mediaeval Baltic, outcomes and issues.

The wars that reshaped the Baltic region in the second half of the 15th century and the first third of the 16th century were fought mainly within its sub-regions of the major riverine and lacustrine basins. Separation of the strategic theatres was determined not by the natural conditions of fighting but by other factors. On the tactical and operational level, where the geographical environment is especially important,⁷⁷ it looked the same over the Baltic region. War combined the overland fighting with a strong riverine and lacustrine amphibious component in the interior, amphibious fighting with some naval component in the sea littorals, and naval fighting in the open sea. Three variations of fighting were overlapping. The natural conditions that favoured them were mixed. Their distinctive technology-based characters, which became a feature of Modern warfare,⁷⁸ were not yet mature. Each of the Baltic sub-regions had natural conditions for all three variations of fighting, and the forces of one sub-region could move to another with their skills and equipment easily.

Topography is a factor that might put barriers to military operations⁷⁹ and watersheds are normally a hard terrain that creates buffer zones between the states⁸⁰ and operational theatres. However, the topography of the Baltic watersheds has little difference from the topography of the riverine and lacustrine valleys. Strict segregation of the Baltic geopolitical sub-regions to secluded operational theatres was imposed not by physical geography.

The Mediaeval geopolitical inertia was one of the factors that secluded the Baltic sub-regions. The Baltic states emerged and grew within the segregated riverine and lacustrine basins. At the end of the Mediaeval Period, they obtained religious, ethnic, dynastic, legal, and other attributes of particularity. The move of borders within the basins was considered normal. The transfer of authority over the watershed was considered an existential insult, like it was with the Danish attempt on the Swedish lacustrine hinterland or the Muscovite invasion of the Novgorodian Republic. The overwhelming force was needed to suppress the survivalist resistance.

The Baltic contenders could not scratch sufficiently large forces to accomplish it. It was the case with the Livonian and Lithuanian failed attempts on the

77 GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 20,23,165

78 GRAY, *Modern Strategy*, 208

79 SPYKMAN, "Geography and Foreign Policy," P.I, 33

80 JERVIS, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," 194



Fig. 2. *Marine map and Description of the Northern Lands and of their Marvels* by Olaus Magnus, a fragment. Besides multiple regional exotics, the map focuses on the episodes of the struggle over the Novgorodian heritage between Muscovy and Sweden: 1) the lacustrine amphibious warfare with gunboats; 2) the siege of Vyborg; 3) the fighting in Karelia; and 4) the Swedish attempt on Ivangorod. It also points out on: 5) the confrontation over Livonia; 6) the Swedish navy with the broadside artillery; and 7) the arrival of the Dutch traders with naval capability. The principal contenders are: 8) The Swedish king Gustav Vasa; 9) The Polish king Sigismund I; and 10) The Muscovite grand prince. The James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota. The public domain, Wikicommons.

Velikaya's upper reaches and the Muscovite's failed attempt on the Western Dvina's middle reaches. Brandenburg's failure to conquer Pomerania, Poland's inability to finish the Teutonic Order in the watershed between the Vistula and Neman, and its inability to conquer the Oder's upper reaches in Silesia were other examples. The Muscovite conquest of the Novgorodian Republic in the 1470s remained the single successful experience of takeover of the major sub-region in the Baltic by an outsider for a long time. The watersheds remained the un-

surmountable boundaries of the Baltic geopolitical sub-regions, expressing the balance of the “driving force” of the expansionist states and “resistance”⁸¹ as a sum of the natural obstacles, military capabilities, and political inertia.

Inadequacy of military capabilities was also apparent in the estuaries where the Baltic Sea proposed a passage from one basin to another circumventing the watersheds. The finally unsuccessful series of Denmark’s amphibious ventures against the Swedish hinterland state-building in the 1470s to 1520s demonstrated that the technique of naval amphibious warfare remained an inadequate agent of conquest.

Spykman and Rollins have found that geopolitical expansion of the states develops similarly to the military tactical patterns of flanking, encirclement, and direct assault.⁸² In the practice of Baltic expansion, the direct advance along the riverine and lacustrine basins remained the sole available pattern. However, by the middle of the 16th century, the basins were taken over for the separate state-building. Further expansion in the Baltic region required more forceful geopolitical techniques.

THE BALTIC GEOPOLITICAL TRANSITION TO THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD, THE 1550s–1590s.⁸³

The Late Mediaeval reshuffle of the Baltic region resolved many geopolitical issues. Their resolution came in three opposing ways. The first of them finished the conflicts, while the second guided them into a deadlock. The Muscovite annexation of the Novgorodian Republic, the Polish subjugation of the Teutonic state, and the Swedish secession from the Kalmar Union were examples of the first way. Branderburg’s merger of Neumark and attempt on Pomerania-Stettin, as well as the Polish merger of Royal Prussia and inability to finish the Teutonic Order in Eastern Prussia, were examples of the second way. However, the third way of the Late Mediaeval resolution of conflicts was also presented. It unsealed opportunities for further contest and expansion. The examples of the third way included the Livonian Order’s survival and the *Hanse*’s legacy of the seapower hegemon and political enforcer in the Baltics remaining unappropriated. It was the avenue of the Baltic geopolitical development in the Early Modern Period.

81 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy,” P.I 391–92

82 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy,” P.I, 393–94

83 See for the facts, sources, and literature on the epoch in: SHIROGOROV, *Ukrainian War. Vol. III. Head-to-head Offensive*.

A shatterzone of Livonia.

The state of the Livonian Order was not touched by the reshuffle of the Baltic in the middle 15th–early 16th centuries. The Livonian Order smoothly withdrew from the Teutonic Order preserving its state organised as a confederation of the bishoprics under the Livonian Order’s protection. Survival and independence of the Livonian Order were political accidents caused by the check of the Holy Roman Empire on Polish expansionism. However, soon it became apparent that they had a strong geopolitical reason. Tremendous geopolitical changes happened in the Baltic region around Livonia. The main Baltic expansionists stopped close to it. They were Muscovy across the Narva and Peipus-Velikaya watersheds with Estland’s interior, Poland over the Western Dvina’s watershed with the Neman, and Sweden over the Baltic Proper and Finnish Gulf. Denmark lost its expansionist vigour with the dissolution of the Kalmar Union, and Brandenburg remained landlocked and was too far away to project its power to Livonia. The location of Livonia regarding the Baltic expansionists responded to Spykman’s analytical meaning of location as the geographical constant corrected by the political variables.⁸⁴ It was explosive.

Following the seminal deliberation of the American naval architect Alfred Thayer Mahan on the geographical factors of strategic superiority,⁸⁵ three features of Livonia’s location might be stressed. The first is its central position regarding the Baltic Sea. Livonia was located at the thickest part of its crescent shape, the Baltic Proper. The second is Livonia’s position between the Baltic Sea’s three outlets, the Bothnian Sea and Bay, the Finnish Gulf, and the Gulf of Riga. The third one is Livonia’s position in the middle of the Baltic share of the European mainland that spread from Valday in the east to the Oder in the west. It is a dumper of the Baltic geopolitical system to the geopolitical systems of the Black and Caspian Seas. Livonia enjoyed three factors of superior strategic location while being a small district that might have been easily controlled, organised and defended. The master of Livonia possessed the strategic “defensive and offensive advantage”⁸⁶ over other Baltic contenders.

The possession of Livonia proposed great prospects for each of the actual Baltic expansionists. Poland looked to establish the same control over the Lithuanian export via the Western Dvina as it had established over the export via the Vistula. It would provide Poland with the final argument for the merger of Lithuania, including its most important part, Western Rus, that was disputed

84 SPYKMAN, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” P.I, 40

85 MAHAN, *Naval Strategy*, 31–33

86 MAHAN, *Naval Strategy*, 33

by Muscovy. Livonia had the position to endanger Muscovy's northwest with Novgorod, Pskov, and Smolensk if full-scale confrontation with it resumed.

Muscovy looked to Livonia as leverage to wrestle Western Rus from the ongoing merger of Lithuania by Poland. Muscovy could have directed its increasing export of forestry goods and agricultural products and "Eastern" transit from the Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva route compromised by the Swedish attacks on the Karelian Isthmus to the Livonian ports at the open sea where the Dutch and English purchasers urged the goods of Rus.

Sweden viewed Livonia as a well-established entrepot with high commercial traffic of Muscovite and Lithuanian goods. Riga, Reval, Narva, and other Livonian ports enjoyed superior locations over Stockholm and Vyborg that the Swedes promoted as entrepots without sound success. Possessing Livonia was the best solution to capitalise on the Baltic trade, the goal that Sweden envisaged as its national strategy. Sweden missed the partition of the Novgorodian and Teutonic heritages. From 1554 to 1557, the Swedish king Gustav Vasa waged the frontier war with Muscovy over the Karelian Isthmus. In 1555 the Finnish governor Henrik Klasson Horn led the Swedish amphibious forces to attack Oreshek and Karela. In 1556, the Muscovite troops attacked Vyborg where Klas Kristersson Horn commanded the garrison. Both sides failed. The settlement of 1557 did not bring Sweden either a better position in Karelia or international prestige.

However, the prominence of the two Horns, the exemplary figures of the Swedish-Finnish nobility, had huge consequences for the Swedish geopolitics. They were aggressive and looked at Livonia as Sweden's rightful share of the Baltic Late Mediaeval reshuffle. The power projection to Livonia entered the Swedish strategic agenda. Sweden subtly attracted its supporters in Livonia, addressing the aspect of the Lutheran solidarity against the Catholic Poland and Orthodox Muscovy.

According to Spykman's definition, Livonia became a buffer state that its stronger neighbours did not need anymore.⁸⁷ The spread of the Reformation dramatically changed Livonia's geopolitical position. Before the Reformation, the crusading Teutonic and Livonian orders felt themselves being the exclaves and agents of continental Christendom and German statehood based in the Holy Roman Empire. The secularisation of the Teutonic Order severed its ties with the empire and transformed Eastern Prussia into a Baltic state. Livonian landmaster Walter von Plettenberg did not follow Duke Albert. He did not convert Livonia into his hereditary dukedom. However, he did not suppress the excesses of the Reformation in Livonia, using it to destroy the position of the Riga archbishop.

87 SPYKMAN, "Geography and Foreign Policy," P.II 227–28

Reformation fractured the cohesion of the Livonian society. Livonia fell off the Holy Roman Empire's orbit and became a Baltic state. It lost the empire's protection against the Baltic expansionists.

Livonia degraded to a shatterzone, a key geopolitical definition of polities in trouble. Saul Cohen defines the shatterzone as "a region torn by internal conflicts whose fragmentation is increased by the intervention of external major powers."⁸⁸ Following the Reformation, Livonia became an exemplary shatterzone. In 1529, a brother of the Prussian duke Albert, Wilhelm, was appointed the coadjutor of Riga's archbishop. In 1539, Wilhelm became the archbishop. The idea behind his promotion to the office was clear. Being a protestant, Wilhelm envisaged transforming Livonia into his hereditary duchy. However, the Catholic town-dwellers of Riga and Livonian estates revolted against his plan being supported by the Livonian Order. In 1556, its coadjutor and then master Johann Wilhelm von Fürstenberg raided Riga and arrested Wilhelm. The cohesion of the Livonian Confederation broke, and the international actors immediately entered the fray.

The Polish king and Lithuanian grand prince Sigismund II Augustus assembled the army and forced Fürstenberg to the Pozwol agreement in 1557. Fürstenberg reinstalled Archbishop Wilhelm. The Livonian Order submitted to Lithuanian protection against Muscovy and declared blocking the transit of arms to Muscovy via Livonia. However, four years before, the Livonian Order had made a treaty with Muscovy containing opposing obligations to avoid alliances against it and keep the Muscovite trade through Livonia free. It was an immense scandal that pushed the Livonian geopolitical situation to war.

A first tile of the "domino effect."

The Baltic expansionists were not a concert. Each of them, Poland, Muscovy, and Sweden, imagined themselves sufficiently strong to take over Livonia as a whole without sharing it. They were hostile to each other and prepared to act forcefully, fearing the "domino effect" that the contenders' grab of Livonia might have initiated. The domino effect, a chain of increasing geopolitical losses that an initial minor concession to the opponent might initiate,⁸⁹ was a nightmare of the Baltic geopolitics. The Baltic contenders feared that the capture of Livonia by their competitors might have pushed irredeemable doom to their

88 COHEN, *Geopolitics*, 9; see also the similar definition of Phil Kelly in: KELLY, *Classical Geopolitics*, 185

89 JERVIS, "Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior," 22; SNYDER, "Introduction," 5

international position and might have endangered their existential interests.

Muscovy moved into Livonia in the late 1550s, preventing Poland and Lithuania from annexing it. Muscovy feared that the Lithuanian takeover of Livonia might have resumed the struggle over Novgorod, Pskov, Tver, and Smolensk that were the principal Muscovite gains of its unification of North-Eastern Rus, and wars against Lithuania from the last third of the 15th century to the first third of the 16th century. Muscovy also feared that the Lithuanian annexation of Livonia strengthened the Polish grip on Lithuania and turned Lithuanian Rus, which was the principal Muscovite objective, to being unattainable.

Muscovy anticipated the much wider domino effect as well. The Kazan Khanate, where the resistance was far from being suppressed after the taking of Kazan in 1552, might have erupted again. The conquest of the Astrakhan Khanate, accomplished in 1556, might have been challenged by the Ottomans. The Crimean Khanate, which was deadly beaten in the battle of Sudbishchi in 1555 and pressed by the new fortifications in the steppes, might have revived. The Nogay Horde, just reduced to the Muscovite vassalage, might have gotten loose. Sweden might resume fighting in the Karelian Isthmus. Muscovy feared the encircling coalition of enemies would rise against it if it allowed Lithuania to annex Livonia.

Lithuania moved into Livonia, fearing that its overrunning by Muscovy would be a prelude to the Muscovite invasion of Lithuanian Rus, the attempt on its principal Polotsk and Vitebsk provinces that were located between Livonia and the Muscovite Smolensk. Muscovy's capture of Polotsk and Vitebsk, in its turn, might have levelled the last barriers before it overran all of Lithuanian Rus from Kiev to Brest. Poland entered the Livonian War fearing that the Muscovite victories in Livonia might have compromised the ongoing merger of Lithuania by Poland, which led to the Muscovite takeover of Lithuanian Rus and provided Muscovy the vital link to West-European military innovations.

Sweden entered the Livonian War fearing that the Polish control over maritime Livonia turned Poland into the dominant Baltic state that monopolised the Baltic trade, shutting down Helsingfors, now Helsinki, which was founded in Finland in 1550 as its Swedish depots. The Swedes also feared that Muscovy might have established direct maritime communications with the customers of its goods in North-Western Europe and deprived the Swedish treasury of its important transit revenues. All of the Baltic contenders looked at Livonia as a peripheral domino tile, the fall of which might have produced the chain of negative events over the Baltic region and wider areas of their vital interests. In full compliance with the domino theory, they considered the military intervention as being a reliable tool "to prevent adverse momentum." (SIDBS8)

Probably it was the case when the geopolitical theory of the domino effect was not a vain fear. It looked well-reasoned for Muscovy from the half-century perspective. Tsar Ivan IV terrorised Novgorod in 1570, fearing that the Novgorodian urban elders schemed with their Livonian colleagues against his authoritarian power and his life. Polish transfer of war to the Muscovite Velikiye Luki and Pskov in 1580 to 1582 with prospects toward Tver and Novgorod, and Swedish transfer of war to Ivangorod, Yam, and Koporye in 1581 and annexation of Ingria and Karelia in 1583 confirmed the Muscovite fears of the Livonian domino effect. The Muscovite fear of the domino effect looks trustworthy also due to the Polish and Swedish interventions in the Muscovite Time of Troubles from 1604 to 1618.

The Polish fears of the Swedish foothold in Livonia looked not less grounded. The taking of Estland and Reval in 1561 opened the Swedish conquests in the Polish zone of interests on the Baltic Sea shores, including the Inflanty War from 1600 to 1629, when the Swedes overran Royal Prussia and Livonia which they kept according to the truce conditions. The Inflanty War looked like a prelude to the more grievous Polish catastrophe of the Swedish Deluge in the late 1650s when Sweden occupied most of Poland and Lithuania and destroyed their Commonwealth.

The Swedish fears were equally visionary. Following the Polish takeover of southwestern Livonia and Riga, the Polish Catholic branch of the Swedish dynasty of Vasa, Kings Sigismund III and Władysław IV, claimed the Swedish throne, menacing Sweden's Lutheran confession and independence. Their claims were revoked only in 1660. The Polish pressure also hindered the Swedish intervention in Germany in favour of Protestantism, which the Swedes imagined as their national mission.

The logical causation of these chains of events by the hostile takeover of Livonia is impressive, even though questionable. Nevertheless, for the geopoliticians of the time, Livonia looked like a first tile of the perilous domino effect and an exemplary shatterzone. These two geopolitical features of Livonia were a strong incentive for the Baltic contenders in the mid-16th century to fight over it with self-sacrificing commitment. They also became recognised geopolitical features of Livonia and its successor states for a long period up to today, and they are used today for future prognostics. Livonia's features of being a shatterzone and the first tile of the domino effect prevail in geopolitical assessments over its potential of geographical location and resources that are the key variables in the geopolitical equation otherwise.⁹⁰

90 JERVIS, "Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior," 31; SPYKMAN, "Geography and Foreign Pol-

Hanseatic wreckage.

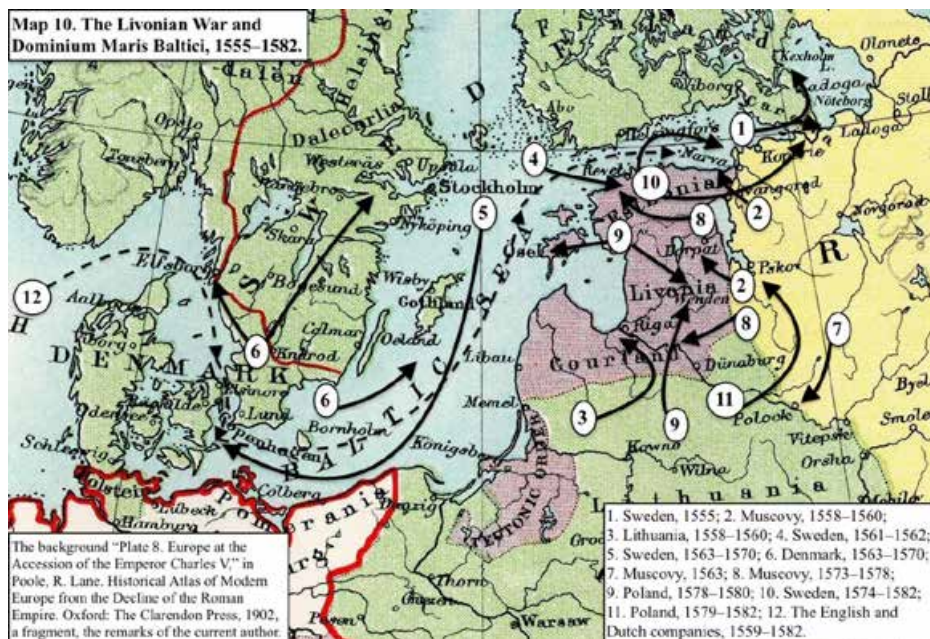
The alliance of the Nordic kingdoms and the Duchy of Prussia destroyed the *Hanse's* commercial and naval dominance over the Baltic Sea and cancelled its egotist interventions into politics of the Baltic onshore kingdoms. The *Hanse* remained a merchant association but was not a state-like body anymore. The reshape of the *Hanse* into an urban league from 1554 to 1557 failed. The economic boom of the Hanseatic trade in the 16th century took place on the background of its military defeats and political humiliation. The former domination of the *Hanse* had been grounded in its supremacy over the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea provided to the *Hanse* its power as a natural hub of communications for trade and shipping and the location from where the assault on the onshore objectives might have been executed. The *Hanse* lost its control and exclusive use of the Baltic Sea, and no power succeeded it immediately. Seapower in the Baltic remained vacant.

Brian Davies opens his excursion to “the steppe above the Black Sea and Caspian” in the middle of the 14th century with the geopolitical thesis of “political vacuum.” Robert Frost uses it to describe the decline of the Livonian Order.⁹¹ They present a political vacuum as a situation when some well-established state loses its strength or some dominating power turns unable to exercise dominance. At the same time, the political vacuum switches on a driving force that pulls into the fray some new contenders. The thesis of political vacuum is well-applicable to the Baltic Sea in the middle of the 16th century.

Destruction of the *Hanse* deprived the economy of the Baltic states of the monopolistic mediator to exchange their goods, but other mediators did not fill its position. The Baltic trade disintegrated. The downfall of Hanseatic naval power, which had disciplined the Baltic seafaring, did not bring some international order. The Baltic Sea became more dangerous and open for power projection. Cancellation of the *Hanse's* intervention in politics of the Baltic onshore states did not result in consent. Their political factions became more aggressive inward and outward. The vacuum of dominance that the *Hanse's* downfall brought to the Baltic onshore states was a factor of disturbance. There were agents to supplement the *Hanse* as commercial mediators. The Dutch traders strengthened their presence in the Baltic, and their English colleagues rushed after them. However, no evident heir appeared to the *Hanse's* position of the naval enforcer and political interventionist.

icy,” P.I., 40.

91 DAVIES, *Warfare, State and Society*, 1; FROST, *The Northern Wars*, 3



Lack of naval dominance in the Baltic Sea became one of the reasons behind the Polish-Lithuanian, Swedish, and Muscovite belief that they could control the export of the Baltic goods to North-Western Europe by taking over Livonia. Nobody could deprive the successful aggressor of the fruits of its victory by blockading the Livonian ports or channelling the trade to other locations. The Baltic Sea was free; the purchasers might have made up to Livonia sweeping away whoever was attempting to hinder them. The open Baltic Sea looked like an incentive to conquer Livonia.

Wrestling Livonia. The Muscovite and Lithuanian geopolitical inertia.

The Pozwoł agreement of the Livonian Order with Lithuania alerted Muscovy. In January 1558, Muscovy unleashed a preemptive raid to warn the Livonian Order, return the buffer status of Livonia, and prevent the domino effect from setting off. Tsar Ivan IV's geopolitical conservatism was a reason behind the Muscovite abstention to conquer Livonia when it was internally weak and international contenders were not ready to counter Muscovy by force. The Muscovite cavalry ravaged eastern Livonia but came out. In the spring and summer of 1558, the Muscovite amphibious forces attacked the Livonian territories in the Peipus-Narva basin. They took over the fortresses Narva, not far from the river Narva's estuary in the Baltic Sea, and Neuschloss, which was at its exit from



Fig. 3. The man-made correction to the geographical settings, the castles of Livonia. A map by Jodocus Hondius after Abraham Ortelius, "Descriptio Livoniæ," Amsterdam, 1616, the National Library of Latvia, Riga. <https://lithuanianmaps.com>

Lake Peipus. The Muscovites secured possession of the Narva's valley by taking over Wesenberg or Rakvere on its western outskirts. The Muscovites took over the large city of Dorpat or Tartu on the western outskirt of the Lake Peipus basin and Neuhausen on the western outskirt of the Velikaya basin. Muscovy occupied the entire Velikaya-Peipus-Narva basin up to its watershed with the rivers and lakes of inner Estland.

It was the limit where the Muscovite conquest of Livonia stumbled. In August 1558, the Muscovite army raided the suburbs of Reval, the capital of Estland, and walked away. In January 1559, another Muscovite army raided the suburbs of Riga, the Livonian capital, burnt some ships caught by ice in its harbour, and walked away. Both principal cities of Livonia were not ready for defence; their fortifications were decrepit and lacked firearms; their militias were untrained, and the mercenaries did not arrive yet. However, the Muscovites did not storm them. It occurred that despite the notorious military reforms of the 1550s the Muscovite army was still unable to transfer conquest from one major riverine basin over the watershed to another, as it was unable to do it during a hundred years since the Muscovite emergence.

It was not an issue of the Muscovite military reforms that were technically advanced, well-organised, and visionary. It was the issue of the Livonian human geography that was represented by its castle system. Jeremy Black argues that

“castle location [...] was a sharp edge of geopolitics.”⁹² “At the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, terrain was made a more significant factor by the interaction with fortifications.” Fortifications could replace the missing natural obstacles and turn the balance between offence and defence in favour of the latter.⁹³

The Livonian castles were neither strongpoints of defence against invasion from outside nor footholds for outward aggression. They were the elements of the inward system of coercion, the conversion of pagans to Christianity, and their economic exploitation. In the 14th century, when the resistance of the local population was suppressed, the normal crusading model of the castle as a garrisoned cell of conquest changed to the economic model of a manor, and crusading garrisons walked apart as the lords. Hundreds of new castles, most of which were of the blockhouse or *myza* kind, were built to suit this function. They composed a thick network around the principal strongholds. The commandant of the fortress Dünaburg or Daugavpils and coadjutor to the Livonian grand master Fürstenberg, Gotthard Kettler, reimagined it as a distributed defence.

Kettler let Fürstenberg be destroyed in hopeless field operations against the superior Muscovites and started his geopolitical game focusing on distributed defence. There were too many castles and blockhouses in Livonia for the Muscovites to overrun it with their cumbersome siege technique of earthworks and artillery bombardment. It was simpler to erect the *myza*-style castles than to siege and destroy them. The Muscovite army was built up for large battles and sieges, while its tactics were inadequate against the network of small castles. Muscovy had neither sufficient numbers of infantry with firearms nor siege guns to invest a number of them. The Muscovites could bite out small pieces of Livonia but not devour it entirely.

The watershed of the Velikaya-Peipus-Narva with the inner lakes and rivers of Estland was dotted with castles and blockhouses. It became a nightmare for the Muscovites. They did not have adequate maps of the terrain to operate their artillery.⁹⁴ Only in eastern Livonia, which was well-explored during multiple wars in the 15th century, were the strongholds skillfully approached for attack with adequately prepared troops. The central and western Livonia and its shore strip along the Baltic Sea required years of raiding to be properly explored as the operational theatres with their chokepoints, invasion corridors, and interchained castles. It was an exemplary case when a technical factor scrambled the operational performance of the otherwise well-built and well-supplied army.

92 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 24–25

93 BLACK, *The Geographies of War*, Chs. 3,4

94 BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, 53

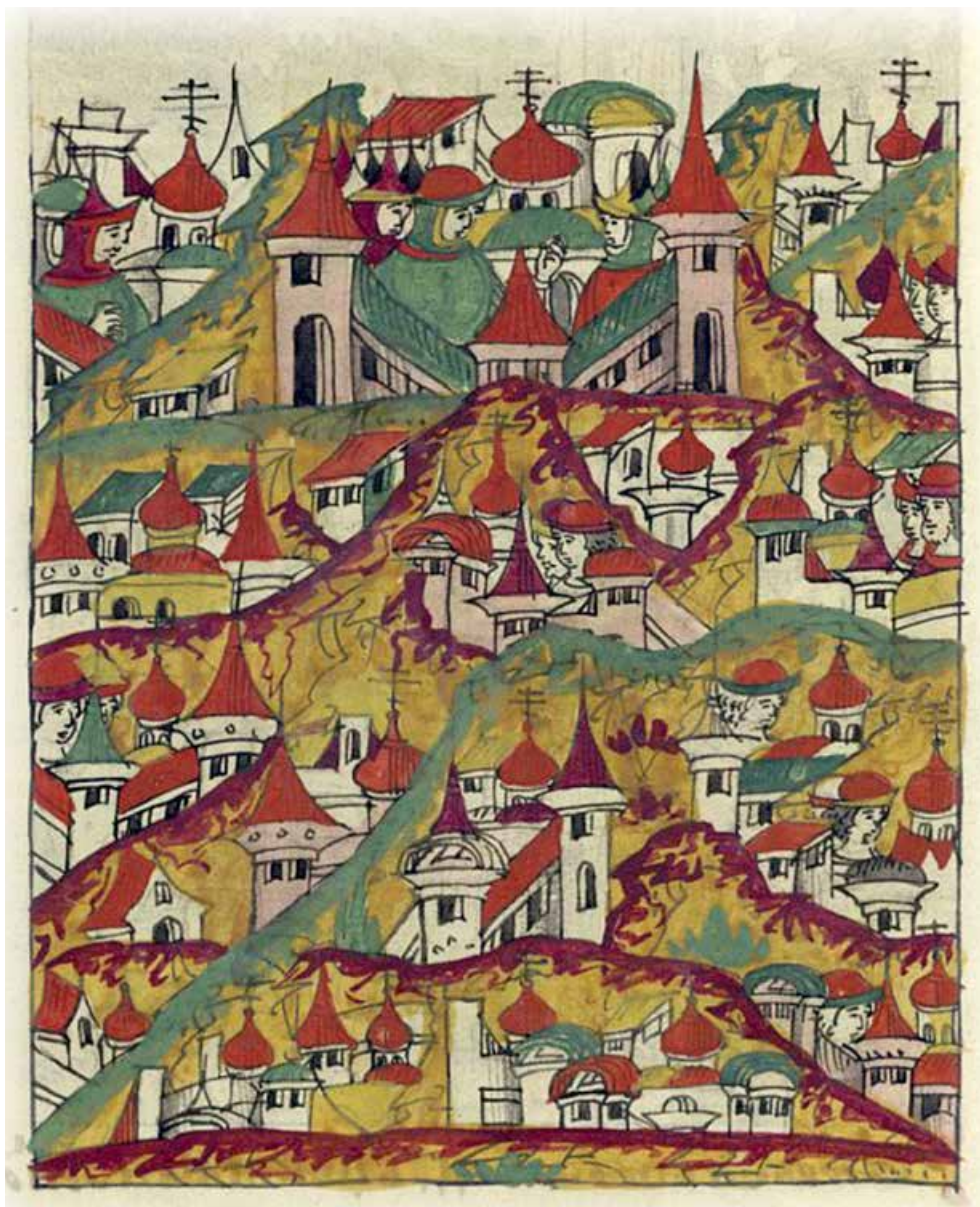


Fig. 4. The Muscovite impression of the Livonian castle network. *The Russian Illustrated Anthological Chronicle of Sixteenth Century, The Synod Volume*. Moscow, Russia, the 16th century, [Лицевой летописный свод XVI века, Синодальный том. Москва, Россия, XVI век, in Russian] The State Historical Museum, Moscow. A courtesy of Runivers, Russia.

The castle system composed the territorial base of Kettler's new geopolitical vision of Livonia. When the Muscovite embassy arrived in Wilno to discuss Livonia in the summer of 1559, it met Kettler. He schemed to secularise the Livonian Order and convert it into a hereditary duchy for him while transferring the Livonian bishoprics under the Lithuanian authority. It meant that the first tile fell and the Muscovites faced the unfolding domino effect that they feared.

Following their agreement with Kettler, the Lithuanians hurried to Livonia. However, they were not more capable than the Muscovites to transfer their expansion over the watersheds. They occupied the castles in the Western Dvina valley that were connected to their possessions in Western Rus and stopped. The Lithuanians did not take over onshore Riga, the urban council of which claimed it to be a "free imperial city." Lithuania transferred to Livonia its best forces, including German and Polish mercenaries and different cossacks. They could not spread the conquest against the resistance of Estland's German knights and urban communities even though they were deserted by the Teutonic Order and hard-pressed by the Muscovites from another side. It was a stunning geopolitical dead end. In eastern Livonia, the Lithuanians clashed with Muscovites. The domino effect that they feared immediately activated. The Muscovites moved to transfer fighting into Lithuanian Western Rus, capturing and fortifying its frontier. The Lithuanian Western Rus was endangered, and the ongoing Lithuanian merger with Poland was compromised. Poland did not have an option besides entering the fray.

It was a moment when the third geopolitical party landed to take over Estland. The death of prudent King Gustav Vasa boosted Swedish intervention in Livonia. It was prepared by his second son, the duke of Finland Johan, who directed to Estland the expansionist vigour of the Swedish-Finnish nobility. Gustav Vasa's heir Erik XIV rushed to Estland as his predestination. In the summer of 1560, the Muscovites finished the army of the Livonian Order and captured Grand Master Fürstenberg. They moved to Reval but stopped dealing with the key castle of Weißenstein, or Paide, on a route from Dorpat to Reval. While the Muscovites sieged it, Reval's burgers applied for the Swedish intervention, at the same time resisting the Lithuanians, Muscovites, and defector Kettler. There was a specific geopolitical factor that pushed them into the Swedish embrace. It was the issue of *Dominium Maris*.

Swedish geopolitical asymmetry and Dominium Maris.

Following their capture of the Narva-Peipus-Velikaya basin, the Muscovites developed it like following a geopolitical manual. The harbour of Narva was reconstructed, and the mouth of the river Narva in the Baltic Sea was fortified

with two earth-wooden forts protecting the riverine route to Narva by artillery fire. The large trade facilities were constructed in Narva, and craftsmen were relocated to Narva from Novgorod and Pskov. The traders of North-Western Europe received direct access to the Muscovite proposal and demand without the Hanseatic, Livonian, or Swedish mediation. The Narva trade boomed, attracting the competitors to old Hanseatic and new Dutch commercial and shipping dominance on the Baltic Sea. The English traders and sailors were especially active. In 1566, Narva was the destination of half of English shipping on the Baltic Sea. The Muscovite trade shifted to Narva, depriving Reval and other Estland towns of their trade and revenues. The number of ships visiting Narva through the Sound rivalled that of Riga.

Desperate burgers of Reval hired corsairs to hunt the ships navigating to Narva while the English sailors filed the caravans with naval protection. They captured corsairs and hanged them in Narva together with its Muscovite commandant. Reval was doomed when Erick XIV and Johan promised the burgers to destroy the Narva trade in exchange for their defection to Swedish authority. Klas Kristersson Horn landed in Reval in March 1661 with Swedish-Finnish troops and captured the main points of Reval. According to the pattern of amphibious occupation, the Swedes immediately started to spread their zone of control outside of the city. In 1562, they overran Pernau (Pärnu), the second largest port of Estland and its outlet to the Riga Gulf ousting the Lithuanians and Kettler's garrison. The Swedes also approached Riga but were rebuked by its burgers.

Henrik Klasson Horn was appointed the governor of Reval, and he continued Finnish-style policy in Estonia. Instead of confirming the slavemaster position of the German nobility over the local Ests as the Lithuanians did in southern Livonia, the Swedes emancipated the Ests to the position of Finnish peasants with some property and human rights. They also built up the Est peasant militia, supplementing the German burger militia. At the same time, the German nobles were enlisted into the Swedish nobility and vested with lucrative military service and administrative offices. The transfer of the Finnish social model to Estland became a successful part of the Swedish geopolitical experiment in Livonia. It secured the Swedish occupation of Estland and supported Swedish ambitions on the Baltic Sea that the protection of Reval's trade instigated.

The Danish king Frederick II felt that the Swedish grab of Estland, a Danish province in the crusading period, violated the Danish idea of naval supremacy on the Baltic Sea. He considered that it was natural for Denmark to control the traffic in the Sound, imposing tolls on it and directing it to one or another competing staple port, Helsingfors, Narva, Reval, Riga, or Danzig. Frederick

II viewed the Swedish attacks on the sea traffic to Narva, Riga and Danzig as unacceptable. He assembled the grand coalition against the Swedish ambitions that included seapower Lübeck, Danzig, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg. It was supported by landpower Brandenburg, Saxony, Poland, and the Holy Roman Empire. Lithuania and Muscovy advanced on Swedish Estland. Muscovy fought off the Swedish blockade of the Narva maritime approaches together with English sailors. Sweden was isolated.

In 1563, Denmark attacked Sweden, unleashing the Northern Seven Years' War. Soon its course took an unforeseen direction. The Danish land army of the German mercenaries under Johan Rantzau repeatedly defeated the Swedish land army, which was considered a reliable force. At the same time, the Danish fleet believed to be an unrivalled navy on the Baltic Sea, was utterly destroyed by the Swedish fleet under Klas Kristersson Horn. The Swedish shipbuilding program conducted just before the war brought excellent results. Sweden had 70 battleships in 1566 and might have been qualified as a global naval power even though its fleet operated exclusively on the Baltic Sea.⁹⁵ The Swedes won six of seven large naval engagements of the Nordic Seven Years' War. The Swedish high-end naval artillery changed the pattern of sea combat from boarding and hand-to-hand fighting to gunfire duel and its objectives from capturing the enemy ships to sinking them. It was the naval technique that overturned the geopolitical situation on the Baltic Sea and capsized the naval warfare.

Sweden entered the struggle over *Dominium Maris Baltici* with two objectives. National security was one of them, and control over the Baltic trade was another. In the late 1540s, the Protestant party in the Holy Roman Empire represented by the Schmalkaldic League of the Protestant princes was broken to debris by Emperor Charles V. The Protestants were pressed by the *Augsburg Interim*, or rules of religion, in 1548. The *Interim* did not soften the feelings but ignited fierce Protestantism and militant Catholic reaction. Protestant Sweden, where the church properties were confiscated and monasteries looted, perceived its international position as being vulnerable and endangered. When Gustav Vasa claimed the hereditary monarchy for his dynasty in the same year, he had a geopolitical vision of the Baltic coastal region as the Swedish bulwark against Catholic aggression.

The ports of the south-central and south-eastern Baltic, such as Danzig, Memel, Riga, Reval, and Narva were at once the depots of the Baltic trade and the threatening launchpads of the enemy power projection against Sweden by sea. Sweden needed to dominate the south-central and eastern Baltic from the

95 MODELSKI and THOMPSON, *Seapower in Global Politics*, 320–21

Dutchy of Prussia and Livonia to Ingria and Karelia to be safe. Control over the Danish Straits, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg was necessary as well. However, it was unrealistic to dream of the occupation of this enormous coastal belt. The Swedish geopoliticians revealed another solution. They changed the archaic model of coastal occupation to the novel model of operational control on the sea itself, with occasional strikes at the challenging chokepoints and occupation of the zones of exceptional strategic value.

The Swedish fleet gained operational dominance on the Baltic Sea by 1567.⁹⁶ It controlled the Baltic maritime routes, shipping gorges, and approaches to important seashore points as if according to a “blue water” manual.⁹⁷ The Swedish navy drifted at the Sound, imposing tolls on the sea traffic entering and exiting the Baltic Sea. It collected tolls on the sea approaches to Danzig and Riga. It almost closed the sea route to Narva. Only two new Danish onshore artillery forts denied the Swedish navy breaking through the Sound and raiding over Skagerrak and Kattegat. Unlike the *Hanse*’s former domination of the Baltic Sea, the Swedish domination relied not on the onshore posts, trade, and political intervention but on naval superiority. The Baltic Sea transformed from a network of sea lines to a dominant military geographical position. It matched the requirements of the dominant military geographical position⁹⁸ in the best way.

The Baltic Sea might be dominated by controlling a few maritime gorges and onshore chokepoints. Access to it might be easily denied to any external contender. The geographic shape of the Baltic Sea allows it to be divided into compact sectors for concentration of force. The Baltic Sea provides unobstructed access to the onshore Baltic region around it and free manoeuvre of the forces within it. The master of the Baltic Sea can shift the strategic gravity as it prefers. The Baltic Sea has abundant operational directions and tactical locations to deploy the forces and engage the enemy equally for offensive and defensive purposes. It was a perfect strategic frontier for an expanding state since an offensive might have been launched effectively from it.⁹⁹

These geopolitical features of the Baltic Sea were explored by the Swedish king Erik XIV and his military commanders during the Northern Seven Years’ War. They professed the geopolitical concept of *Dominium Maris Baltici*, and at the same time, introduced sea dominance as the principal commitment of naval

96 GUILMARTIN, *Gunpowder and Galleys*, 100; GLETE, *Warfare at Sea*, 122

97 VEGO, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 24–25, 36, 38

98 COLLINS, *Military Geography*, P.1

99 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy,” P.I, 403

warfare.¹⁰⁰ Erik XIV was claimed “crazy” in 1568 and was deposed by his brothers Johan and Karl. However, Erik XIV’s commanders and ideas continued to determine the Swedish geopolitical thinking. The concept of *Dominium Maris Baltici* corresponded to principles of sea control by superior naval power that George Modelski and William R. Thompson generalised.¹⁰¹ The Early Modern Baltic became a mini-globe where the model of sea control started to function.

Unlike the strategy of indirect approach’s author, Basil Liddell Hart,¹⁰² other influential strategists of naval warfare Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett agree that economic war on sea communications is an auxiliary tool to the main weapon of the decisive offensive on the enemy’s political centres and destruction of its military. The maritime attacks on the shipping and offshore blockade are of secondary importance, while the assaults on the ports and onshore economic centres of the enemy might be decisive.¹⁰³ Taking Narva by four amphibious assaults one after another in 1574, 1577, 1579, and 1581 demonstrated the hard process of Swedish learning of the new geopolitical mode of expansion.

It was not a galley fleet of the old Mediterranean kind that produced the Swedish amphibious achievements as many historians believe following Jan Glete, but the large artillery *carracks* and smaller *caravels*, the advanced types of ships of the epoch. They provided deck-to-shore gunfire on the enemy’s onshore fortifications. Being combined with the mobile landpower into integrated amphibious forces, the seapower was able for overseas conquest and expansion. The new pattern of amphibious warfare became a power projection component of *Dominium Maris Baltici*.

The instruments of naval power such as the sea battles, blockades, and amphibious landings might create the preconditions for the overall military victory and the new international order. However, they cannot provide victory on their own. A lot of other efforts are needed. The main of them are overland conquest, making of coalitions, and economic influence.¹⁰⁴ The lagging of the other efforts behind the naval supremacy was the principal problem of the Swedish implementation of *Dominium Maris Baltici*. Sweden needed more resources to increase its expansionist efforts, and the model of the “fiscal-military state” was introduced to mobilise them. It became a prototype of the “nation-state,” which is a geopolitical entity that dominates international relations in the Modern Period.

100 GLETE, *Warfare at Sea*, 124

101 MODELSKI and THOMPSON, *Seapower in Global Politics*, 11–12, 14, 17

102 LIDDELL HART, *The Strategy of Indirect Approach*, 265–67, 287

103 BOWEN, “Neither a Silver Bullet nor a Distraction,” 48, 52–53

104 MODELSKI and THOMPSON, *Seapower in Global Politics*, 22

Seapower is the foundation of the international order that concludes major wars in large geopolitical systems.¹⁰⁵ The asymmetric results of fighting on land and sea in the Northern Seven Years' War produced peace in 1570 that did not change the boundaries of Denmark and Sweden, while the change of their geopolitical position was evident.

Dominium Maris Baltici provided Sweden with the capabilities to overcome the former dead ends of the expansion in the region. Sweden managed to break through its watershed limitations, spread its conquest over different major riverine and lacustrine drainage basins, and occupy the estuaries, cutting them off from the river valleys.

While Poland and Muscovy continued moving awkwardly within the old watershed frames, Sweden fought them off from Estland, retaking all of their initial gains in northern Livonia. By the end of the Livonian War, it also captured the Muscovite Ingria and Karelian Isthmus with the entire Neva's range, making up uninterrupted onshore holding from Pernau to Vyborg around the Finnish Gulf. Riga was conquered by the Swedish fleet of 158 ships that delivered 18,000 soldiers in the summer of 1621. The Baltic region became a mini-globe in which the Mackinder-style struggle over hegemony between the continental heartland and sea-bound onshore states was tried for further geopolitical usage.

Polish geopolitical mergers and acquisitions (M&A).

Entering the Livonian War, Poland was locked in the Vistula riverine basin in the same way as Sweden was locked in its interior lacustrine basin before its conquest of Estland and Reval in the 1560s. In a hundred years since the annexation of Royal Prussia in 1466, Poland has made profound use of it without changing its internal German-style social constitution and German ethnic composition. Danzig became the principal Polish outlet in the Baltic, the main depot of Polish grain export. The grain export was critically important not only for the Polish economy but also for Polish social structure and national strategy. The grain was produced by the lord farms, *folwarks* where the ruthless lords coerced their serfs to work for free. The *folwarks* were the economic base of the Polish nobility, the *szlachta* that monopolised the country's politics, and the incredible wealth of the magnates who ran the Polish "republic of nobles."

The folwark revenues were the economic foundation of the specific Polish system of military recruiting that was arranged as the magnates' investment in private bands and royal units that they commissioned. The mainstay of the Pol-

105 MODELSKI and THOMPSON, *Seapower in Global Politics*, 17

ish army, the shock *hussaria* cavalry and mercenary infantry hired primarily in the German-speaking Royal Prussia, were recruited according to this pattern. The Polish reliance on the recruits of its German-speaking provinces for manning infantry with firearms and artillery displayed that Poland looked on the Baltic as the supplier of the critical military innovations of the gunpowder epoch in the same way as Muscovy did. The Vistula and its Prussian outlet were not a transport line only; they were the structural vertebra of the Polish political regime, social organisation, and military.

The Polish colonisation of Polish Rus, including Galicia, Western Volhynia, and Western Podolia, depended on their agricultural export via the Vistula to Danzig and further to North-Western Europe. The Polish efforts to penetrate the Moldavian trade route that might have provided southward export of the Polish agricultural plenty to the Ottomans and Mediterranean were unsuccessful. Other routes to the Black Sea via the Dnieper and Southern Bug were torn apart by the Zaporozhian cossacks. Polish dependence on the Baltic trade and its Vistula avenue increased. The change of the buyers and markets of the Polish grain from the *Hanze* and central Germany to the Netherlands and North-Western Europe was important for the Polish position of independence from the Holy Roman Empire that patronised the Baltic affairs favourably for the German communities of Prussia and Livonia.

In 1563, the Muscovite tsar Ivan IV the Terrible turned to change the declining efficiency of Muscovy's offensive in Livonia by the bold geopolitical move. He transferred the Muscovite conquest from the Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basin across Valday to the Western Dvina's basin. Ivan IV understood that he needed overwhelming force to accomplish the geopolitical task, and he marched a grandiose army from Velikie Luki at Lake Ilmen's tributary river Lovat to Polotsk. The army was burdened with artillery and siege equipment designed by mercenary Italian and German engineers. The best Tatar horsemen of the conquered Kazan Khanate were assigned to the cavalry, and twenty thousand regular handgunners composed the infantry.

In January 1563, the tsarist army overcame the frozen swamps and rivers of the watershed and descended on Polotsk. It smashed Polotsk's fortifications and garrison. Then the Muscovites cleared the Western Dvina's left bank to its watershed with the river Berezina of the Dnieper-Black Sea basin and rivers Narew and Neris (Viliya) of the Vistula's and Neman's basins, respectively. The Muscovites were smart enough to take over the valley of the middle Western Dvina entirely and started to fortify it with earth-wooden forts.

It was a perfect transfer of conquest from one major riverine basin to another, and nevertheless, it stumbled. The Lithuanians in the Livonian castles

downstream the Western Dvina panicked, expecting the soon invasion of the Muscovite overland and amphibious troops along the river valley. However, it did not come. Ivan IV overwhelmed the Lithuania, but he was not able to cancel the Baltic geopolitical rules. His army marching to spread the Muscovite control over the watershed between the Dnieper and Western Dvina was destroyed by the Lithuanian troops at the river Ulla in 1564. An ordinary military event caused two political avalanches, one in Muscovy and another in Poland and Lithuania. Searching for treason that caused the Ulla defeat, Ivan IV unleashed domestic terror or *Oprichnina* that interrupted the Muscovite activity in Estland for a half-decade and postponed the Muscovite advance along the Western Dvina's valley for a decade. And the Poles, guided by similar reasons, processed their Baltic possessions into mincemeat.

The union diet, or *Sejm*, of Polish and Lithuanian nobles was assembled in Lublin in 1569. The Poles pressed the Lithuanians to merge their statehood with the Polish one and transfer the Polish social constitution to Lithuania. When the Lithuanian delegation vacated the meeting, the Poles voted for the integration single-handedly. Lithuania was cancelled. Now it was safe from the Muscovite "tyrant." Besides the cancellation of Lithuania, the alarmist Poles cancelled the self-styled social constitution of Royal Prussia to prevent its siding with the Swedes. They also took over the western part of Lithuanian Rus, Podlasie, located in the Vistula basin, and the Lithuanian gains in Livonia.

The former Livonian bishoprics composed a province of Inflanty, and Kettler's allotment became the Duchy of Courland. Cutting off Muscovy from access to the West-European knowledge shared in the Polish imagination the idea of vesting the Baltic region with the "freedoms" of the "republic of nobles," to which the Muscovites were "inborn and incorrigible enemy." It was the total reorganisation of the Baltic territory under the Polish authority. Poland reshaped the Vistula's estuary for its unrestricted control and gained the Neman basin and Western Dvina middle reaches.

Poland felt itself a Baltic power. King Sigismund II Augustus launched a naval commission in Danzig that procured the ships and hired corsairs to harass the shipping to the Swedish and Muscovite ports. The king envisaged taking over *Dominium Maris Baltici* from Sweden. However, he died in 1572. The long and twisty interregnum followed until 1576, when the Transylvanian *voivode* Stephen Bathory was elected the Polish king. During his reign, the power in Poland was grabbed by the group of magnates under Jan Zamoyski, who prioritised expansion in the southern direction in the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, the Vistula remained the vertebra that assembled Poland, and the Baltic liabilities must have been attended to. The next Muscovite unburst of conquest needed to be dealt with.

Muscovy's geopolitical underextension. Failure of overwhelming force.

Muscovy was able to return to Livonia only in 1572 after Novgorod was sacked by the tsarist *Oprichnina* in 1570 and Moscow was burnt down in 1571 by the Crimean khan Devlet Geray who was maybe a most daring protector of Novgorod between the Mongolian successors. However, in 1572 the Muscovite army annihilated his troops at the river Lopasnya south of Moscow and marched to Livonia. Ivan IV rushed to overcome the watershed between the Velikaya–Peipus–Narva basin and lower Western Dvina with the same overwhelming force that had overcome the watershed between the Velikaya and middle Western Dvina in 1563. In 1573, the Muscovites outright stormed and cracked Weißenstein, dominating the watershed. The storm assault of the castles was Muscovy's new geopolitical leverage in castle-packed Livonia.

The watershed was crossed in 1575 when the Muscovites took over Pernau. In late 1576 to early 1577, they sieged Reval and made strong progress through its fortifications until the fighting accident deprived them of their commander. At the same time, Tsar Ivan IV in person led the army to the Western Dvina lower reaches. His troops swept them from Dünaburg near Polotsk to Kokenhausen or Koknese near Riga. The Muscovites also captured the castle Wenden, or Cēsis, in the Western Dvina's watershed with the rivers and lakes of Estland. Now only westernmost Courland and Riga and Reval with their suburbs remained out of the Muscovite control over Livonia. It seemed the Muscovite pattern of conquest by the overwhelming force was an effective solution to transfer expansion over the watersheds between the major Baltic riverine and lacustrine basins.

Ivan IV rushed to rearrange the conquered territory according to the Muscovite social pattern, and it was a move that provoked geopolitical retaliation. In 1578 many Livonian towns rioted in favour of the Danish prince Magnus, whom Ivan IV appointed the king of Livonia and who secretly intrigued the Poles and Swedes to confirm his seat. The locals assisted the Polish raiding party to catch Wenden. The Muscovite overwhelming army spread over Livonia and lost its focus. It sieged Wenden. The Swedish and Polish forces joined and relieved the fortress, destroying the Muscovite siege army in the fiercest battle of the Livonian war. The technical base of the Muscovite overwhelming forces, their artillery, was lost, as well as its fighting spirit and best commanders.

The rollback of the Muscovite conquest took its momentum. At the same time, the Polish king Stephen Bathory disciplined Danzig. He sacrificed the Duchy of Prussia for hereditary possession of the Hohenzollern electors of Brandenburg to deprive Danzig of their support. In 1577, the Polish and Transylvanian troops managed to divide Danzig's urban militia from an amphibious flotilla that shipped upstream the Vistula and destroyed it. The Poles sieged

Danzig through 1577 and failed to impose their dictate on it because Danzig's seapower provided sufficient resources for staunch resistance. Danzig preserved its self-rule while other Prussian territories were reduced to plain Polish provinces. Among the Polish acquisitions in the Baltic, according to the Lublin *Unia* of 1569, Livonia was most disarranged, unshaped, and endangered.

Stephen Bathory and his advisers, the Polish chancellor Jan Zamoyski and Lithuanian chancellor Mikołaj Radziwiłł, grasped the geopolitical rule of the Baltic region's arrangement by major riverine and lacustrine basins. No conquest or occupation might have been effective if executed contrary to this rule. The Poles must have advanced on Ivan IV's gains in Livonia either upstream from Riga or downstream from Polotsk, but strictly not over the Western Dvina's watershed with Vistula and Neman. Polotsk was occupied by the Muscovites. Riga claimed itself a "free imperial city" and refused to accept the Polish authorities and garrison.

Stephen Bathory chose to capture Polotsk. He used the weakness of the Muscovite control in the Western Dvina tricky watershed with the Vistula, Neman, and Dnieper basins. In 1579 Stephen Bathory marched from the Neman's tributary Neris to the Western Dvina's tributary Dysna and Polotsk along it. He took over Polotsk by storm. The Muscovite system of control over the Western Dvina's valley by the small earth-wooden forts crumbled. The Muscovite strategists lost their grasp. The gains in the lower Western Dvina valley in Livonia were soon lost.

In 1580 Stephen Bathory moved to transfer his conquest over the Western Dvina's watershed to the Velikaya-Peipus-Narva and Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basins, where the principal Muscovite strongholds in the Baltic region, Pskov and Novgorod, were located. Stephen Bathory envisaged rolling back Muscovy not only from Livonia but from the Baltic region. In 1580, the Poles took over Velikiye Luki at Ilmen's tributary, the Lovat; Nevel and Zavolochye in approach to Velikaya's valley; and Velizh and Toropets, that were the key forts in Western Dvina's upper reaches on Valday. Now Stephen Bathory controlled all of the Western Dvina basin and passed through the watersheds to the Velikaya-Peipus-Narva and Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basins, where he could advance to Novgorod and Pskov.

The king chose Pskov as his objective, marched on it, and sieged it in 1581 and 1582 but failed to take it. His tremendous mobilizational efforts in Poland and Lithuania, the build-up of the mightiest armies in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's history, and the unrivalled gifts of a military leader did not secure the envisaged outcome. The Yam-Zapolsky truce of 1582 returned Polotsk to Poland and granted it Livonia, but all Polish gains in the Velikaya-Pei-

pus-Narva and Ilmen-Volkhov-Ladoga-Neva basins were lost. The overwhelming force was not able to overcome the Baltic rule restricting conquest within secluded basins, neither in Muscovite nor in Polish interpretation.

Following Paul M. Kennedy,¹⁰⁶ the geopolitical theorists like to discuss the “overextension” of empires as a prime reason for their collapse. Contrary to this fashionable observation, the collapse of the Muscovite empire in the Baltic was caused by its underextension imposed by the resilience of watersheds to expansion from one riverine and lacustrine basin to another. The Muscovite Baltic empire was unable to extend sufficiently to take root in the conquered basins. The same issue of underextension hunted its Polish rival.

GEOPOLITICAL FORMATION OF THE EARLY MODERN BALTIC, MODELS AND THEIR PROJECTIONS.

All three geopolitical models of expansion that were tried in the Livonian War – the Swedish seapower asymmetry, the Polish M&A model, and the Muscovite model of the overwhelming force – were imperfect and worked within territorially limited and short-lived situations.

The Swedish seapower model.

The Swedish seapower model provided a pattern of action to overcome the limits on conquest and expansion that the Baltic rule of state-building within the major riverine and lacustrine basins imposed. The Swedes advanced through the Neva-Ladoga watershed with Finnish lacustrine and riverine interior and captured the Karelian Isthmus. They also landed in Estland across the Finnish Gulf and occupied it. Then they moved across the Narva and occupied Ingria, creating the uninterrupted holding around the Finnish Gulf and removing Muscovy from the Neva’s estuary and the Narva’s estuary. However, Sweden was not able to either transfer its conquest to Riga and the Western Dvina’s estuary or explore the depth of Muscovy to the natural limits of the Baltic region in Valday. The Swedish model required to deploy resources of land warfare and administration competence that Sweden did not possess. Both issues of Swedish expansion appeared repeatedly during the Early Modern Period, especially in the 17th century.

Intervening in the Muscovite Time of Troubles from 1609 to 1618, Sweden achieved the largest-ever conquest in the Muscovite Baltic, occupying the former Novgorodian Republic up to the town of Tikhvin in Lake Ladoga’s water-

106 Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.

shed with the upper Volga. Sweden resurrected the Novgorodian Republic as its vassal. From 1613 to 1615, the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf overran the former Pskovian Republic and sieged Pskov. The conquest of the entire Muscovite Baltic was achievable but was not achieved. It seemed that Muscovy was rolled back over Valday to its Volga-Caspian core and ceased to be a Baltic power. It did not happen. Gustav II Adolf did not take Pskov, and in 1617 he conceded to Muscovy all his gains in the former Novgorodian and Pskovian Republics besides the coastal strip of land around the Finnish Gulf.

Sweden managed to keep it a hundred years until the Great Northern War in the early 18th century, when its Baltic empire was dismantled. Different geopolitical successors of the Swedish conquest in the Muscovite Baltic collapsed at the same frontier. For example, the limits of the advance of the *Entente*-sponsored general Nickolay Yudenich on the Bolshevik Saint-Petersburg or Petrograd in 1919, as well as the German and Finnish advance in the Soviet Union's north-west from 1941 to 1943, accurately coincided with the limits of the Swedish occupation in 1611 to 1617. In 1919 and 1944, both of the conquerors collapsed in the same way.

The Polish model of M&A expansion.

The Polish model of M&A expansion looked like a highly effective and long-living but extra slow solution. It took around two hundred years from Krewo Unia in 1385 to Lublin Unia in 1569 to transfer the Polish expansion from the Vistula basin to the Neman basin. It took a hundred years from the Polish annexation of Royal Prussia in 1466 to spread the Polish social constitution there in 1569. The Poles did not have sufficient time to root their control in western and southern Livonia, possessing it only four decades from the 1580s to 1620s. The Swedes unrooted them easily.

The most severe application of the Polish M&A model happened in the aftermath of WWII when the Soviet-led reshuffle of Eastern Europe transferred Royal Prussia, Pomerania, and Brandenburg's eastern districts to Poland. The allies of the anti-German coalition, the USA, the UK, and the USSR, could not grant Poland a hundred or more years to digest them. So, they allowed Poland to deport their German population with terrible excesses to misery in post-war Germany. The Polish M&A model required harsh coercion if it did not have ages to be implemented.

However, if established, the Polish domination was hard to dislodge. The Prussian and Russian imperial authorities wasted huge efforts to erase the Polish cultural and social domination, which worked like a conspiracy, in Royal Prus-

sia and Lithuania that they, respectively, acquired by the Polish Partitions in the last third of the 18th century. They did not resolve this issue until the German and Russian Empires collapsed in 1917 and 1918 and the reviving Poland managed to grab much of Royal Prussia and Lithuania.

The province of Podlasia, which historically belonged to Western Rus, occurred Polonised to the extent that it was impossible to transfer it “back” to Belarus during the Soviet-led geopolitical reshuffle of Eastern Europe in the aftermath of WWII in a way as other districts of “Western Ukraine” and “Western Belarus” were transferred to the respective republics of the USSR. The Lithuanian capital district of Wilno (Vilnius) was transferred to Lithuania only by herding its Polonised population to Poland.

The Muscovite model of overwhelming force.

The Muscovite model of overwhelming force was practiced in the Baltic region five hundred years before it was put on paper as the “American way of war.”¹⁰⁷ And like “the American way of war,” it did not work if force was not overwhelming on a solid, permanent basis. As soon as the overwhelming superiority weakened, the Muscovite conquest collapsed. It was the situation in central and eastern Livonia at the end of the Livonian War. It was also the situation in the successors of Livonia, provinces of the Russian Empire in the aftermath of WWI, and Soviet republics Latvia and Estonia in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Muscovite, Russian, and Soviet occupation of Livonia depended on unrivalled, overwhelming force invariably.

The interesting side of the Muscovite model of expansion by overwhelming force consists in its universality. The Swedish occupation of former Livonia collapsed as soon as it appeared that the Swedish force, although superior, was not overwhelming. A decade before Sweden’s crucial disaster at Poltava in 1709, the Swedish control over Livonia crumbled following the Swedish triumph at Narva in 1700 as soon as the Russian troops achieved their first raiding successes over the Swedish garrisons. The German occupation of former Livonia during WWI in 1918 fell because the local nationalistic factions did not feel that Germany had overwhelming force and switched their allegiance to the *Entente*.

The German occupation of former Livonia during WWII from 1941 to 1944 was shaky and contested by the communist guerrillas despite the German crushing victories over Poland, France, and Britain from 1939 to 1941 and the Soviet Union during the first months of the Barbarossa *blitzkrieg*. Germany op-

107 SONDHAUS, *Culture and Ways of War*, 60

posed too many enemies to maintain overwhelming force.

The NATO and European Union incorporated Latvia and Estonia in the 1990s, projecting the overwhelming force. Geopolitics is a cynical worldview. Would they have an overwhelming force forever? Maybe for a long time, but never forever.

CONCLUSION.

The calm eye of a geopolitical cyclone.

Tracking the Baltic models of state-building and expansion through the dimensions of space and time discloses Livonia as a centre of geopolitical construction characterised by its intrinsic instability. While Livonia was an objective of the contest of the Baltic expansionist states, the area encircling it generated domestic and international concussions.

Royal Prussia to the west was the main target of the Swedish attacks on Poland in the Inflanty War from 1600 to 1629. It became the Swedish target again in the Deluge from 1655 to 1660. It became the target of Brandenburg-Prussia in the same conflict and reasoned its involvement in the Partitions of Poland in the last third of the 18th century when the Polish statehood was cancelled. Some districts of former Royal Prussia and adjacent Greater Poland became a springboard for the multiple Polish nationalistic riots in the 19th century and the Wielkopolska Rebellion from 1918 to 1919 that resurrected Poland and destroyed the German Empire. In 1939, former Royal Prussia produced the crisis that launched WWII. In its aftermath, former Royal Prussia became a Soviet ace in the territorial reshuffle of Central and Eastern Europe, compensating Poland for ceding its eastern provinces to Soviet Ukraine and Belarus.

On the German side, the Duchy of Prussia became the cradle of the imperial Brandenburg-Prussia and a symbol of German imperialism. The German opponents targeted finishing it in Eastern Prussia in the Seven Years's War from 1756 to 1763, the Napoleonic War of the Fourth Coalition from 1806 to 1807, WWI and WWII. In the 20th century, Eastern Prussia repeatedly created the feeling of Germany being abused, like in the aftermath of WWI, and WWII. This feeling did not disappear up to today.

Lithuania and Western Rus, Belarus now, were the Muscovite objectives in the Thirteen Years' War from 1654 to 1667, and then reasoned the Russian participation in the Partitions of Poland. In 1918, in Belorussian Brest, the Russian Bolsheviks made a truce with Germany giving up the Baltics, the Ukraine, and the Transcaucasia. It was a humiliation that provoked the Civil War in Russia

that continued into 1921. The westernmost part of Belarus became the Soviet share of divided Poland after its collapse in 1939 under the German strike and then a reason to “push” Poland for two hundred kilometres westward after WWII. Lithuania was the most separatist republic of the USSR, and it activated the USSR’s disintegration in the early 1990s. Today, many experts consider Belarus a most fragile partner of Russia’s superpower resurgence.

The proper Russian regions to the southeast of former Livonia, Pskov and Novgorod, were the principal scenes of the Russian Empire’s collapse in 1917. Emperor Nicholas II abdicated in his train of the commander-in-chief near Pskov, and the Russian front disintegrated from the Baltic to Romania. They became the important centres of Russian nationalism that launched the USSR’s disintegration in the early 1990s. Saint-Petersburg, or Leningrad, at the Neva estuary was the scene of the principal Russian political troubles in the 18th and 19th centuries and the springboard of the revolutions in 1905 to 1907 and 1917 that destroyed the Russian Empire. It was also a principal centre of the upheaval that destroyed the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

Most of the scholars of geopolitics see Livonia’s successor states, Latvia and Estonia, as a shatterzone of Eastern Europe. However, a sketch of their geopolitics following the Livonian War reveals that Livonia’s successor states or territories have been stable and not troublesome since. The combustible geopolitical potential of Livonia had burnt out in the Livonian War and its aftermath while its surroundings, the belt around it erupted one trouble after another.

Livonia’s current successors, Latvia and Estonia, do not have any new natural resources that come in demand in industrial or post-industrial epochs. They are still an area of marginal agriculture, local fishing and forestry and not envious prey for aggression. Their superb location as a transit hub between Eastern Europe and Western Europe works only if they are politically connected to producers of East-European goods or other staple locations such as the Neva estuary or Belarus are shut. Without these two conditions, the transit value of the Livonian successors is negligible.

Their other value consists of allegedly being a well-located foothold for either Russian westward expansion along the Baltic shore enveloping Central Europe or Western expansion eastward enveloping Russia. Both scenarios are shortsighted. The westward move from former Livonia is blocked by the Vistula with die-hard Polish statehood. The eastward one is blocked by the Neva and Valday with the Russian unassailability. Former Livonia is useful to wrestle Western Rus, Belarus now, but Lithuania and Russian Smolensk are better footholds to do it.

The Baltics is a calm eye, while Central and Eastern Europe are cyclones engulfing it. Livonia’s successor states, Latvia and Estonia, might provoke the

crisis only if the expansionist states or alliances that semi-encircle them have their inner problems of cohesion and commitment. Today this is true both for the NATO and European Union, and Russia and the post-Soviet integrating alliances like the Union State with Belarus, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. If they do not have inner problems of cohesion and commitment, if they do not allow their frontiers with former Livonia to turn into shatterzones, Livonia's successor states would not be agents of war between them.

However, from a historical geopolitical perspective, the close neighbours of former Livonia have this kind of problem almost always. It means that while losing its shatterzone character, the Baltics increased its feature of a first tile in the menacing domino effect for the "great powers" and coalitions around it. In practice, the Baltics did not have a chance to become Saul Cohen's "gateway region" with a function of "exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas."¹⁰⁸ The Baltics is the epitome of geopolitical conflict.

The Baltic succession.

The Baltic geopolitics from the 15th to 17th centuries is especially manifesting since it produced some stable geopolitical models that have been used later for understanding much bigger geographical entities and the creation of much harder political constructions. The pioneering models in the Baltic region that were invented to overcome geopolitical obstacles and limitations to state-building and expansion in the Early Modern Period spread globally. The "Swedish" model of the fiscal-military state became a pattern for the nation-state, the main political innovation of the Modern Period. The "Polish" model of state-building by the social M&A was profoundly used for territorial consolidation of the panoply districts into the Modern nation-states with their unitary social constitution. Today it is in use for the consolidation of close international alliances with supranational authority.

The "Muscovite" model to utilise an overwhelming force to transfer conquest over geographical barriers became a foundation for the modern offensive military strategy that has been in use from the Napoleonic Wars through WWI and WWII to the USA's wars in Kuwait and Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s. The current incapability of the military technologies to overcome the geographical and political obstacles is strikingly similar to the Livonian War's deadness. The Israeli insistent fighting in the Gasa sector and Lebanon, as well as the three-year-long

108 COHEN, *Geopolitics*, 54

fighting in Ukraine, on both sides, demonstrate that the overwhelming force is needed to secure the upper hand and no RMA's achievements could substitute it. The lack of resolute military victory in these conflicts is caused by the Early Modern "Baltic decease" of the inability to deploy overwhelming force. It compromises strategic performance disregarding tactical and operational efficiency.

The model of *Dominium Maris Baltici* was reproduced for the "blue water" concept of seapower and naval warfare that dominated the military minds in the 18th and 19th centuries until the long-range land-based weapons turned it unusable in the second third of the 20th century. The Baltic pattern of overseas amphibious conquest and occupation became a prototype for the European colonial empires in the Modern Period. It was in use until the French amphibious imperialism collapsed in North Africa and Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s.

The model of Russia's rollback by the "collective West," first tried in Livonia, was a substantial part of Napoleon's strategy, influenced British strategy in the 19th century, and guided German strategy in the 20th century. It became the USA's fundamental strategy in the Cold War. It is pivotal for the West's cohesion and international stance up to today, not only in relations with Russia but also with other actors that are viewed as natural enemies of the Western values and interests.

Maybe the most impressive Baltic model is the organisation of power around a sea or another large water space like the geopolitical super-state. The sea is a hub of this system and its compound of cohesion. This function of the sea is provided by the social homogeneity of the onshore policies and their political consolidation. It is secured by the sea's superior features as a geographical military position and the operational capability of the navy that dominates it. The geopolitical concept of the sea-based super-state includes the idea of the joint predestination or mission of its member policies. It differs from the colonial empire, where the sea functions to project the metropole's power to its overseas possessions.

The sea-based super-state could have a leader; however, the concept stresses the cohesive functioning of its member polities around the sea to produce matching strategic resources. It prioritises the power projection within the system. The vector of power is directed inward to tighten the sea-based geopolitical construction, dominate over its polities and safeguard its outer frontier against external challenges. The Baltic prototypes of this system were the Kalmar Union in the first third of the 15th century and the Swedish Baltic empire from the late 16th to 17th centuries. The modern systems modelled according to these Baltic patterns include the British Empire with its "white colonies," later dominions of the British Commonwealth, from the eve of WWI to the aftermath of WWII.

The sea's function as their compound of cohesion was secured by the British "blue water" navy that dominated the world's oceans.

The most profound and complete system modelled after the Baltic sea-based super-states of the Early Modern Period is NATO organised around the sea-hub of the North Atlantic Ocean. The sea's function as its compound of cohesion is secured by the new pattern of naval power introduced in WWII by the USA in the Pacific Ocean. It differs substantially from the "blue water" concept of the oceanic dominance of the 18th and 19th centuries. It focuses not on wrestling maritime communications but on power projection from the sea to surrounding landmass by long-range weapons like aviation and missiles and "old good" amphibious operations. NATO might be esteemed as the "most successful alliance in history" for its perfect implementation of the geopolitical model of the sea-based super-state authored in the Early Modern Baltic.

However, both of its Early Modern Baltic predecessors collapsed. They were victims of the fundamental geopolitical rivalry that ruled the Early Modern Baltic region. Spykman and Rollins believe that the "riparian and transfluvial" kinds of expansion by either projecting seapower or descending to the seashore along the riverine and lacustrine basin are the historically established "behaviour patterns of states," and there is "no reason to assume or expect" that they "will suddenly change or disappear." The Early Modern sea-based super-states assembled by "riparian" expansion around the Baltic Sea were destroyed by their competitors that exercised "transfluvial" expansion. Conflicts of this kind are universal and inevitable. The rivalry of the states never ceases. Hostile expansion is ever going.¹⁰⁹ NATO is a long-lasting alliance; however, from a geopolitical perspective, it lives only twice as long as the Kalmar Union and already a half of the Swedish Baltic empire's life-time. If history is a sum of precedents, besides its other natures, the "Baltic" challenge is knocking at NATO's door.

In what form does it come? It is a complex prediction that requires analysis of the crossing political, social, technical, and ideological trends that produce large-scale geopolitical change together. However, the examples of the Kalmar Union and Swedish Baltic empire foretell that besides the pressure of the geopolitical rivals from outside, which is well-advertised,¹¹⁰ the main threat lies inside. Geoffrey Parker proposes some important elements of decline from the dominating core's perspective. They are the failure of the conglomerate's core to impose the agenda of integration on the conglomerate periphery, halted expansion into hostile areas, and an exodus of the economic weight and political

109 SPYKMAN and ROLLINS, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy," P.I, 392, 394; P.II 611

110 GRYGIEL and WESS MITCHELL, *The Unquiet Frontier*.

power from the historical core of the conglomerate to its periphery.¹¹¹

NATO is a super-state cemented by the superior capabilities of the naval force in the North Atlantic to exercise domination over the surrounding coasts. Its wane or transformation following the technological changes is inevitable. Weakening of the seapower compound had finished the *Hanse*, the Swedish Baltic empire, and the British Empire of the dominions. Now it is a predictable threat to NATO's cohesion and functionality.

The perspective of the peripheral polities of the endangered conglomerate is different from the perspective of its centre. It is determined by the fundamental nature of their statehood. For example, Swedish participation in NATO and the European Union might be historically vulnerable because it contradicts the hinterland self-made foundation of the Swedish statehood. Considering that in the Baltic regional perspective, NATO is an alliance modelled after the Kalmar Union and the European Union is an association modelled after the Holy Roman Empire, it is rather probable that the Swedish hinterland social groups would turn to oppose integration with them.

The Swedish political body would split, and commitment to NATO and EU became hesitant for a long, disturbing period until Sweden would burst from the alliances amid some upheavals. What kind of changes could trigger the rise of discontented social groups? The experience of the Kalmar Union and Swedish Baltic empire advises that they might include the shift of the Swedish relative location due to climatic change or move of the international power dominants, excavation of some new minerals and emergence of some new economic sectors, military conflict, or ideological drivers like messianism and nationalism. All of these factors could be the agents of the driving force that has ruled over Swedish geopolitics for a thousand years. They could become a ram of the separatist statehood.

The dynamic of social and economic development promotes new social groups permanently. The supranational political structures and military organisations must either accommodate them and mutate according to their interests or they perish. Could this contradiction be detected in time and properly treated? It is the principal task of geopolitics as strategic practice.

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111 PARKER, *The Geopolitics of Domination*, p.8.

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The Atlantic: Pivot of maritime power? Empire, policy and conflict, 1700-1900

BY MARTIN ROBSON

In 1903 Germany decided to open up a communication route between Berlin and Baghdad. The intent was to provide a secure route for Mesopotamian oil to fuel the German economy and its developing navy. There were also strategic reasons, a railway would potentially open up Germany's East African colonies, and to serve as a broader commercial artery for German trading interests. A railway link between Berlin and Baghdad was selected due to very basic geopolitics. To go west via Alexandretta would have placed this strategic route at the mercy of the French. To export via Basra would have placed it at the mercy of British naval force, not just in the Middle East but, after transiting the Suez Canal, in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. It is somewhat noticeable, that in attempting to escape the straitjacket of its central European geopolitical position by pursuing a policy of colonial expansion and naval aggrandisement that relied upon oil, Germany could not escape the geopolitical reality of constraints in accessing the global economy. The railway ended in failure, with Germany lacking the ability to raise the finance nor possessing the necessary technical expertise. In a great power geopolitical contest for the control of oil, the nation possessing the will and the ability to exploit Mesopotamian oil was Britain.¹ As Andrew Lambert in his introduction to *Seapower States* wryly observed 'Adding navies and colonies to an existing great power, as was the case with Imperial Germany between 1890 and 1914, did not change the underlying strategic and cultural realities that compelled it to sustain a massive army and policies dominated by the European continent.'² Moreover, it was more than dominance of European affairs that mattered here, it was Germany's inability to access the Atlantic as a gateway to the rest of the world on a sustained basis that strategically hemmed it in. As this chapter will analyse, this was only the latest in a long line

1 Ediger, V. Ş., & Bowlus, J. V. (2020). Greasing the wheels: the Berlin-Baghdad railway and Ottoman oil, 1888-1907. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 56(2), 193-206.

2 Lambert, A. D. (2018). *Seapower states: maritime culture, continental empires and the conflict that made the modern world*. Yale University Press. pp.6-7.

of power struggles which categorised the period 1700-1900 between land based geopolitical entities who attempted to exert power at and from the sea and maritime empires as geopolitical entities. The central point of these clashes was control of access to the Atlantic.³

Introduction

At its basic level geopolitics is about time, people, place and space – the geo bit. To that can be added issues of control, borders, security, access – the politics, and at times, policy bit. Of course, this is a very simplistic interpretation of a complex and significant academic field which can dominate the manner in which global politics, international relations, political economy are researched and taught. Perusing the articles published in the past few issues of the journal *Geopolitics*, for example, displays a significant range in subject matter, almost to the point where, to quote Jean Claude Juncker speaking in December 2021, ‘Everything is geopolitical’.⁴ This is both accurate and unhelpful. Given the focus on the ‘Great Power’ dynamics evident in geopolitics, what we should really be thinking of is the output of geopolitics: power. One of the recurring themes in discussions about geopolitics from a strategic perspective can be summed up as the Mahan versus Mackinder debate, which often infuses contemporary thinking about how the United States and China can leverage power in a maritime and or a continental context.⁵

Nevertheless, the specifics of places do matter. In 1904 the Royal Navy’s First Sea Lord Admiral John ‘Jackie’ Fisher identified ‘Five keys lock up the world: Singapore, the Cape, Alexandria, Gibraltar, Dover’⁶ – sitting as they do as bits of land that have a significant relation to the unfettered utility of the

3 Mackinder, H. J. “The Geographical Pivot of History (1904).” *The Geographical Journal* 170, no. 4 (2004): 298–321.p.436. Mackinder had argued the Atlantic was the real divide between east and west. See Gray, C. S. “Sir Halford Mackinder and Geopolitics.” *The Geopolitics Of Super Power*, University Press of Kentucky, 1988, pp. 4–12, p.11.

4 Jean-Claude Juncker, Gilles Gressani, “Everything is geopolitical”, a conversation with Jean-Claude Juncker, Dec 2021. The groundwork of European power, Issue #3, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/conversation-with-jean-claude-juncker/> (Accessed 10/10/2024)

5 For a recent example see: Zhao, P. W. G., & Munadi, S. M. (2023). The role of Gwadar in China’s maritime strategy: A geostrategic dialogue between Mahan and Mackinder. *Comparative Strategy*, 42(4), 489–508.

6 Fisher to Selborne, 19.10.1904, containing Fisher’s ‘Scheme’, see section ‘The Strategic Distribution of the Fleet’, Fisher, J. A., & Kemp, P. K. (1960). *The papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*. 2v. Printed for the Navy Records Society. Vol 1, pp.160-161.

globe's shipping lanes. Mackinder himself noted the importance of maritime mobility and specifically the Cape route 'to connect the western and eastern coastal navigations of Euro-Asia, even though by a circuitous route, and thus in some measure to neutralize the strategical advantage of the central position of the steppe-nomads'.⁷ But they were still bits of land that needed political and strategic control to exert power from, into the maritime environment to control access to the global shipping routes. Since Fisher voiced his opinion much may have apparently changed, but some underlying principles remain. Project a visualisation of the shipping lanes from the Age of Sail and lay over one from today and not much has changed. Yes, there is Suez and Panama, but the traditional routes round the large continental landmasses have remained quite constant, never mind the continued use of brown water river routes (still maritime) as well as the importance of the broader maritime littoral environment. As of 2023 the number of people living in the near-coastal zone was 2.15 billion;⁸ eight of the top ten urban conurbations by population size are coastal and in 2001 more than half of the global population lived in coastal areas.⁹ Mackinder himself argued two-thirds of the world's population lived within the coastal zone.¹⁰ Wherever the 'heartland' what mattered to societies and peoples was maritime access.

One of the long-term trends in the developed world between 1700 and 1900 was increased urbanisation and decline of the rural, agricultural workforce.¹¹ Societies and peoples have tended towards settling on coastal areas or rivers, due to the ability to connect much more effectively by water, than using land-based connections. Mackinder portrays rivers as a mixed blessing, giving access into the continent to seapowers but often standing as barriers to movement of peoples. The development of internal canal networks, often aligned to river and coastal access, to shift bulk goods economically and much more effectively than on roads is completely ignored, instead Mackinder notes the importance of the Panama and Suez canals in global terms.¹² It was only with opening of land masses due to rail and then enhanced road technologies that land based

7 Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p. 432.

8 Reimann L, Vafeidis AT, Honsel LE. Population development as a driver of coastal risk: Current trends and future pathways. *Cambridge Prisms: Coastal Futures*. 2023;1:e14.

9 Human Settlements on the Coast, UN Atlas of the Oceans, <https://www.oceansatlas.org/sub-topic/en/c/114/>

10 Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p.428.

11 Grigg, D. B. "The World's Agricultural Labour Force 1800-1970." *Geography*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1975, pp. 194-202.

12 Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p.434.

communications became cost effective for trade and efficient for the movement of people. That is writ large for the movement of armies on land, at least until the late nineteenth century, as recognised by Martin van Creveld: 'the shipping of such supplies as were carried along by water was always very much easier than dragging them overland. While this particular consideration applied equally to all armies it was found, paradoxically, that the better a commander organized his supplies the more dependent on the waterways he became.'¹³ The challenges of feeding armies led to the development of the magazine system, food and supplies stockpiled in fortresses and or urban areas as well as the age old technique of foraging off the land, through purchase or plundering. As long as armies moved, they could subsist, but if forced to traverse a region previously stripped bare by friend or foe, or to even stay still, provided often unsurmountable challenges. When the Duke of Wellington formulated his strategy to defend Portugal in 1810 it was largely founded on the ability of the Royal Navy to keep his army supplied behind the fortified Lines of Torres Vedras much more effectively than Marshal Massena could feed his French army in a Portuguese countryside stripped of food and resources.¹⁴ With his army starving Massena eventually withdrew. It was the same principle that allowed the British and French to maintain military forces (at times, just) in the Crimea between 1854 and 1856. Mahan's analogy of France as the Elephant and Britain as the Whale, comfortable in their own environment but struggling in that of their opponent, is only partly accurate.

So while agreeing wholeheartedly with the great maritime theorist Sir Julian Corbett when he wrote 'Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do' it is worth pointing out that, as Fisher alluded to, not all 'land' is the same, or has the same value or, at times, even needs to be formally controlled.¹⁵ While Corbett was talking specifically about the use of a state's armed forces

13 Creveld, M. (2004) "The Background of Two Centuries." In *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, 5–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.10.

14 A point Mackinder recognises but does not develop in terms of getting the naval support and army there in the first place '...where the outside navies would support armies the pivot allies to deploy land forces and prevent them from co their whole strength. On a smaller scale that Wellington accomplished from his sea-base at Torres Vedras in the Peninsular War'. Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p.436.

15 Corbett, J. S. (1911) *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Longmans. p.16.

to achieve strategic effect he was also identifying a truism – when it comes to power, in a maritime context, the critical aspect is to quote Geoffrey Till, ‘the capacity to influence the behaviour of other people or things by what one does at or from the sea’.¹⁶ Hence, for maritime empires what they can do from the sea into the land domain matters an awful lot in terms of generating geopolitical power, but what happens at sea, to give them that ability, is absolutely critical and cannot be seen in isolation from the land. For a maritime empire to stand some chance of success against great continental powers it must be able to hit that continental power where it hurts, either alone or, in the case of Britain, with continental allies, but it must also keep in the fight by preventing continental powers from fatally damaging it in the maritime domain. Balancing these two aspects, often under the concept of ‘grand strategy’, sits at the heart of a strategic debate within Britain and the latterly USA for at least three centuries.

Mahan argued that ‘Control of the sea, by maritime commerce and naval supremacy, means predominant influence in the world; because, however great the wealth product of the land, nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea. The fundamental truth concerning the sea—perhaps we should rather say the water—is that it is Nature’s great medium of communication’.¹⁷ Furthermore, ‘the control of the seas and especially along the great lines drawn by national interest or national commerce is the chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations’.¹⁸ Generations of maritime thinkers, using the examples, like Mahan himself did, of the rise and fall of maritime empires, have argued that there is something distinctly different about maritime power as opposed to land power. As we saw above, this something that Mackinder himself noted. Colin Gray and Roger Barnett identified ‘an enduring geopolitical difference between land and sea that affects importantly how man thinks about his natural habitat, the land, and an environment that is fundamentally hostile to him, the sea. The natural condition of the land is to be politically controlled.... The natural condition of the sea, in sharp contrast, is to be uncontrolled’.¹⁹ They have a point, for if geopolitics focusses upon the structures of how states and other actors interact in the international system then how that works on land and how it works at sea are quite different. On land we talk of the

16 Till, G. (2013). *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (3rd ed., Vol. 51). Routledge. p.25.

17 Mahan, A.T. (1897). *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Port Washington. pp. 124-5.

18 Mahan, *Interest of America in Sea Power*, p.54.

19 Gray, C. S., & Barnett, R. W. (1989). *Seapower and strategy*. Tri-Service. p. ix.

danger of ‘ungoverned spaces’ outside of the ability of states to generate or impose security. At sea there is the concept of the high seas or international waters as eventually enshrined in maritime law. Before and after codification what mattered was access to and from those waters. On land there are political entities, states and peoples, engaging in societal, economic and other activities. Despite all the potential economic activity at sea and some people spending a considerable portion of their lives at sea, it is not the same as human interaction on land. In terms of maritime empires, it is not surprising that in a geopolitical sense, they were (and still are) very different to land based empires. Andrew Lambert has persuasively argued for the historical identify of ‘Seapower states’²⁰ – some states and their empires have been much more reliant upon the sea than others. That reliance has entered political culture, further shaping decision making. What I am arguing here, in the knowledge that other contributors in this volume are much better placed to assess aspects of geopolitics in Asia and beyond, is for a reassessment of the role of the Atlantic not, as Mackinder argued, as a divide between east and west but, certainly for maritime Atlantic empires, as a ‘maritime pivot’ of control and access in the formulation and implementation of global power politics.

A question of taxonomy?

So what makes a maritime empire different to a land empire and does this actually mean anything for debates about geopolitics? Mahan, Corbett, Till, Gray and many others have all argued that there is something fundamentally different. Mackinder agreed, given his focus on the fundamental differences related to the great Eurasian landmass he thought was the critical pivot of exerting power. In contrast, for Britain it was ensuring access to and through the Atlantic which defined its ability to project power.

Of course, some land empires can project power at and from the sea, and that can at times be done on a sustained basis. For example, the rise of US land based power in the nineteenth century was translated, due to a combination of geography, economics and politics, into sea power. Mahan in fact played no small part in that, as the prophet of sea power and convinced, due to his approach to history, that great power status as achieved by Britain, was only achievable through the exertion of maritime power through command of the sea.²¹ Naval mastery

20 Lambert, A. D. (2018). *Seapower states: maritime culture, continental empires and the conflict that made the modern world*. Yale University Press.

21 For example see his comments ‘The overwhelming sea power of England was the determin-

placed Britain as the foremost global power. The United States in the twentieth century did not, unlike the Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, British and French, build an empire at and from the sea, instead it forged its own domestic security through a number of internal and external conflicts and then influenced and exerted power through its relations with other powers and its ability to leverage its economic position.

Examining the 1700-1900 period reaps much reward and resonance as to why some states develop a maritime empire and some states look to exert maritime influence, for they are not the same in terms of the ability to exert power. Nor are they the same in terms of political and strategic vulnerabilities. What is noticeable here is, while land powers look to formally control territory, maritime powers look to regulate access, as Gray and Barnett note 'Wars, for the most part, have been fought to gain control of the land. States have also joined in combat to gain control of sea areas' noting that control is for a finite amount of time and with the intent of influencing war on land.²² It is worth remembering that when we talk about the creation of a maritime empire what we are, in effect, analysing is how powers, initially European, in the period 1700-1900 exerted influence and control over strategically important bits of land, whether that be the critical global nodes (some identified by Fisher) from which to project sea-power, trading entrepôts which facilitated the coming and going of seabased trade into landmasses (especially using river systems), or more significant bits of land accessible to a maritime power.

What is crucial is an understanding of how states actually connect up areas of population, agricultural, and later industrial, activity, giving them access points to the resources of the world. In other words, both land and maritime empires, and hence geopolitics itself, is nothing more than an exercise in building functioning networks. In the nineteenth century land empires utilised technology to connect strategic points within their own state sovereignty. As large continental powers the opening up of the American West and the route to the west coast by railways by the USA, or the opening up of the trans-Siberian railway by Russia allowed those states to turn vast swathes of their territory into connected and productive assets.²³ Maritime empires did the same in parts of the world, across Latin America, Africa, India the new technology of railway and the telegraph

ing factor in European history during the period mentioned [War of the Spanish Succession]. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p.209.

22 Gray, & Barnett, *Seapower and strategy*. p. x.

23 Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p.434.

allowed for the passage of people, goods and information in numbers and at a pace which provided significant benefits. But those connections required sea-power to connect globally.

At sea, the concept of the sea lines of communication and flagged merchant shipping provided the same glue, binding together the nodes of productive human activity with a significant difference. While some of these sea lines of communication passed through controlled or, in Mahan's words, commanded waters, on many occasions they passed through the high seas, uncontrolled international waters, critical here being the Atlantic shipping routes to North and South America, or round the Cape to the East, or through the Mediterranean to pick up shipping again in the Red Sea area.

In time of conflict, while a nation could generally protect its inland based communications at least until the advent of airpower brought strategic bombing into play, it was a much harder task to protect the sea lanes against hostile powers. For all that Germany could do at sea during the First World War through its initial and ineffective surface raider campaigns, it was its two bouts of unrestricted U-Boat warfare in 1915 and 1917 that caused great national concern alongside the strategic requirement to bottle up the High Seas Fleet in the North Sea. The effectiveness of the 1917 U-Boat campaign providing the critical pinch point in British maritime strategy leading to the introduction of the convoy system. Germany could not, however, interdict US or Russian railway lines. So what maritime powers and hence geopolitics is, is more than just the ability to provide security for sea lines of communication, it is setting the broader conditions of how that maritime network actually functions. To paraphrase Geoffrey Till, it is about investing in good order at and from the sea in order to ensure unfettered access to the worlds markets, raw materials, manufactured goods and, with increasing importance for Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, imported foodstuffs. This was as true for Britain in both World Wars as it was for Athens in the Peloponnesian war. Athens gave up the fight in 404BC because the sea lines of communication of its maritime empire were fatally severed by Sparta which had amassed sufficient naval force to project power into regions through which Athens critical supplies of grain were imported. The maintenance of those food imports had been the critical reason why Athens had built its long walls to Piraeus and the critical part of Periclean strategic vision for how Athens would fight against its powerful neighbour, Sparta.²⁴ Land-based powers can,

24 Morley, Neville, 'Thucydides' Legacy in Grand Strategy', in Thierry Balzacq, and Ronald R. Krebs (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* (2021; online edn, Oxford Academic,

with the political will and resources, become highly effective maritime powers as well. The United States in the twentieth and China in the twenty-first centuries being excellent examples. Sparta won in 404BC because as a land power it had, over the course of nearly 30 years, morphed effectively into a power that could project more effective maritime power than the traditional maritime power of Athens.

Twice ever thus, for in the 1700-1900 period states who could not break away from land based geopolitical concerns struggled to maintain an ability to project power at and from the Atlantic 'maritime pivot' in a sustained effective manner to break British dominance of it until the rise of American power Twentieth century.

The Atlantic as the maritime pivot

Towards the end of the Seventeenth and early in the Eighteenth centuries there developed a debate within British political circles about the economic benefits of maritime colonial wars as opposed to the drain on resources evidenced by committing British forces to Europe. Yet, it was not that simple, as Sidney, 1st Earl of Godolphin wrote when he was Lord High Treasurer 'We can't be in the Mediterranean, in Portugal, upon the Coast of France, and in the West Indies all at once'.²⁵ The economic benefits of colonial maritime power always had to be set against the costs of providing for its security. Also noteworthy was the critical development of the state monopoly of naval power, with taxation providing for a standing navy to provide for the security of overseas interests. As Kennedy noted 'Englishmen had already recognised that a lasting success for this policy depended not so much upon a rejection of Europe as upon a shrewd strategy of preventing a continental balance of power from altering to the country's detriment'.²⁶ Balancing European security interests against the economic benefits of a trans-Atlantic maritime empire identified by Satsuma and Kennedy, are highly evident in British thinking during the Seven Year War.

Between the start of hostilities in 1754 and 1760 when French Canada surrendered, the main focus for offensive aspects of British strategy during the Seven Years War was North America with operations in Europe to deny France

8 Sept. 2021), p.49.

25 Cited in Satsuma, S. (2013). *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower and the Atlantic* (1st ed.). Boydell & Brewer. p.127

26 Kennedy, P. M. (2016). *The rise and fall of British naval mastery* (New edition.). Penguin Books. p.67

significant gains, particularly with regard to Hanover, that would have to be traded at a peace for any overseas possessions that France might seize. France tried to win North America by taking a defensive stance and winning viz-a-viz Britain with an aggressive strategy in Europe. For Britain to succeed overseas required sustained exertion of maritime power at each end of the Trans-Atlantic maritime routes, in European waters and North America, to sever France's ability to keep its empire linked up with the metropole.

Britain achieved this, at considerable effort, requiring the development of maritime power bases in North America. Of particular note was the development of Halifax as an in-theatre naval base essential for the projection of maritime power. This required the mobilisation of imperial networks with ships stores including canvas shipped from New York and skilled shipwrights from Boston arriving in early 1758 with stores that could not be stored locally shipped out from England to ensure a Royal Navy squadron was ready to project power by blockading Louisburg. It was by no means perfect but with the Western Squadron interdicting at one end of the sea line of communication in European Waters and an effective deployment in North America, of the nineteen convoys the French tried to send across the Atlantic in late 1757 and 1758, only five made it without loss and five convoys did not get a single ship to Louisbourg or Quebec. The impact was felt when Louisbourg was attacked and taken by the British in July 1758, a critical stepping stone for the success the following year with operations in the St Lawrence and the fall of Quebec both benefitting from the exertion of Trans-Atlantic British maritime power in Europe and North America to isolate that latter from mainland France and, ultimately, the complete loss of French possessions in North America as confirmed in the Treaty of Paris.²⁷

France, a geopolitical heavyweight power in Europe, had failed to sustain its North American empire because it could not wrestle British dominance of the Atlantic. For Britain, an Atlanticist outlook had to be balanced with a political, monarchical and strategic requirement to make some kind of continental commitment to the security of Hanover involving the deployment of 'boots on the ground' in the form of His Britannic Majesty's Army in Germany and a significant subsidy to Frederick the Great. It was 'shield' to protect Hanover which allowed the maritime 'sword' to strike overseas. Britain's ability to do both of

27 Corbett, J. S. (1907). *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy*. Longmans. vol. 1, pp.315-6; Baugh, D. A. (2011). *The global Seven Years War, 1754-1763: Britain and France in a great power contest*. Longman., pp.339-340; Boscawen, H. (2011). *The Capture of Louisbourg 1758*. University of Oklahoma Press., pp.93-99, see also Table 2, pp.100-1.

these and in a manner more sustainable than France came from a combination of politics and economics. Yet, there were significant limits to British maritime power especially once one moved away from the Atlantic littoral. With his back to the wall and strategic defeat looming it was the death of Elizabeth, Empress of Russia on 5 January 1762 which was, as Frederick himself noted, 'The Miracle of the House of Brandenburg'.²⁸ Her Prussophile nephew Peter succeeded her, negotiated a truce and then a peace with Frederick. Russian troops had twice, during the course of the war, occupied Berlin and while ending the Prussia-Russo conflict Elizabeth's death did not mark an end to Russian geopolitical ambitions around East Prussia and control of the Eastern Baltic an area increasingly important for British naval supplies. Of course for Russia, the critical limitation in its geopolitical development was how to ensure timely and effective mobilisation of resources across its large landmass and how to effectively communicate with the outside world, given the terrible state of its internal land communications which existed for most of the period 1700-1900.²⁹ Russia's requirement for a window on the world was a driving factor in Russia's policy at the start of the century, solidified by the opportunity of and eventual success in the Great Northern War which established Russian control of the Eastern Baltic and marked a significant geopolitical power shift based upon success on with the land conquest of Livonia and Finland and concurrent development of Russian naval power. Success in the north was not matched in the south where war against the Ottoman Empire led to the loss of Azov.³⁰

British naval mobilisation was, at times, used as a deterrent, to leverage political negotiations. Twice, over the Falklands Islands in 1770 and at Nookta Sound in 1789 naval mobilisation added gravitas to the political discussions given the vulnerability of Spain and, in the latter case, the United States to naval power. In 1790-91, however, British attempts to limit Russian expansion across Eastern Europe, like earlier British attempts to prevent the carving up of Poland between Austria, Prussia and Russia in 1772, showed the limits of maritime power while great matters of European geopolitics were being decided. The

28 Schumann M. & Schweizer K. (2008) *The Seven Years War: A Transatlantic History*. Routledge, p. 211.

29 Russia faced significant challenges mobilising and then exerting power into Central Europe. See Duffy, C. (1981). *Russia's military way to the West: origins and nature of Russian military power, 1700-1800*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. And for the later period Lieven, D. C. B. (2010). *Russia against Napoleon: the battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814*. Penguin Books esp chapters 2 and 4.

30 Harding, R. (1999). *Seapower and naval warfare, 1650-1830* Routledge. pp. 188-189.

failure to give work for France to do in Europe between 1775-1783 (given the nature of European politics at this time there was no natural ally for Britain) culminated with the loss of Atlantic security, a French fleet exerting power in North America and the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown. Limitations were evident against other land empires and were reinforced by British failures in 1806 when attempting to force the Dardanelles and bombard Constantinople into a pro-British policy as much as the later failure of 1915.

In many respects, Russia faced a similar geopolitical conundrum as France between 1700 and 1900. France's great problem in its long maritime struggle with Britain was much more than its ability (or lack of it) to balance its European Security concerns which nearly always took priority, against its maritime ambitions. In the maritime sense, it was simple problem of geography. Britain, with excellent deep water ports on its South Coast and the pattern of prevailing winds, could dominate the Channel and Western Approaches in a cohesive manner. A South Westerly wind posed a danger to a British Fleet blockading the main French Atlantic base of Brest but it also kept the French Fleet in Harbour, a North Easterly or East wind allowed the French to sail but also for the Royal Navy to appear in timely fashion. With the creation of an effective supply at sea system from the Seven Years war onwards, blockading Brest was the cornerstone of British global strategy to control access to and from the Atlantic. The other limitation on France was the need to split its naval power into two operational theatres – the Channel Fleet based at Brest and the Mediterranean Fleet based at Toulon. Uniting these fleets was the object of much French thinking and a significant concern for Britain, but as Napoleon found out, it was much easier on paper than in reality. For Russia the problem was even more extreme, in order to project maritime power it required maritime access (i.e. control of land based ports, inland rivers, infrastructure) in not just the Baltic Sea but also the Black Sea and, eventually the Pacific Ocean. To attain a concentration of force in timely fashion was nigh on impossible. When it was obtained after the initial Japanese attack on Port Arthur in 1904 (leased to Russia by China) crippled the Russian Far East Fleet, Russia, through a lengthy process of transferring naval forces from the Black and Baltic seas to support the Russian Army operations in Manchuria and which was destroyed at Tsushima 27-28 May 1905.

Loss of the ability to contest for sea access significantly damaged both Russia and France's ability to play at global politics. French inability to fight effectively across the Transatlantic pivot doomed her to failure in both Europe and North America. Moreover, thanks to a superior credit rating based upon maritime trade, protected by the Royal Navy, Britain could borrow more money

over longer terms at a better rate of interest than France.³¹ As early as 1758 there were French concerns about fulfilling their subsidy arrangement with Austria and their own ability to finance army campaigns in Germany. In grand strategic terms, undermining the French economy at sea had an indirect effect upon French strategy in Europe, and that had an indirect effect upon Austria and Russia's war against Prussia.³²

This was not a focus on maritime geopolitics to the detriment of land geopolitics, however, Pitt the Elder recognised that 'You must always cast out work for France upon the continent whenever you go to war with that country'.³³ Between 1700 and 1900 when that did not happen during the American Revolutionary War, Britain lost control of the Atlantic, France and Spain interdicted the sea lines of communication and, as land powers, projected their transitory, but in this case, effective maritime power in a manner similar to Sparta in 404BC. The difference was one of object and resilience. In 1783 with the loss of the American Colonies the British empire refocused during the 1793-1815 period in a 'swing to the East' as identified by Michael Duffy³⁴ but a swing still based on Atlantic communications and security. Of course, it was in the 1793-1815 period that France, due to aggressive wars of Revolution and then Empire, provided plenty of work for herself and opportunity for alliances (coalitions) but despite the best (or at times not) efforts of British diplomacy, no amount of supplies and treasure could tempt European powers away from their own interests in the power makeup of Central and Eastern Europe to help London achieve British interests on the periphery in places such as the Mediterranean and Baltic.

Despite all the focus on the transatlantic primacy of British actions, Britain entered the war against Revolutionary France in February 1793 over security of the homeland due to the danger posed by French expansion into the Low Countries.³⁵ French control over Holland was a threat to Hanover, the electorate of King George III; gave France access to the Dutch navy and colonies; prevented

31 Morriss, R. (2010). *The Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources, Logistics and the State, 1755-1815* Cambridge University Press, p.100.

32 Szabo, F. (2007) *The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756-1763*. Routledge. pp.191-2.

33 Baugh, *Global Seven Years War*, pp.564-5, 639-641; Schumann and Schweizer, *The Seven Years War*, p.118; Morriss, *Foundations*, p.87-8, 97-100.

34 Duffy, M. (2001) 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815', in Marshall, P. J., (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume Two, The Eighteenth Century*. OUP. p.184.

35 Schroeder, P. W. (1994). *The transformation of European politics 1763-1848*. Clarendon Press. p.113.

British commercial shipping from utilising the Rhine and Meuse to serve the markets of central Europe; and, most importantly, posed a direct threat to British home security.³⁶

The Low Countries were the most favourable location in Europe from which to launch an invasion of Britain. The South coast of England was relatively protected by tides, currents, high cliffs and the fleet bases at Plymouth and Portsmouth. Directly opposite the River Thames, Britain's main commercial artery, and the open flat countryside of Essex, however, are the shipbuilding ports of Antwerp and Flushing and the Scheldt, Rhine and Mass estuaries. Conquest of the Low Countries in 1794-95 provided France with access to this ideal location from which to launch an invasion of Britain. 'In the Napoleonic wars' Michael Howard argued 'the British fought in the Low Countries whenever they had allies to fight for'.³⁷ Britain began the war by assisting Austria in the Low Countries, and an Anglo-Russian expedition was despatched to the Helder in 1799. In 1809 a massive amphibious operation was launched against the French naval facilities at Walcheren. Waterloo was fought on the road to Antwerp for to leave that place in the hands of the French, Castlereagh wrote, 'is little short of imposing upon Great Britain the charge of a perpetual war establishment'.³⁸ Controlling the Atlantic pivot in a maritime imperial sense would be no good if the British Isles were subject to invasion.

Success at Trafalgar in 1805 actually did both; preventing any naval invasion by France and securing control of the Atlantic, prompting a significant shift in French policy. Economic warfare was always integral to British strategy but from 1805 played an enhanced role in French thinking. The Berlin Decree of 21 November 1806 and two Milan Decrees in late 1807 declared the British Isles under blockade and prohibited all commerce between the continent and Britain and her colonies. Napoleon's economic warfare strategy reached its zenith during late 1807 and early 1808. The signing of the Treaties of Tilsit in July 1807, between France and Russia, confirmed Napoleon's dominance of continental Europe and left Britain strategically isolated with no major allies in Europe. Napoleon's object was to create an imbalance in British trade, reducing revenue and the inflow of specie, this would also undermine British credit, thereby limiting Britain's ability to pay subsidies to allies and fund military

36 Hall, C. D. (1992). *British strategy in the Napoleonic war, 1803-15*. Manchester University Press. pp.83-85.

37 Howard, (1983) *The causes of war and other essays*. Temple Smith., p.179.

38 Citation in Hall, *British Strategy*. p.86.

expeditions, all of which was, of course, vital for continuing the war against France.³⁹ Yet Napoleon could not challenge British control of the Atlantic and global trade.

Britain responded by imposing political and economic terms on neutral trade. By 1808 the British government realised the war had become a global contest for economic superiority and that at the end of conflict the accounts would have to be balanced. If Britain ended the wars as the carrier of global trade it would compensate her for the sacrifices made in the same way the European powers would want territorial compensation for their war efforts. Foreign Secretary George Canning identified control of the Atlantic would enable Britain to become:

...the carrier of the commerce of the continent of Europe, as, no other could, under the above circumstances, trade to the W. Indies and Spanish America but herself; this would annihilate the marine of all the powers in Europe, as, in a few years for want of employment, it would sink into insignificance.

In this case 'England would, by adopting these measures with promptitude and vigour, become mistress of the seas'. British strategy was now focused on dominating global maritime commerce, facilitated by the world's largest merchant marine and protected by the world's largest naval force, the Royal Navy. This would provide the finance necessary to continue to fight Napoleonic France.⁴⁰

The Atlantic and the Americas

The USA only became a systemic challenger to British Transatlantic hegemony towards the end of the period under consideration, but it wise to address it first. It was disagreements over maritime rights that contributed to war between the USA and Britain in 1812 but for all the American boasting regarding their heavy frigate successes at no time did the fledgling US navy threaten Britain's control of the Atlantic. In fact, Britain, not for the first time nor last time, traded with the enemy as American and neutral shipping carrying American flour and cereals to Wellington's Army in the Peninsula were granted licences to exempt them from the Royal Navy's blockade of the US coastline. This trade contin-

39 Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, pp.311-331. Davis . L. E. and Engerman S. L. (2012), *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History since 1750*. CUP. pp.328-31.

40 Memorandum by Canning, 2 Apr 1808, Canning Papers, HAR GC, 46a.

ued until 1813 when alternative sources were found, including Russian wheat from the Mediterranean and Brazilian wheat.⁴¹ Later in the nineteenth century the rise of the USA, along with other potential naval rivals, led to some British compromises in their approach to maritime war, as Lemnitzer has argued regarding the Declaration of Paris in 1856 which formalised the rights of neutrals. British concerns in the later years of the century focussed on the potential for a coalition of naval rivals acting against British interests. Key was the US rise to become the world's second most numerous merchant marine, something that Russia or France could not achieve. So while the US navy lagged behind the Royal Navy, the US was certainly making commercial inroads into Britain's hegemonic transatlantic position.⁴² To the commercial threat would be added the naval threat posed by Washington's expansive naval programme, partly infused by Mahan's thinking, success in the 1898 Spanish-American War and the very visible naval power displayed between late 1907 and 1909 by President Roosevelt's 'Great White Fleet' and its trans-global voyage.

Just over a hundred years before American naval power made its global presence felt, Trafalgar had dealt a fatal blow to the Spanish transatlantic Empire. It was Portugal's unwillingness to enforce the resultant Continental blockade that led Napoleon into Iberia and then Russia's intransigence that led him to the invasion of 1812. The French elephant, frustrated by the British Whale, ended up taking on a much bigger Russian Elephant with disastrous consequences. For Spain and Portugal, their very strengths were based on the transatlantic flow of precious metals from Latin America. Control of this allowed Britain to penetrate the lucrative markets of Spanish America. British exports to areas in the Americas outside of the USA, valued at £7.8 million in 1805, increased following the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil from £10,440,000 in 1807 to £16,590,000 in 1808. With the traditional European markets constrained by the Continental Blockade and exports to the lucrative US markets halving (over £8m down to £4m) between 1806 and 1808 Latin America became the crucial region for opening up new markets for British trade. For a few years between 1806 and 1808, South America 'really *was* important to Britain'.⁴³

41 Hall, *British Strategy*, p.32. W. Freeman Galpin, (1923) 'The American Grain Trade to the Spanish Peninsula, 1810-1814', *American Historical Review* XXVIII, pp.24-25; Knight R. and Wilcox M., (2010) *Sustaining the fleet, 1793-1815: war, the British Navy and the contractor state*. The Boydell Press, p.10, 54; Morriss, *Foundations*, p.389.

42 Lemnitzer, J. (2014). *Power, Law and the End of Privateering*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.173.

43 Blanning, T. (2007) *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648-1815*. Penguin. p.111; Emsley, C. (1993) *The Longman Companion to Napoleonic Europe*. Longman. p.132; Hall, *British Strat-*

Control of the Atlantic provided access, the critical element of maritime geopolitics. During the latter years of the Napoleonic Wars and beyond the Spanish transatlantic Empire was riven by independence movements. The fear in London was of Spain diverting resources away from the fight against France, but also of the independence movements looking to France for support. Controlling South American trade would, it was hoped in London, also stop the penetration of South American markets by the United States.⁴⁴ British policy was, therefore, focussed on commerce, an informal imperial policy, the main object was not large-scale military conquest, Duffy argues, but to 'occupy strategic points from which to establish commerce with Spanish America...in this way British influence could be established without requiring the burdens of direct rule over the whole continent'.⁴⁵

British concerns over Latin America were heightened during the complex succession wars that broke out in Portugal and Spain during the late 1820s and early 1830s, the origins of which can be traced back to the Napoleonic Wars.⁴⁶ Argentina achieved its independence in 1818, formally recognised by Britain in the 'Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation' of 1825 which, amongst other things, regulated trade between the two countries.⁴⁷ The treaty was reflective of British policy which was, according to Kaufmann, based on 'the pervasiveness of British trade and the intangibles of prestige and example to with the general confidence of the Latin Americans'.⁴⁸ London was more at home brokering the peace between Argentina and Brazil in 1828, leading to the creation of the buffer state of Uruguay, than using force to enact policy. Atlantic maritime supremacy provided the ability to leverage influence rather than control, to balance as noted by McLean: 'London did not seem to worry much about Latin America beyond the need to keep its markets open and its politics independent

egy. pp.97-98, 112-113; Kaufmann W. W. (1967), *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828*, Archon Books, pp.10-13; Popham H. (1991) *A Damned Cunning Fellow, The eventful life of Rear-Admiral Sir Home Popham 1762-1820*, The Old Ferry Press, pp.133-134, Platt D. C. M. (1972), *Latin America and British Trade, 1806-1914*, Adam and Charles Black, pp.4-7, 28, Table 1.

44 Memorandum by George Canning, 2.4.1808, HAR GC, 46a. [need disclaimer from book]

45 Duffy, 'World-Wide War'. p.193.

46 For an accessible overview see Brett E. M., (2005) *The British Auxiliary Legion in the First Carlist War, 1835-1838*, Four Courts Press. chpts 1 and 2.

47 Gallo, K. (2001). *Great Britain and Argentina: From Invasion to Recognition, 1806-26*. Palgrave Macmillan Limited, p.157

48 Kaufmann, *British Policy*, p.202.

of undue influence from either France or the United States'.⁴⁹ British policy could do little to prevent war breaking out between Argentina and Uruguay in 1839 and hence was somewhat reactive. The deployment of an Anglo-French fleet, its blockade of the Paraná and actions in bombarding Argentine shore batteries in 1845 had a clear commercial driver: transatlantic naval power was utilised to enforce commercial relations. Longer term benefits followed the 1847 lifting of the blockade culminating in 1852 with Argentine recognition that the principal tributaries of the River Plate were international waters and thereby open to the commerce of all nations.⁵⁰

This approach continued into the 1860s with the River Plate opened to trade in the 1863 Treaty of Free Navigation. With Barings Bank already present the decade also witnessed the creation of the London and River Plate Bank. Critical was the opening up of the interior and the greater ability to move commerce to and from the sea by the building of railways, often funded by British money and built with British expertise, but also reliant on the juxtaposition of London boards of control segued with local, commercial and mercantile, knowledge.⁵¹ The effects were tangible, Argentinian exports grew 4.9% between 1850 and 1870 and an export growth purchasing power growth rate of 8.2% between 1870 and the Barings crisis of 1890.⁵² By the latter part of the nineteenth century, therefore, Anglo-Argentine relations had been normalised in an 'informal' sense through British money and engineering, based on an interest in mutually beneficial commerce. Developing the interior would have been pointless without access to the sea lanes:

Stability fostered trade, trade generated revenue and both in turn fostered stability. Argentine exports began to grow, facilitating imports from Britain. As the first railways snaked their way across the pampas, they attracted British investment, boosted exports and, the British Minister observed, brought the benefits of 'civilization and business'⁵³

The full commercial and economic benefits of 'informal' economic empire

49 Mclean, D. (2007). Trade, Politics and the Navy in Latin America: The British in the Paraná, 1845-46. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35(3). p.353.

50 Mclean, Trade, Politics and the Navy, p.366.

51 See Lewis, C. M. (2008). Britain, the Argentine and Informal Empire: Rethinking the Role of Railway Companies. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 27(s1), 99-123.

52 Miles, W., (2009) 'The Barings Crisis in Argentina: The role of exogenous European money market factors' *Review of Political Economy*, 14:1, p.9.

53 Knight, A. (2008). Rethinking British Informal Empire in Latin America (Especially Argentina). *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 27(s1), 23-48. p.40.

were felt because London, perhaps still lingering under the shadow of the military disasters of 1806-7, resisted meddling in internal Argentine politics, religion and civil society. From order and stability flowed riches.

Unlike other parts of Latin America, Argentine stability attracted British investment which was needed for further development. Even the Barings Crisis of 1890, when Argentina defaulted on £48 million worth of debt, did not rock the boat of Anglo-Argentine relations. Instead, fiscal intervention restructured the Argentine debt, and while it took a decade for Argentina to recover, investors were not deterred.⁵⁴

By 1913-14, when British investment in the Dominions, Dependant Empire and China totalled £1,76bn, the largest Dominion investment was in Canada at just over £500m. Latin America, at £1,18bn, received more UK investment than any single Dominion.⁵⁵ In 1912 the US was Britain's largest trading partner, with a total (import and export trade) valued at £186 million, followed by British India (£137.6m) and Germany (107.5m). Argentina was further down the list of trading partners with a total trade of £48m, the figures for 1913 show British exports at £22.6 million and imports at £42.5 million.⁵⁶ In 1913 British investments were 60% of all foreign investments in Argentina. Britain was still the major trading partner with Argentina, and if the coffee trade with the United States were removed, then the same would be the case with Brazil.⁵⁷

Between 1909-1913 grain imports accounted for 78.7% of wheat and flour consumption in Britain.⁵⁸ UK total grain imports in 1913 were 9.9million metric tons with a value of £80.9 million.⁵⁹ Much of this came from the Dominions, Canada, India and Australasia, with Argentina the second largest foreign supplier behind the United States. Argentina was, however, the largest supplier of maize to the UK.⁶⁰ The Argentinean wheat trade was controlled by four big

54 Mitchener, K. J., & Weidenmier, M. D. (2008). The Baring Crisis and the Great Latin American Meltdown of the 1890s. *The Journal of Economic History*, 68(2), 462–500.

55 Knight, A. (1999). Britain and Latin America. In *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*. Oxford University Press. pp.135-7.

56 Platt, *Latin America*, see appendices.

57 Dehne, P. (2009). *On the far Western Front: Britain's First World War in South America*. Manchester University Press pp.8-12. Knight 'Britain and Latin America', p. 141.

58 Broadberry, S., & Howlett, P. (2005). The United Kingdom during World War I: business as usual? In *The Economics of World War I* (pp. 206–234). Cambridge University Press. pp. 211-2, 224.

59 Offer, A. (2023). *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation*. Clarendon Press, p.219.

60 Platt, *Latin America*, p.264.

firms, all managed by businessmen who identified themselves as German. In 1914 British business only had a 9% share of Argentinian grain exports as opposed to the 60% share from the big four. As an importer of wheat, most of this German controlled trade was destined for Britain. In 1913 Sir Reginald Tower, British Minister at Buenos Aires, warned the Foreign Office that German controlled firms had a stranglehold over the sinews of vital British food imports.⁶¹

Between 1909 and 1913 imported meat accounted for 35-40% of meat consumption in Britain.⁶² In 1907 Britain obtained the majority of its imported meat from the US, but by 1911 the largest supplier was Argentina, accounting for 16% of the British import trade, mainly as frozen beef. The majority of South American meat was shipped from the River Plate area. For frozen and chilled beef, South America supplied 82.6% of British imports, which was 29.97% of domestic consumption, and 25.83% of mutton and lamb, equating to 11.9% of domestic consumption.⁶³ To South American exports must be added the meat imports which came from New Zealand round Cape Horn and followed the South American routes, leading the Official Historian of the Great War and Seaborne Trade to calculate from official figures that in the years of peace 84% of the Beef and 67% of mutton imported into Britain came from or through South American waters.⁶⁴

Ivan Bloch had stated in 1898 'You cannot fight unless you can eat'.⁶⁵ MacKinder had in 1904, somewhat clumsily, noted the 'vast potential' of South America and the value it may have and influence upon his 'pivot' system of geopolitics for the USA or 'if Germany were to challenge the Monroe doctrine successfully, they might detach Berlin from what I may perhaps describe as a pivot policy'.⁶⁶ This assumed US and German access to South America, which was fine in peacetime, but surely would be challenged by British naval power in time of war. In percentage terms, 40% of British meat and wheat imports followed the route from the River Plate, up the Brazilian coast then through the Atlantic to Britain. In the years before the First World War the UK was the largest importer of food in the world, importing by sea, more than half its food by value

61 Dehne. *On the far Western Front*, pp.16-17.

62 Broadberry & Howlett, 'The United Kingdom during World War I' pp. 211-2, 224.

63 Platt, *Latin America*, pp.263-264.

64 Fayle, C. E. (1997). *Official History of the Great War: Seaborne trade. Vol 1, The Cruiser Period*. Imperial War Museum. p.159

65 Cited in Offer, p.11

66 Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, p.436.

and at least 58% and perhaps up to 64% of its calories.⁶⁷ When looking at where this came from and how it got to the UK, it is hard not to agree with Dehne's statement that 'By 1914, the River Plate region had become an irreplaceable source of food for the United Kingdom'.⁶⁸

While South American waters were attractive due to the value and strategic importance of British investments and trade, and the large volume of tonnage, there was a significant factor linking all this together – the large ocean going British registered refrigerated ships which kept the vital supply of chilled and frozen meat flowing between the River Plate and the UK. By 1914 there were over 200 British steamers working in the refrigerated trade, though admittedly not all were on the South American route. On the eve of the war Britain controlled nearly all of the refrigerated shipping on the South American route. With the Atlantic trade routes of critical importance to keeping food flowing into Britain, it is no surprise that Avner Offer argues for a pivot away from the Channel and the Western Front towards an Atlantic orientation of British strategy;⁶⁹ something Alan Knight has also recognised:

'While South America would not expend blood on behalf of the British Empire, it yielded treasure and, so long as liberal Anglophile oligarchs ruled, displayed an intangible politico-cultural sympathy which, by the 1900s, contributed to the 'Atlantic orientation' of Britain's grand strategy.'⁷⁰

Conclusion

I have gone beyond a start date of 1700 and an end date of 1900, history is never that tidy. I have only considered part of the geopolitical, maritime imperial experience in that broad timescale. The justification for those decisions is a critical focus on maritime geopolitics, and for the period examined it is clear that the Transatlantic pivot sat front and centre in global geopolitics, the rise of the British Empire and the failure of land based empires to consistently challenge that position.

In this period the critical issue for the British was how to balance the advantages and dangers of a Transatlantic maritime empire with the ability to translate that power into influence upon the politics and strategies of the large continental powers in power struggles within and outside of the European landmass,

67 Offer, *First World War*, p.81.

68 Dehne, *On the far Western Front*, p.164.

69 Offer, *The First World War*, p.4.

70 Knight 'Britain and Latin America', p. 141.

starting with France, then moving on to include a united Germany, Russia and eventually the United States. The latter becoming the only power rising both on land and at sea to pose a sustained challenge to British maritime hegemony; a challenge that would become much more evident in the Inter-War period.

Security and control of maritime trade was at the heart of the system providing the money and credit which allowed for long term fiscal planning: 'British naval power ensured that Britain gained this wealth and her opponents lost it, and this was vital to the ability to the British state to finance its actions in peace and war'.⁷¹

The whole broad period of 1700-1900 highlights the challenges around framing a discussion of the influence of geopolitics as a framework, especially as it can tend towards a narrow and limited perspective of a defining policy and strategy around the extremes of a maritime 'blue water' version versus the primacy of continental power. Such a narrow framing ignores two aspects. The first is that power and the exercise of power through strategy is relative. Second, it also ignores a fundamental facet that Corbett always stressed that wars were (and still are) not the same for all the protagonists:

...wars tend to take certain forms each with a marked idiosyncrasy; that these forms are normally related to the object of the war and to its value to one or both belligerents; that a system of operations which suits one form may not be that best suited to another.⁷²

The lesson of success and limitations for Britain, France, Spain, Russia and others is writ large. France could afford to lose her North American colonies and still be a powerful European nation. For the Iberian powers it was more problematic, but they could survive. For Russia and Prussia then Germany projecting power was secondary to land based security. For the latter power, the ideological framework of *Weltpolitik* in the first half of the twentieth century would clearly require the delivery of control of the Atlantic as a way to project power effectively across Africa and, as Goda has argued, the Americas including the USA.⁷³ The Imperial German Navy's inability to break out from the North Sea in 1914-1918 constrained Germany's *Weltpolitik* ambitions (which had already been shown to lack effective power over Morocco).⁷⁴ No matter how effective

71 Black, J. (1999), *Britain as a military power, 1688-1815*. UCL Press. p.221.

72 Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, p. 9.

73 Goda, N. J. W. (1998), *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path towards America* (College Station: Texas A & M U.P.).

74 Murray, M. (2018) 'Weltpolitik: The German Aspiration for World Power Status', *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (Ox-

the U-Boat campaigns were in 1915 and especially 1917 (before the Admiralty introduced convoys) at interdicting, Germany could not make permanent inroads into controlling access to and from the Atlantic shipping lanes. Learning from that, Nazi naval building was focused on the acquisition of a new surface fleet to contest localised control of the British transatlantic sea lanes by breaking up convoys, leaving them vulnerable to attack to the other part of the *Kriegsmarine's Weltpolitik*, the U-Boat Wolfpacks. But again, it was Germany's critical priority, the conflict on land, that meant *Weltpolitik* based on naval access could only be a transitory, not a permanent, proposition. In a final sense then, the Allies bridging the transatlantic air gap in 1942-43 can be seen as the transition of the British Empire's Atlantic Pivot into the North Atlantic Community's Pivot, increasingly dominated by the USA's interpretation of global power viz-a-viz Germany and then the Soviet Union and predicted by Mackinder and others.⁷⁵

In contrast to the European powers, Britain was not part of the European system; it was on the periphery – only marginally a European Country. But it *was* at the centre of an Atlantic Empire, encompassing possessions in the West Indies, East Indies and Canada. This Empire was based on maritime commerce and protected by the Royal Navy. At its heart was control and access to and from the Atlantic. For Britain, given the critical importance of food imports, by the time of the First and Second World Wars that control and access had become a matter of life and death.

ford Academic). 87–112.

75 Gray, C. (2004). In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On. *Comparative Strategy*, 23(1), 9–25. Esp 13–15.



The Atlantic Ocean, showing the positions of the Ocean Actions of the War of 1812 and the movements of the squadrons in July and August 1812. From A. T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1905, I, p. 326.

The Rise of the Marathas: A Geopolitical Analysis

BY KAUSHIK ROY

Introduction

The long war between the Marathas and the British East India Company (EIC) for controlling the Indian subcontinent started in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the 1820s, the Marathas were down and out and the EIC emerged victorious. We have a few works dealing with the three Anglo-Maratha Wars. However, there is no study which explains how and why the Marathas became the premier indigenous power to challenge the *vilayati* (foreign) 'hat wearers.' This paper analyses the rise of the Marathas through the lens of geopolitics. Geopolitics in my conceptualisation is the product of geography, politics, economy, culture, and history. Geographical factors influence political culture, economic activities, and the historical process. Hence, in my analysis, geography is the principal driver in shaping geopolitics. Besides long-term impersonal factors, human agency also plays an important role in shaping geopolitics. Geopolitics in my understanding operates both at the level of grand strategy and military strategy. Grand strategy is an amalgam of foreign policy, military strategy, and internal politics. Military strategy is the art of using military assets for gaining political objectives. The focus of this paper is the period stretching from mid seventeenth century to mid eighteenth century. During this time frame, the Marathas were transformed from mere insurgents into an all-India power.

Geographical Context of Maratha Geopolitics

The Marathas are inhabitants of Maharashtra in west India which comprises three regions: the Konkan, Western Ghats, and the Desh. The Konkan is the most fertile region of Maharashtra. Konkan is a long narrow strip about 30 miles wide and extends from Goa to Daman for 240 miles.¹ Rainfall in this region is

1 Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English Concerns in Indostan*. 1782, reprint, Strand, London 1805, p. 21.

over 80 inches a year. The region had several coastal ports. The Western Ghats rises sharply from the Konkan Coast and is characterised by steep separated peaks and a few passes. In the eighteenth century, these mountains were covered with dense vegetation. Food and fodder in this mountainous area were scarce. Hence, it was difficult for an invader like the Mughals to keep a big army in this region indefinitely for subduing the Marathas. The Desh is a broad plateau widest at the Western Ghats and narrowing in the east. This region has three principal rivers: Purna-Tapti in the north, Godavari, and the Krishna-Bhima.² These rivers were not navigable. Thanks to the unique geographical position of Maharashtra, the Marathas were in a position to cut off communication between southern and northern parts of India. Hence any power (Mughals or the EIC) attempting to establish an all-India empire had to tackle the Marathas.

The infantry soldiers in the Maratha Army were the Mavle highlanders. They inhabited the Western Ghats and this region was economically backward due to poor soil conditions. Absence of roads and navigable rivers also thwarted development of commercial activities. Since there was no prospect of agriculture or trade and commerce for them, perforce they turned to banditry. Under the leadership of their hereditary *deshmukhs* (high caste landlords), these groups engaged in plundering the territories in the plains. Shivaji (1627-1680), the founder of the Maratha power, enlisted the support of these *deshmukhs*. The opportunity for plunder attached them to Shivaji's banner. These highlanders were well acquainted with the topography and knew about the secret small paths across the mountains. The Mavles made excellent scouts and commando troops in the Maratha guerrilla units.³

Besides being economically remunerative, military service, served as a vehicle for upward mobility. In fact, the status of a warrior was higher than a *kunbi* (a peasant who happened to be of low caste). Military service gave the *kunbi* the prestigious status of being a Maratha. This factor motivated many from the low castes to join the army. Take for example the family of Holkar who were Shudras (the lowest caste). They were shepherds. Malhar Rao Holkar born in 1693 took service with his maternal uncle named Narayanji. Narayanji by dint of his military service under Kadam Bandi, a Maratha *sirdar* (chieftain) became a landholder at Talunda in Khandesh. Narayanji placed Malhar Rao in command

2 Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India*, II.4, *The Marathas, 1600-1818*. 1998, reprint, Foundation Books, New Delhi 2000, pp. 12-3.

3 N.S. Takakhav and K.A. Keluskar, *The Life of Shivaji Maharaj: Founder of the Maratha Empire*. Manoranjan Press, Bombay 1921, pp. 36-7.

of 20 horsemen. Soon the able Malhar became an independent military mercenary. He took service with the *Peshwa* (Prime Minister of the Maratha Confederacy) Baji Rao I who gave him command over 500 cavalry. By dint of his extraordinary service in Konkan against the Portuguese and in Deccan against the Nizam (Mughal governor) of Hyderabad, Malhar in 1731, gained land north of Narmada River. At this point Malhar from a military mercenary became a politico-military entrepreneur and ruler of a territorial base. Such an entrepreneur had a territorial fief, a contingent of his own and a standard. At the height of his power, Malhar was assigned *jagirs* (land grants in lieu of military service) worth Rs 40 lakhs (1 lakh=100,000) in Malwa and Rs 20 lakhs in Deccan south of the Satpura Range. His obligation was to maintain a contingent of 15,000 cavalry for the Maratha Confederacy.⁴

In premodern India, the three terms: bandits, mercenaries, and military entrepreneurs, were interchangeable. Successful bandits became military mercenaries and those mercenary leaders who excelled occasionally became the ruler of a territorial unit. Then they could be categorised as politico-military entrepreneurs. The Bhonsle clan among the Maratha caste proved most successful in undergoing this transition in precolonial Maharashtra. They were *patils* (headmen of villages), bandits and also functioned as mercenaries for the Ahmदनagar Sultanate. Ambition, lack of prospect in agriculture and greed for quick money and power encouraged men to become bandits and military mercenaries.

Each of these *sirdars* had under them a number of bandit leaders commanding bands of armed men. With the loot (cash and kind like jewels, gold, grain, etc.) gathered from robbing, pillaging, and plundering, the ambitious bandit leaders went to the bankers. The bankers sold them horses, saddle, and weapons in exchange of the loot. Then the well-equipped bandit leader took service with the Maratha *sirdar* and became a leader of a military mercenary band of the state. These mercenary leaders were nefarious in changing their loyalties as per their selfish interests. The successful military mercenary leader got *jagir*, which became his territorial fief. Then, he became a politico-military entrepreneur and a noble of the state. He legitimised his activities and increased his popularity by providing alms to the religious persons, building temples for providing spiritual solace and dug wells to increase the productivity of his *jagir*.⁵ For all these rea-

4 Major-General John Malcolm, *Report on the Province of Malwa, and Adjoining Districts*. Government Gazette Press, Calcutta 1822, pp. 93-7, 100.

5 Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and his Times*. 1919, reprint, M.C. Sarkar & Sons, Calcutta 1961, pp. 14-6.

sons, there was no shortage of military manpower in Maharashtra. This was one of the reasons for the Maratha military upsurge continuing even after the death of Shivaji in 1680.

In August 1687, Santaji Ghorparde with 18,000 cavalry led a plundering raid against Mysore. Simultaneously, another Maratha force sent by Harji Mahadik plundered Punamali, Arcot and Kanchipuram. The Maratha force swelled in size during the 1680s and 1690s. The severe drought in 1681 and consequent devastation of agriculture aggravated by continuous campaigning by the Mughal Army and Maratha bands forced the desperate peasantry to throw their lot with the Maratha raiders. Not only were the lands of the peasants plundered and burnt but their farm animals were also taken away by the armies. After all, the peasants concluded that they could at least get two meals a day by joining the bands of bandits and subsist through pillage and plunder. The destruction of the Bijapur and Golkonda Sultanates in 1686 and 1687 by the Mughals resulted in disbandment of numerous Maratha mercenary soldiers of these two polities. Not all of them were absorbed in the Mughal Army. These unemployed soldiers (both Hindus and Muslims) joined the service of the various Maratha *sirdars* who were pillaging and plundering Deccan. The situation was further exacerbated when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb ordered the disbandment of the armed retainers of the zamindars of Bijapur and Golkonda. Aurangzeb did this to check the rebellious tendencies among the unruly zamindars who refused to pay the land revenue regularly. Ironically, these zamindars then became easy prey for Maratha warbands because the Mughal Army could not provide them 24x7 protection for 365 days. So, pacification required a scheme for absorption of the disbanded and demobilised soldiers of enemy states that had collapsed. During 1694-1695, in total there were 100,000 Marathas under arm.⁶

Maharashtra is separated from the neighbouring areas by the Vindhya Mountains and the Satpura Range and the Western Ghats. This geographical isolation resulted in the development of a separate vernacular known as Marathi in this region. Due to development of Marathi language, a sense of Maratha identity spread among the inhabitants of Maharashtra. Shivaji motivated the Marathis to

6 C.A. Kincaid and Rao Bahadur D.B. Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 2, *From the Death of Shivaji to the Death of Shahu*. Humphrey Milford, London 1922, pp. 46, 83; Anon, *Origin of Pindaries preceded by Historical Notices on the Rise of the Different Mahratta States*. John Murray, London 1818, pp. 9-10; *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, *Siva Chhatrapati being a translation of Sabhasad Bakhar with Extracts from Chitnis and Sivadigvijaya*, by Surendranath Sen. University of Calcutta, Calcutta 1920, pp. 153-54.

fight the foreign Muslim Mughals. The insurgency after Shivaji's death became a sort of 'People's War.'

The Maratha insurgency was fuelled by a sense of premodern Hindu nationalism.⁷ Ideology amalgamated with Marathi identity played a crucial role in sustaining the Maratha movement. Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha movement told the Muslim Sultan of Bijapur 'We are Hindus and the rightful lords of the realm. It is not proper for us to witness cow slaughter and oppression of the Brahmins.'⁸ In 1659, Moro Pant, the Commander-in-Chief of Shivaji's force ordered *Sirdar* Pratap Rao to capture Konkan. The mission, emphasised Moro Pant was to destroy the Mughal force and establish 'Hindu *Dharam* (religion) and *Rajya* (rule).'⁹ The policy of the *Peshwas* after the death of Shivaji was to establish Hindu *Padpadshahi* (Hindu Empire) in place of the Muslim ruled Mughal Empire.

Shivaji's Geopolitics: Ganimi Kava for Swarajya

Men will be spoilt, if they tried to find out the Mughal Army and fight a pitched battle. The army should be cleverly kept intact and the enemy harassed.

Shivaji¹⁰

The above statement summed up Shivaji's way of war. The Marathas' date with history started with Shivaji. Shivaji on land fought the armies of Bijapur, Golkonda, and the Mughals. Shivaji's area of operations was Deccan (Maharashtra and Karnataka). His naval operations were confined to the coastal areas of Maharashtra. Shivaji's geopolitical strategy was to establish an independent Maratha state (*swarajya*) in Maharashtra by waging *ganimi kava* (guerrilla warfare) both on land and sea against the Mughals and the European trading companies. Shivaji the most successful politico-military entrepreneur became a monarch and established a polity. Besides his skill in politicking and diplomacy, Shivaji's success was mainly due to his ability to tune his military system to fit

7 Takakhav and Keluskar, *The Life of Shivaji Maharaj*.

8 Quoted from *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, p. 160.

9 *Latche Marathi Aitihāsik Lekh*, Part 1 1670-1818, ed., V.S. Shrivastava. Aitihāsik Gaurava Grantha Mala, Bombay 1936 [in Marathi] (hereafter *LMAL* Part 1], Document No. 1.

10 Quoted from *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, p. 184.

the physical geography of the region in which he operated. Let us see how it all started.

Shahji, the father of Shivaji, was a politico-military entrepreneur of the Adilshahi Bijapur Sultanate. Shahji maintained an army of 12,000 soldiers. Pune was his *jagir*. Shivaji took over the task of managing the estate. Shivaji was ambitious and was eager to chart out his own career. With the territories now under his possession, he controlled 300 cavalry. Immediately, Shivaji started his career of banditry.

Shivaji plundered the city of Junnar and was able to capture 200 horses and 300,000 *Hons*.¹¹ The Indian economy was monetised and commercialised. In Ahmadnagar and Golkonda Sultanates and in Maharashtra, agricultural taxation was collected by the state in copper and in gold *Hons*.¹² More plunder resulted in increasing military strength of Shivaji which in turn encouraged him to undertake more frequent and long distance *mulkgiri* (pillaging and plundering raids).

The Bijapur Sultanate responded by sending their general Afzal Khan in 1659 with 12,000 armoured Afghan cavalry. Shivaji through treachery killed Afzal Khan in midst of a negotiation at Jawli. Then, a sudden commando attack by his infantry concealed among the jungles on unsuspecting Afzal's troopers completed the Bijapuri rout. Shivaji had realised that in the rocky terrain covered with forest, light infantry was more suited than heavy cavalry. After this victory, Shivaji captured 4,000 horses, 1,200 camels, 65 elephants and 700,000 *Hons* in cash plus jewels worth Rs 300,000.¹³ An Indian army moved with lot of cash and jewellery to pay for its day to day expenses during campaigning. Shivaji made good use of this treasure to further augment his military power. By 1660s, Shivaji maintained 10,000 cavalry and 50,000 infantry.¹⁴

Pillaging and plundering of the enemy states and even neutral powers remained an essential technique for acquiring resources. Surat was one of the richest ports of Mughal India. Gold and silver from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf regions were imported through Surat. The Anatolian mines exported silver

11 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

12 Frank Perlin, 'Changes in Production and Circulation of Money in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century India: An Essay on Monetization before Colonial Occupation,' in Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Money and the Market in India: 1100-1700*. Oxford University Press, Delhi 1994, pp. 280-84.

13 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 9-24.

14 John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India*, I.5, *The Mughal Empire*. 1993, reprint, Foundation Books, New Delhi 2002, p. 207.

to India through Surat. Surat's annual trade exceeded Rs 16 million.¹⁵ At the end of 1669, Shivaji appeared before Surat. It was a repeat of the 1664 raid. The Mughal *subahdar* (governor) of this town retired into the castle. Every house which did not pay the ransom that the Marathas demanded was looted. However, the Dutch and the English factories were not attacked.¹⁶ Shivaji's light cavalry armed with lances and swords baulked at the firepower generated by the disciplined European infantry.

Shivaji's Way of Warfare was to a great extent the product of geographical environment and historical legacy. Shivaji waged a form of warfare both on land and sea which was a sort of attrition oriented harassing warfare. The British officers in mid eighteenth century termed as 'predatory warfare.' The Marathas called it *ganimi kava*. It means that being unable to meet the enemy (superior in numbers) head on, the Marathas waged asymmetric warfare. It involved cutting off the enemy's supply lines, ravaging his base area, following scorched earth policy to obstruct hostile advance, and tiring out the enemy by launching continuous harassing raids at his front and rear but never engaging the main battle force of the enemy in a frontal clash.¹⁷

This sort of warfare was not entirely novel in the Deccan. Malik Ambar, the general of Ahmadnagar Sultanate avoided pitched battles with the Mughal heavy cavalry supported by artillery. He sent his light cavalry to cut off the Mughal's line of communications and captured the convoys carrying provision for the Mughal force. The Maratha mercenaries in Ambar's pay drew armoured Mughal cavalry into the rugged hills and narrow ravines and delivered nocturnal attacks taking advantage of the night and surprise. When the Mughals advanced, Ambar retreated and vice versa. With severance of the line of communications and plundering of the *banjara* (itinerant merchants who carried grain on bullocks and sold it to the soldiers) convoys, the only option for the invading Mughal force was to subsist on local resources. Due to the scorched earth policy followed by the hovering Maratha light cavalry, the Mughal Army unable to extract food and forage from the countryside retreated.¹⁸

Shivaji elaborated and systematised the guerrilla warfare as practiced by Ma-

15 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Precious Metal Flows and Prices in Western and Southern Asia, 1500-1750: Some Comparative and Conjunctural Aspects,' in Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Money and the Market in India: 1100-1700*, pp. 201-03.

16 Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire*, pp. 24-5.

17 M.R. Kantak, *The First Anglo-Maratha War, 1774-1783: A Military Study of Major Battles*. Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1993, p. 12.

18 Radhey Shyam, *Life and Times of Malik Ambar*. Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi 1968, p. 78.

lik Ambar between 1600 and 1626. Shiva's guerrilla warfare on land centred round three elements: forts, infantry, and cavalry. The forts and fortresses did not merely function as sentinels for protecting the borders of Maharashtra. Forts opened access to lands that could feed the Maratha troops and aid in payment of their wages. The citadels acted as safe harbours for the Maratha raiding parties who struck out to extract wealth from the enemy domains. Further, the chain of fortresses guarded the conquered territory as well as the homeland and denied their wealth to the hostile parties. The objective was to gain victory by being able to stand the stress and strain of war by passing on the cost of conflict to the other side thus trying to outlast the enemy's will to continue the war.

The forts, in Shivaji's paradigm of warfare, functioned as bases. In the forts, wealth, food, and military supplies were stored. Guerrilla parties for attacking the enemy were launched from the forts. When the Maratha guerrillas were on the run being hotly pursued by the Mughal forces, these bands took shelters in the forts for replenishment and reorganisation. The forts also afforded shelters to the cultivators who with their cattle and crop moved there when the hostile force appeared in the surrounding countryside. The forts were guarded by the infantry. Moreover, the string of fortresses was so constructed that the garrisons were able to assist each other.¹⁹ Most of the hill forts of Shivaji were in the Western Ghats. Since food and fodder were not available in this region, a big Mughal Army with large number of animals and men could not easily subsist here for a long period. Worse, lack of good wide roads and absence of navigable rivers in this region, prevented the Mughal besiegers from deploying large number of heavy cannons to blast the Maratha hill forts.

While Shivaji constructed some forts, he captured most of the forts from the Deccani Sultanates, and then repaired them for his own use. One Maratha fort was Suvarnadurg. It was used as a depot and an arsenal. This fortified complex comprised of four fortresses. All of them were located half a mile of each other. These fortresses were in the shape of a square. The walls of the fortresses were flanked by round towers.²⁰

Maharashtra did not breed high quality horses. Further, Shivaji unlike the Mughals lacked money to buy good war horses from West Asia and Central Asia. So, Shivaji had to rely on the home bred ponies which functioned as light

19 C.A. Kincaid and Rao Bahadur D.B. Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 1, *From the Earliest Times to the Death of Shivaji*. Humphrey Milford, London 1918, p. 274.

20 Report upon the present conditions of the Forts in the Southern Konkan with Five Plans by Lieutenant M. McGillivray, Suvarnadurg, No. 6, Military Records of the Old Bombay Army, Adjutant-General's Correspondence, 1829, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

cavalry. Such small mounts were not suitable for carrying a heavily armoured trooper or plate armour on themselves. Such small ponies and lightly armed men mounted on them were not suitable for launching frontal cavalry charge in the battlefield like the heavy Mughal cavalry. Further, the people of Maharashtra did not know the use of composite bows from horseback, a tactic in which the Turkish mercenaries of the Mughal Army excelled. Hence, there was no question of launching the famed '*taulqama*' charge against the enemy army.

Shivaji's guerrilla bands comprised of light cavalry. The focus was on boldness, speed, surprise, and mobility. The term which was used for depicting cavalry warfare by the Marathas was *kavebaji* (forward and backward movement of the horses). The objective of such guerrilla bands was to avoid a set piece battle with the principal force of the enemy. The objectives were to attack the reconnaissance parties, supply convoys, cut off stragglers, harassing the enemy force on march and especially carrying raids deep into the enemy territory away from the frontlines for pillage and plunder. The aim was to harm the logistics of the enemy.

Similarly, Shivaji's naval guerrilla tactics involved using light oared ships for harassing and capturing British cargo ships. Shivaji's navy always avoided battles with the heavily armed battleships and frigates of the EIC. Shivaji also maintained a number of marine forts for protection of the Konkan Coastline and these forts functioned as logistical bases for his ships. Ratnagiri was a coastal fort. It was constructed on a rocky promontory separated from the coast at a distance of one and half miles. This fort comprised of two fortresses situated on two hillocks. Each of the fortresses had a citadel. The hillocks on which these two fortresses were built were at a height of 200 feet above the sea level. The stone wall was flanked by towers.²¹

Maharashtra was technologically backward in the spheres of production of cannons and oceangoing ships. Nor adequate financial resources could be extracted from the backward agricultural sector. After all, the rocky soil of Maharashtra was not as fertile as Ganga-Jamuna Doab and Bengal. So, Shivaji could not go for manufacturing extremely costly technologically advanced battleship. He had to depend on the traditional grabs and gallivats. Instead of broadside firing battleships, these small and nimble Maratha ships had to resort to the tactics of using stealth while boarding hostile cargo vessels. The ecology of India's

21 Report upon the present conditions of the Forts in the Southern Konkan with Five Plans by Lieutenant M. McGillivray, Ratnagiri, No. 6, Military Records of the Old Bombay Army, 1829.

western seaboard along Maharashtra suited Shivaji's naval guerrilla tactics. The Konkan had numerous shallow creeks and rivers. When pursued by the heavy enemy battleships, Shivaji's light vessels always escaped and with their low draught took shelter in such coastal waterways of which the Maratha mariners had local knowledge. Moreover, in the coastal waters of Maharashtra, when the wind failed or changed direction, the European sailing ships were at a disadvantage. In contrast, the oared Maratha vessels enjoyed a distinct tactical mobility in such circumstances.²²

Shivaji's force was not an unorganised undisciplined rabble. A hierarchical officer corps and a supporting logistical establishment came into existence. The infantry comprised of archers, spearmen, and musketeers. Over nine infantry soldiers, there was a naik. The cavalry was of two types: *paga* and *siladar*. In the *paga*, the horses and weapons were supplied by the government to the troopers who were called *bargirs*. But *siladari* cavalry comprised of men who came with their own horses and weapons. In the *paga*, over 25 troopers, a havaldar was appointed. One havla comprised of 25 horsemen. Five havla constituted a jumla. Each jumla was commanded by a jumladar. The deputy of a jumladar was called majumdar. For every 25 troopers, there was a water carrier and a farrier. A hazari commanded 10 jumlas. Each hazari had karkuns (news writers) and harkaras (functioned both as couriers and as spies). Over five hazari was a panch hazari. A sarnobat commanded five panch hazari.²³

Shivaji was no religious bigot but a realist. He recruited Afghan deserters from the Bijapur Army because the former were experts in using artillery. However, the top level of military command remained in the hands of the Marathas. The top civilian command remained in the hands of the Brahmins because of their monopoly of education. The mid level of civilian administration was in the hands of the Kayasthas (a middle caste whose duty was to keep records).²⁴

The army remained in the cantonments within *Swarajya* (homeland meaning Maharashtra) during the rainy season. The cantonments were filled with grains, fodder, and medicines. There were houses and stables for the men and the horses within the cantonments. After the Dussehra festival, the army marched to plunder foreign countries. At that time, an inventory was made of the things possessed by each of the troops. The soldiers were not allowed to keep women,

22 Surendra Nath Sen, *The Military System of the Marathas*. 1928, reprint, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1979, pp. 152-69.

23 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 29-31.

24 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 29-30, 164.

female slaves, or dancing girls. For eight months, the troops subsisted in hostile territory, levied contributions, and took male hostages for ransom. After eight months, when the army returned to home cantonments, the soldiers had to surrender the loot to the royal exchequer. Those who failed to do it were severely punished.²⁵ Discipline was very strict in Shivaji's army. Forts like Satara were used for hosting the prisoners.²⁶

A corps of officials was in charge of regulating the affairs of the forts. In every fort there was an official named karkhani who was in charge of keeping ledger of all the materials stored in the fort. Depending on the size of a fort, one or more tat sarnobats was given the responsibility for guarding the ramparts. Maximum there were 10 tat sarnobats in a big fort.²⁷

Shivaji towards the end of his reign was able to establish a well-developed administrative fabric in *Swarajya* which in turn generated a regular source of income. This income supplemented the gains made from plundering. This system continued under his successors. Rent free land was granted for establishing markets. To new settlers, grain, and money for buying seeds were given and this was realised in the next two to four years.²⁸ This was somewhat equivalent to the *taccavi* loans issued to the poor peasants by the Mughal administrators. Shivaji appointed several officials for accurate estimate of the yields of the land under his control. A sarsubedar oversaw revenue assessment of several districts. Below him came the hawaldar who was in charge of preparing revenue assessment of a particular district. The hawaldar employed several people for assessment of the villages of his district. For each village, one revenue assessor was appointed. In 1656, the year when Shivaji proclaimed himself *Chhatrapati* (Hindu King), he carried out detailed revenue assessment of northern Konkan. During natural or manmade distress, the ryots received remissions.²⁹ In contrast to Aurangzeb's demand for 50% of the gross produce, Shivaji demanded 20% of the gross

25 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 31-2.

26 *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* (henceforth *SPD*), (ed.), G.S. Sardesai, No. 30, *Miscellaneous Papers of Shahu and his first two Peshwas*. Government Central Press, Bombay 1933 [in Marathi], Document No. 20, 7 Feb. 1719.

27 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, p. 29.

28 Surendra Nath Sen, *Administrative System of the Marathas*. 1925, reprint, LG Publishers, Delhi 2021, p. 52.

29 *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* (henceforth *SPD*), (ed.), G.S. Sardesai, No. 31, *Selected Papers from the Jamav Section*. Government Central Press, Bombay 1933 [in Marathi], Document No. 24, 11 May 1656, Document No. 69, 11 Dec. 1696.

yield.³⁰

Shahji's *jagir* in Pune which Shivaji inherited yielded 40,000 *Hons*. When Shivaji died, his kingdom's estimated annual revenue was one crore (1 crore=100 lakhs) *Hons*.³¹ The administrative mechanism established by Shivaji was able to generate adequate surplus. In 1681, during the early part of Sambhaji's (Shivaji's eldest son) reign (1681-1689), Raghunath Hanmante the Governor of Jinji and Maratha dominion in Karnataka sent 40 lakhs in gold coins which was the surplus of his province. He was able to accumulate this surplus despite the expenditure incurred in maintaining a military force (5,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry) under his own control.³²

Expansionist Geopolitics and the Road to Panipat

The Maratha movement initially started as an insurgency under Shivaji in the first half of the seventeenth century. The centralised bureaucratic monarchical state built by Shivaji disintegrated after his death due to the weight of Mughal counteroffensive. Nevertheless, the Maratha military movement under various *sirdars* continued. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, the Maratha Confederacy under the stewardship of the *Peshwa* became dominant. The Confederacy comprised of *sirdars* with their military contingents, and all of them operating under the leadership of the *Peshwa*.

Shahu (Shivaji's grandson) when released from Mughal confinement after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 had to face a civil war. Many Maratha *sirdars* under Shahu's aunt Queen Tarabai challenged Shahu's authority. Shahu had spent most of his time in Mughal Court. So, he lacked expert knowledge of warfare and diplomacy. He came to depend on a Brahmin named Balaji Viswanath whom he appointed as *Peshwa* in 1714. Under King Shahu, the *Peshwa* became dominant. At a meeting convened by the *Peshwa*, it was agreed among the chieftains that they should keep one half of the spoils taken by them from the Mughals and the rest should be sent to the *Peshwa* at Pune instead of King Shahu at Satara. This marked the beginning of the Maratha Confederacy under the *Peshwa*'s leadership.³³

As a result, the post of the *Peshwa* became hereditary. The three *Peshwas*

30 Kincaid and Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 1, p. 274.

31 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, p. 149.

32 Kincaid and Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 2, pp. 42-3.

33 Anon, *Origin of Pindaries*, pp. 12-3; *SPD*, No. 31, Document No. 123, 1720.

successively (Balaji Viswanath [1714-1720], his son Baji Rao I [1720-1740] and the latter's son Balaji Baji Rao [1720-1761]) formulated Maratha geopolitical strategy. Baji Rao I's mission was to establish a Maratha run Mughal Empire. It meant taking over the all-India Mughal imperium. Instead of destroying the semi-independent Mughal *subahdars* one by one, Baji Rao opened several fronts. He sent armies simultaneously against the Portuguese and the EIC in Konkan, against Nizam in Hyderabad, and the Mughal *subahdars* of Awadh and Bengal. Not content with such a multifront war, Baji Rao I's son Balaji Baji Rao sent another army for conquering Punjab. This in turn provoked the ruler of Afghanistan Ahmad Shah Abdali. Maratha military manpower and finance proved inadequate for fighting several such long-distance protracted wars simultaneously. Further, Balaji Baji Rao followed a continental geopolitical strategy and did away with Shivaji's naval guerrilla strategy which kept the British EIC on its toes. Worse, the Maratha military strategy was going through a doctrinal debate which ripped apart their military machine.

Fitna and Military Finance

Pillage and plunder of foreign territories continued under the *Peshwa*'s leadership. In 1724, the *Peshwa* ordered Kande Rao Dabhade to destroy the Mughal *thanas* (police stations) in Balsar, Parnera, Chikli and Navsari. *Chauth* (25% of the revenue demand) and *sardeshmukhi* (10% of the revenue assessment) were collected regularly. The tactics that should be followed, ordered the *Peshwa*, was to plunder the countryside continuously and subsequent area domination which will lead to the establishment of Maratha control. As the Maratha Confederacy expanded its sphere of operations, tributes from the defeated states constituted one of the principal sources of income. When a new ruler came to the throne, the *Peshwa* always exacted a sum of money as succession fee.³⁴ The Marathas always insisted about written agreements (as a sort of legality) with the polities who had agreed to pay tributes. A treaty with a clause for a tribute rather than oral agreements legalised Maratha claims in the long run.³⁵ In accordance with the treaty signed between the *Nawab* of Bengal Alivardi Khan and *Sirdar* Bhonsle of Nagpur on 18 September 1751, the Bengal *Nawabi* (which comprised of Bengal Bihar and Orissa) had to pay annual tribute of Rs 12 lakhs to Bhonsle. In return, Bhonsle promised not to raid Bengal and Bihar. However,

34 *LMAL* Part 1, Document No. 2, Document No. 8, 1726.

35 *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 91, 19 Nov. 1732, Document No. 143, 17 Nov. 1735.

Orissa passed under the control of Bhonsle.³⁶

Baji Rao I ordered the *sirdars* to bring the region around Surat and beyond Tapti to bring under Maratha control and levy *chauth*, *sardeshmukhi* and also a 10% duty on all those goods which were exported to overseas markets and imported from territories beyond India by sea. Two-third of the import and export duties realised were to be used by the *sirdars* for establishing *thanas* and forts in the newly conquered regions. The remaining one-third was transmitted to the central exchequer under the *Peshwa*'s control. Similarly, 50% of the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* collected were to be used for establishing forts, *thanas* and administrative machinery and the remaining 50% were to be sent to the *Peshwa*'s exchequer. In addition, the *sirdars* as well as the *Peshwa* collected *ghasdana* (a tax for the grain and fodder of the Maratha cavalry).³⁷

At this stage, the Marathas were not intent merely to pillage and plunder areas beyond Maharashtra. They were attempting to set up an administrative machinery for establishing permanent control over these regions. However, the forts in the newly conquered territories unlike the Mughals were to be under the control of the semi-independent *sirdars* and not under the *Peshwa*'s central government. So, the Maratha Confederacy was more decentralised than the Mughal Empire at its peak.

Land revenue remained the principal source of *Peshwa*'s income. The Pune Government took care to protect the peasants. After all, a stable and continuous source of land revenue meant that the peasants' welfare needs to be attended. In 1719, an official named Mahadaji Daji was in charge of assessing all cesses imposed by the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*.³⁸ The objective was to prevent any exactions of extra cess from the peasants by these hereditary landholders.

For land revenue collection, a province was divided into *sarkars*. Each *sarkar* had 30-40 *mahals* (districts). Each *mahal/pargana* had between 50-300 villages. Each *pargana* was further divided into *taluks*. Each *taluk* had about 20-30 villages. The land revenue was collected from the *parganas* by the Maratha kamavisdars through the zamindars. The kamavisdars got 5% of the revenue collected as his wage. The position of the zamindar was hereditary. The zamindar received 8% of the revenue collected from a *pargana* as his service charge. The zamindar was aided by the chaudhuris (village headmen). Each chaudhuri

36 Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, vol. 1, 1739-1754. 1932, reprint, Orient Longman, New Delhi 1988, p. 89.

37 *LMAL*, Part 1, Document Nos. 3, 30, 1748.

38 *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 21, 18 March 1719.

collected the revenue from his particular village and sent it to the zamindar. The Marathas did not disturb these rural hereditary officials.³⁹

The *Peshwa* tried to maintain some sort of bureaucratic control over the *sirdars*. A powerful *Peshwa* like Baji Rao I was successful in at least transferring the *parganas* allotted to the *sirdars* at regular intervals to prevent the emergence of a territorial fief. To prevent the emergence of vested interest, the *Peshwa* transferred the kamavisdar of a *pargana* after every three years. To prevent any *sirdar* from deliberately underassessing the area assigned to him thus cheating the Pune Government, the *Peshwa* in 1743 ordered his officials to assess average income of all the *parganas* under Maratha control. Every *sirdar* was ordered to maintain a detailed account of the amount of dues collected from the regions under their area of operations and they had to submit it to the Pune Government. A copy of the revenue receipt remained with the central treasury at Pune and another copy with the *sirdar* in charge of a particular area.⁴⁰ Thus, we can argue that a sort of 'paper empire' was emerging.

Shivaji attempted to pay his soldiers and officers in cash directly from the treasury under his control. However, the *Peshwas* were forced to pay the *sirdars* and their military retainers with land grants. Less than 10% of the military establishment which comprised of *paga* cavalry were only paid in cash. Due to the Mughal counteroffensive in Maharashtra, the state which Shivaji had constructed suffered a meltdown. Vast parts of Maharashtra were under the Mughal occupation force. The Marathas experienced a civil war between Shahu and Tarabai. The government controlled neither territory nor money. The coffers were empty due to continuous warfare and inability to collect taxes. In desperation, the *Peshwa* assigned various regions to the different *sirdars* and they were asked to capture it and use the revenues for maintaining their militias.⁴¹ Soldiers and officers were rewarded for meritorious service with land grants. When a soldier or an officer died, either his family got a family pension in the form of land grants or his son or brother was taken into government service.⁴²

All the officials both civil and military were granted *jagirs*. The revenue from these land grants were used by the *sirdars* to recruit men, buy horses and weap-

39 Malcolm, *Report on the Province of Malwa*, pp. 403-06; *LMAL* Part 1, Document Nos. 10-11, 1738.

40 *LMAL* Part I, Document Nos. 6, 12, 30 Dec. 1733, 1740, Document No. 21, 1743, Document Nos. 33-4, 1748, Document Nos. 59-60, 1756.

41 *LMAL* Part 1, Document Nos. 4, 32.

42 *SPD*, No. 31, Document No. 124, 19 Dec. 1720.

ons. Once this process started, it gained its own momentum. Even when in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the Mughals were on the run and the Marathas started gaining ground in central and north India, the *sirdars* were unwilling to part with their estates which in turn became hereditary. The failure of the *Peshwa* to construct a centralised polity with a fiscal-military structure over the conquered areas further accelerated the feudalisation of the Maratha polity. At times, *jagirs* were granted even within the *Swarajya*. Often a province was divided among the different *sirdars* who developed overlapping spheres of territorial interest. The *sirdars* collected revenue from their *jagirs* through the *kamavisdars* appointed by them. The *kamavisdar* of a *sirdar* paid the troops in the latter's contingent after every 45 days.⁴³

Possession of a territorial base which gave a *sirdar* an autonomous financial base to maintain a contingent of troops loyal to him encouraged rebellions. Most of the officers of the contingent of a particular *sirdar* were the latter's relatives. The troops and the officers (related by kin and clan) were recruited, paid, and led in battles and campaigns by the *sirdar*. Hence the *sirdar* could count on their loyalty. Generally, a *sirdar*'s military force comprised of his own contingents plus a few mini *sirdars* under his control. The mini *sirdars* commanded their own contingents and exhibited a loose allegiance to the *sirdar*. Frequently, these mini *sirdars* changed sides.⁴⁴

During a campaign, extra men were recruited by the *sirdars* and they were demobilised with the onset of peace.⁴⁵ When the *Peshwa* went on a campaign, his own force was supplemented by the contingents brought by the various *sirdars*. In 1737, during the Bhopal Campaign against the Nizam, Gaekwad joined the *Peshwa*'s force. In 1750, as per the agreement concluded between the *Peshwa* and Damaji Gaekwad, the latter had to serve the former with 3,000 cavalry in peacetime and 5,000 in wartime. In case, Damaji had to go to Gujarat, to look after the civil administration, the Gaekwad contingent in *Peshwa*'s service would be led by his son.⁴⁶ Due to the culture of *fitna* (the trend of challenging central authority by the semi-independent politico-military agents), the *sirdars* occasionally fought among themselves and raided each other's territories. The

43 *LMAL* Part 1, Document Nos. 7, 13, 61; *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 75, 22 Oct. 1731; Malcolm, *Report on the Province of Malwa*, pp. 95-6.

44 *SPD*, No. 30, No. 64, 12 Jan. 1729, Document No. 67, 27 April 1729.

45 *Selections from the Satara Rajas' and the Peshwa's Diaries*, IV, *Swai Madhavrav Peshwa*, vol. 1, prepared by Ganesh Chimnaji Vad, ed. By Kashinath Balkrishna Marathe. Poona Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, Pune 1908 [in Marathi], Document Nos. 1-2, 1773-74, p. 1.

46 *LMAL* Part 1, Document No. 37.

sirdars were even disloyal to the *Peshwa*. They refused to send the tribute which was due to the *Peshwa*.⁴⁷

The cost of continuous campaigns outstripped Maratha Confederacy's finance. Frequently for ready cash, the Maratha *sirdars* took loans from the bankers. If the debtors failed to pay back the creditors punctually, then the former was in serious trouble. In November 1736, Gopal Udhao was campaigning on behalf of the *Peshwa*. Gopal had taken a loan but failed to repay it with interest. So, the creditors sent men who harassed Gopal's family members. At times, those *sirdars* who failed to repay their loans were even arrested till the Pune Government carried out an enquiry.⁴⁸

Frequently, military operations were hampered by insufficient funds and the *Peshwa* remained in perpetual debt like King Charles V of Spain. Between 1721 and 1726, the *sirdars* fighting in central India appealed to the *Peshwa* to provide funds so that they could buy new horses in compensation for the mounts they have lost in heavy fighting with the Mughal forces. The yields from the *jagirs* granted to them were inadequate to cover such heavy losses. On 3 December 1738, the Portuguese Fleet started bombarding Bassein Port and Kelve Mahim Fort in Maharashtra. Due to lack of funds, the Maratha *sirdars* like Ramchandra Baba and Raghu Narayan failed to send a relieving force. On 10 May 1739, Baji Rao I could not move with the main army to reconquer Bassein because it was feared that the Persian ruler Nadir Shah who had conquered Delhi might move towards central India.⁴⁹ Baji Rao I was paying for his policy of expansionist geopolitical strategy. He should have finished the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Portuguese in Konkan first before moving into central and north India.

Baji Rao I's successor Balaji Baji Rao sent his uncle Raghunath Rao to conquer Punjab including Attock and Peshawar. Balaji Baji Rao should have concentrated against the rising British power in Madras and in Bengal rather than pursuing the continental dream of creating an empire stretching up to the borders of Afghanistan. Ragunath Rao's successful expedition which included his advance from Indore in central India then to Delhi and finally Punjab up to Indus and back to Maharashtra lasted from 1757 to 1758. After defraying the money acquired through tributes, pillage and plunder, the Maratha exchequer still faced

47 *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 40, 4 May 1727, Document No. 66, 7 Feb. 1729, Document No. 206, 30 Dec. 1737.

48 *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 27, 1720-21, Document No. 170, 8 Sept. 1736, Document No. 177, 26 Nov. 1736.

49 *SPD*, No. 30, Document No. 28, 1721-26, Document Nos. 219-20, 3 Dec. 1738, Document Nos. 228-29, 12 April 1739, 10 May 1739.

a debt of Rs 80 lakhs in addition to the unpaid salaries of the soldiers.⁵⁰ Obviously, the Maratha system of warfare was not effective in defraying the cost of a military expedition, not to speak of generating profit. Meanwhile the British after winning the decisive Battle of Plassey (23 June 1757) had gained control over Bengal, the richest province of India. Bengal's annual revenue was Rs 1.2 crore. A mere 5,000 strong Maratha cavalry would have prevented Lord Clive at Calcutta from marching to Plassey.

Doctrinal Confusion and Defeat

The arrival of the Maratha Army in Punjab during 1758 and the call for help by the Muslim polities of north India against the rampaging Hindu Marathas activated the ruler of Afghanistan Ahmad Shah Abdali (r. 1747-1772). He decided to launch a campaign to deter the Marathas from moving into Punjab. In 1759, Abdali crossed into India. The arid regions of Afghanistan were suited for the breeding of animals (camels, and war horses). However, the Marathas had no access to such animal assets. After the rise of Durrani power, the bankers from Shikarpur settled in Multan. These bankers financed Ahmad Shah's campaign.⁵¹ Abdali offered a deal to the Marathas. He would annex Punjab and in return the Marathas would have a free hand in the rest of India. But, this deal was not acceptable to Balaji Baji Rao. He should have vacated Punjab and concentrated against the EIC in Bengal.

Meanwhile a doctrinal debate was going on inside the Maratha high command due to the shifting goals of Maratha geopolitics. As a result, the Maratha Army was in the throes of an organisational transformation. One lobby spear-headed by the *Peshwas* and General Sadashiv Rao Bhau (nephew of Balaji Baji Rao) argued that the Maratha geopolitical strategy had changed, hence the military strategy and the force structure needed to change also. Unlike in the days of Shivaji, the political objective of the Marathas was no more conducting guerrilla warfare against the Mughals for creating an independent Maratha state. The *Peshwas* aimed to establish a pan Indian centralised bureaucratic imperium. This required destruction of the enemy forces in battles. It necessitated transformation of light cavalry-oriented force geared for raiding enemy territories to a capital-intensive heavy state army designed to destroy enemy field force in battles.

50 Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, vol. 2, 1754-1771. 1934, reprint, Orient Longman, New Delhi 1991, p. 140.

51 Jagjeet Lally, 'Beyond "Tribal Breakout": Afghans in the History of Empire, ca. 1747-1818,' *Journal of World History* Vol. 29 no. 3 2018, pp. 369-79.

So, heavy cavalry for launching frontal attacks, infantry with handheld guns, elephants and cattle for drawing siege and field guns for generating firepower with a logistical establishment were necessary.⁵²

In contrast, another lobby under the leadership of Malhar Rao Holkar argued that instead of a battle seeking strategy with a capital-intensive army, the Marathas should follow their traditional strategy of *ganimi kava*. Malhar pointed out that Abdali's field guns were better than the heavy siege guns of the Marathas. Since the Marathas were engaged in capturing the Mughal forts in central India the former had invested in heavy almost immobile siege artillery rather than 4 to 6 pounder mobile and light field artillery. The Marathas had no counter to Abdali's mobile quick firing *shutarnals* (camel mounted guns). Abdali's drilled and disciplined infantry were armed with heavier muskets which had longer range and could throw heavier bullets compared to Maratha matchlocks and fusils provided by the French. Further, most of the Maratha infantry were armed with spears, swords, and shields. Maratha military modernisation was incomplete mainly due to lack of funds. Lastly, Malhar pointed out that in a set piece battle, light Maratha ponies acquired from Gujarat will be smashed by disciplined heavier Afghan horses acquired from Central Asia.

Malhar argued for following a strategy of exhaustion. He argued that the heavy cavalry, infantry and all the non-combatants should be kept in the Gwalior Fort which should become the base for conducting long distance guerrilla raids. He favoured launching long distance raids by light cavalry against Abdali's rear to cut his communication with Afghanistan. Further, Malhar was for launching light cavalry detachments for ravaging Awadh and Rohilkhand the two regions which were supplying Abdali with money, fodder, and food. Malhar reasoned that breakdown of logistics, demands of Central Asian politics and the Indian summer would force Abdali to leave India by mid-1761. Without fighting a decisive battle, the Abdali threat would be neutralised. The arrogant Bhau abused Malhar as a shepherd and decided to fight a pitched battle with Ahmad Shah Abdali. Balaji Baji Rao decided to side with Bhau.⁵³

Bhau was given command of 20,000 cavalry and 10,000 disciplined infantry and gunners by the *Peshwa* for confronting Abdali.⁵⁴ The Maratha force under Sadashiv Rao unlike the previous traditional Maratha armies was a capital-in-

52 *SPD*, No. 30, Document Nos. 5-6, 23 July 1710, 28 Dec. 1709.

53 Hari Ram Gupta (ed.), *Marathas and Panipat*, Panjab University, Chandigarh 1961.

54 *Memoir of the Life of Nana Farnavi*, Compiled from Family Records and Extant Works by A. Macdonald. Oxford University Press, London 1927, p. 3.

tensive force. Bhau's force had field artillery under the Muslim commander Ibrahim Khan Gardi. Bhau was impressed by heavy artillery battery in Nizam's service during the Battle of Udgir (February 1760). So, he inducted the Muslim mercenary commander of Nizam named Ibrahim Khan Gardi who had been trained by the French General Bussy. However, induction of artillery slowed the rate of march of the Maratha Army. Each artillery piece had to be drawn by bullock teams, each of which comprised of 15 to 20 such beasts. The light Maratha cavalry which guarded the artillery also marched at the same slow pace with the artillery pieces. Influenced by the French, Bhau ordered Gardi to raise 10,000 drilled and disciplined infantry armed with French fusils.⁵⁵ In addition, the Maratha force was accompanied by a large number of male and female non-combatants. The total strength of the force under Bhau (including combatants and non-combatants) exceeded 500,000.

From the very beginning, Bhau's force was dogged by inadequate finance. The Maratha administrative infrastructure utilised *hundis* (bills of exchange and promissory notes) for financing military operations. The banking agencies issued *hundis*. The *mahajans* (financiers) were involved in moving money through *hundis*. If the officials of the state wanted to send money to a distant place, due to dangers of the route or the long distance involved, the coins were not transferred in bulk. The *shroff* (money changers) took the money and gave the *jagirdar* or agent of the state a signed piece of paper. When this person showed this piece of paper to the *shroff*'s agent at the designated place, the latter paid the full amount after deducting a charge for their service. The *hundi* charge was 8% of the value of money transferred. The Pune bankers through *hundis* could transfer funds not only in the big towns but also in the smaller urban centres.⁵⁶

The Maratha Army under Sadashiv Rao Bhau started for north India in March 1760. The *Peshwa* provided Bhau with Rs 2 crores.⁵⁷ At Sironj, Bhau stopped for several days to cash the *hundis* received from the *Peshwa*. The *hundis* were cashed at the cities of Ujjain and Indore.⁵⁸ The monthly expense of Bhau's force on average came to about Rs 550,000. The estimated expense of the Maratha force under Bhau during its 10 months sojourn in north India came to about Rs

55 Brigadier K.G. Pitre, *War History of the Marathas: A Military Study*. Privately Published, Pune 1998, p. 14.

56 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction,' in Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Money and the Market in India: 1100-1700*, pp. 31-5.

57 *Memoir of the Life of Nana Farnavi*, p. 6.

58 Raghubir Singh, *Malwa in Transition or A Century of Anarchy, the First Phase: 1698-1765*. 1936, reprint, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi 2017, p. 307.

80 lakhs. During this period, Bhau obtained Rs 23 lakhs from various allies in north India, another Rs 9 lakh from melting the silver ceiling of *Diwan-i-Khas*. This silver was then minted into coins. Another Rs 7 lakhs was obtained by plundering Kunjpura. For the remaining amount, Bhau looked for supply of treasure from Maharashtra which did not come. Then, while the Maratha force was stationed at Delhi, Bhau looked for loans from the bankers. However, they had shut shops due to the disturbed conditions in the regions around Delhi.⁵⁹ In late December 1760, in desperation the Maratha leaders at Panipat erected mints in their camp and melted the gold and silver ornaments of the men and the women. These coins allowed the Marathas to buy food for 15 days. After that Bhau had no money to buy food, fodder, and military supplies for his force.⁶⁰

On the fateful day of the Third Battle of Panipat (14 January 1761), the starving Marathas fought desperately but were wiped out by superior firepower of the Afghan Army. In the flat plains of Panipat, Afghan heavy cavalry and repeated volleys from Afghan musketeers and Abdali's field guns made mince-meat of Maratha light cavalry and their heavy slow firing guns. The eight hours long battle resulted in complete destruction of the 50,000 strong Maratha field force.⁶¹ It was a banker who bought Balaji Baji Rao the letter which described in coded language the disaster at Panipat. The letter stated: 'Two pearls have been dissolved, twenty-seven gold mohurs have been lost, and of the silver and copper the total cannot be cast up.'⁶² After the destruction of the Maratha field army in the battlefield of Panipat, the Pune government had neither money nor any soldiers left. Throughout Deccan and central India, the local chiefs challenged Maratha authority. It was an opportunity the EIC could not miss. It subdued the Nizam and defeated Awadh at the Battle of Buxar (22-23 October 1764).

Epilogue

The Third Battle of Panipat resulted in decline of *Peshwa's* authority and the transformation of the Maratha Confederacy into five semi-independent ter-

59 Govind Sakharam Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of the Maratha Power*. 1946-8, reprint, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi 1986, pp. 421-22.

60 C.A. Kincaid and Rao Bahadur D.B. Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 3, *From the Death of Shahu to the End of the Chitpavan*. Humphrey Milford, London 1925, p. 68.

61 Ali Ahmad Jalali, *Afghanistan: A Military History from the Ancient Empires to the Great Game*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 2021, pp. 303-25.

62 Quoted from Kincaid and Parasnis, *A History of the Maratha People*, vol. 3, p. 75.

ritorial states: *Peshwa* of Pune, Bhonsle of Nagpur, Holkar of Indore, Sindhia of Gwalior, and Gaekwad at Gujarat. The Maratha central government at Pune had disintegrated beyond repair. This encouraged *fitna* among the *sirdars*. The *sirdars* frequently fought against each other. After the exit of Ahmad Shah Abdali in the late 1760s from the Indian subcontinent, the foreign trading corporation from Britain became the principal military competitor of the Marathas. This trade corporation, the British EIC after defeating the French East India Company by mid eighteenth century had established unchallenged supremacy in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal and along the coastal areas of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Then, the EIC attempted to establish a continental empire in South Asia.

The EIC and the Maratha Confederacy fought three wars which are known as the First, Second and Third Anglo-Maratha Wars. In all these wars, the different Maratha *sirdars* failed to cooperate with each other because the absence of a central government at Pune. In 1774, the EIC clashed with the Marathas. However, the Maratha Confederacy of 1770s was disunited without any central leadership and it was still recuperating from the disaster at Panipat. Sindhia made peace with the British while the *Peshwa* continued to fight till 1781. The British by this time had become too powerful after conquering Awadh, Bihar and Bengal. The Marathas should have initiated the clash with the EIC in the 1720s. At that time, the military establishment of the EIC was quite small. The EIC had 3,700 British troops in India.⁶³

Between 1740 and 1749, the EIC was engaged in a life and death struggle with the French East India Company. It was a golden opportunity for the Marathas to attack the EIC. But, the Marathas missed this window of opportunity in pursuit of their continental geopolitical dream. After defeating the French, in 1749, the British in Madras acquired Carnatic, an agriculturally productive province. The three centers of British power in India were Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Bombay was well fortified and the Maratha Navy was no match for the Royal Navy. However, the Marathas by establishing a land blockade could have prevented the EIC from conducting trade and commerce in west India. Bombay derived most of its income by exporting cotton and spices from west India. Similarly, Madras in case of land blockade by the Marathas could have been supplied by British sea power. However, Madras derived most of its revenue from Carnatic. Maratha light cavalry by ravaging the Madras Presidency

63 G.J. Bryant, *The Emergence of British Power in India 1600-1784: A Grand Strategic Interpretation*. Boydell, Woodbridge 2013, pp. 14-5.

would have been in a position to bring Madras to its knees. In 1781, Haidar Ali of Mysore with his light cavalry was able to bring the British in Madras to the negotiating table. It is erroneous to assume that an Indian army could not capture a British fortified centre. On 20 June 1756, the *Nawab* of Bengal (whose military establishment was inferior than that of the Marathas) was able to capture Calcutta.⁶⁴ Hence, if the Marathas seriously pursued the siege of Madras, it would have fallen to them.

The jewel in the crown of British-Indian Empire was Bengal. Sugar, silk, and saltpetre exported from Bengal and Bihar constituted the principal income of the EIC. Political rivalry between Baji Rao I and Bhonsle prevented a full-fledged Maratha invasion of Bengal. Had such an invasion occurred in the 1720s or 1730s, neither the Bengal *Nawabi* nor the EIC could have opposed the Marathas. Even in 1757, Clive feared Maratha light cavalry because the British in Bengal had no cavalry of their own. British infantry deployed in linear formation practicing volley firing was vulnerable to attacks by light cavalry on their flanks and rear. Further, the Maratha light cavalry by practicing scorched earth policy would have prevented the march of Clive's army from Falta to Murshidabad. Clive had 200 Europeans and 500 sepoys at Murshidabad. He noted that a major attack by an Indian power would have thrown the British out from Murshidabad.⁶⁵ After defeating the Awadh *Nawabi* in 1764, the EIC acquired Indian cavalry from north India. During the First Anglo-Maratha War (1775-1782), the drilled and disciplined British infantry and allied Indian horse was able to contain the Maratha military machine.

In 1796, the strength of the Bombay Army (King's and Company's troops) was 11,718 which in 1818 increased to 33,740 men. The revenues of the Bombay Presidency in 1795-1796 was Rs 24,00,000.⁶⁶ Thanks to the tributes from Awadh and revenues from Bengal and Bihar, the EIC was able to expand its military establishment. Between 1796 and 1805, the number of troops in EIC's employ rose from 70,000 (13,000 British and the rest sepoys drilled and disciplined in Western style and equipped with smoothbore muskets) to 154,500

64 Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company*. 1966, reprint, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2020, pp. 62-73.

65 Colonel S. Rivett-Carnac, *The Presidential Armies of India*. 1890, reprint, Lancer, New Delhi 2010, p. 223.

66 *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, No CIV New Series, Selected Minutes by the Honbl. Mountstuart Elphinstone in the Military Department, 1820-1827*. Byculla Government Education Society's Press, Bombay 1867, p. 2.



A depiction of Maratha light cavalry. Henry Alken (1785-1851), *horseman in military dress, with shield and lance, riding towards left* (watercolor, 1828). Anne S. K. Brown Collection, Brown University Library, Center for Digital Scholarship.

(including 24,500 British).⁶⁷

During the Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-1805), Sindhia and Bhonsle fought but the *Peshwa* remained neutral. Holkar attacked the EIC after Sindhia and Bhonsle were defeated. Gaekwad became an ally of the EIC. Even at this stage if all the Maratha *sirdars* had cooperated, history might have taken a different turn. The Maratha Confederacy met its final demise in the hands of EIC in 1818 when only the *Peshwa* and Bhonsle fought but Gaekwad, Holkar and Sindhia remained neutral. The above account shows that in shaping geopolitics, besides long-term impersonal factors, human agency, internal politics, and timing were important.

⁶⁷ *The Army in India and its Evolution including an Account of the Establishment of the Royal Air Force in India*. 1924, reprint, Anmol Publications, Delhi 1985, pp. 11-4.

Geopolitics and War in Eighteenth-Century Bengal to 1757

BY MARK H. DANLEY

Geopolitics profoundly shaped warfare in the eighteenth-century Bengal *Subah* (Mughal province of Bengal).¹ Although it is somewhat anachronistic to apply the terms “geopolitics” and “geopolitical” to eighteenth-century Bengal, if one thinks of the geopolitical dimensions of military power in the modern sense of those terms, they certainly affected warfare in that polity and period. In a military system that depended on personal relationships as much as (if not more than) institutions, the spatial aspect of military human resources was always at work and affected the ruler’s decisions. The *Nawabs* (Mughal governors) of the Bengal *Subah*, who by the beginning of the eighteenth century were *de facto* independent, had to be intensely aware of the geographic position of the *Subah* and strategically oriented in multiple directions at once. Yet these considerations rarely enter into the analysis of the part the Bengal *Subah*’s military history most often encountered in Western historiography: the conquest of Bengal by the East India Company during the Seven Years’ War. In fact, however, the geopolitical aspects of war in eighteenth-century Bengal, especially as waged by *Nawab* Alivardi Khan (1676-1756; ruled 1740-1756) and his chief subordinates provide an important context for understanding the outcome of the famous campaign of 1756-1757 that resulted in the defeat and death of Sirajuddaula and the end of the independent *Nawabi* regime. Particularly useful in this sort of analysis is a body of sources that many modern

1 The eighteenth-century polity known as the Bengal *Subah* included Bengal and Orissa (Odisha) and, from 1733, Bihar; Jadunath Sarker, ed. *History of Bengal*, vol. 2, *Muslim Period, 1200 A.D.-1757 A.D.* (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1948; reprint, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 2003), 401, 425. In the present chapter the term “province” is used in the generic sense of the term to describe Bihar and Orissa even though during most of the period under study they were under the rule of the governor of the Bengal *Subah*. The author wishes to thank the following people and institutions for their advice and assistance in preparing this chapter: Dr. Jeremy Black; Dr. Virgilio Ilari; Dr. Kaushik Roy; Dr. Luigi Loreto; Lucy C. Chiu, J.D. and Christopher Eck, M.A., J.D.; very special thanks to the New York Public Library (especially its Vartan Gregorian Center for Research in the Humanities and the Manhattan Research Library Initiative) and to the author’s colleagues in Princeton Research Forum, without whose support this research would have not been possible.

Western accounts of war in eighteenth-century Bengal undervalue or ignore: the Persian-language narratives written by South Asian contemporaries of Alivardi Khan and Sirajuddaula. Three in particular invite analysis: the *Siyaru'l-muta'akhhirin* of Ghulam Husain Tabatabai (born ca. 1728, and a Bengali Muslim nobleman associated with the ruling elite), the *Muzaffar-nāmah* of Karam Ali (born 1736, son of an official in the government of Alivardi Khan), the *Tá'rikh-i-Bangála-i-Mahábatjangi* of Yúsuf 'Alí Khán (son of another government official of Alivardi Khan's regime, fl. 1750s-1760s).²

Spatial considerations affected the political and military decision-making of the leaders of the Nizamat (*Nawabi* regime) in several ways. Some of those considerations stemmed from the very location of the Bengal *Subah* within the Mughal Empire as well as within the broader geographic expanse of the Islamic and Eurasian worlds. On the one hand, Bengal was at the geographic extreme of the Mughal empire. As a result, the imposition of Mughal centralized authority and institutions was less intensive than in the northern parts of the subcontinent

- 2 Ghulam Husain Khan [Sayyid Ghulam Husain Tabatabai], *Siyaru'l-muta'akhhirin, the History of Latter Days: India in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (Delhi: Primus Books, 2023), [hereafter cited as *Siyar*]; Yúsuf 'Alí Khán, *The Tá'rikh-i-Bangála-i-Mahábatjangi: An Eye-witness Account of Nawab Alivardi Khan of Bengal and his Times*, trans. Abdus Subhan (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1982), [hereafter cited as *Tá'rikh-i-Bangála-i-Mahábatjangi*]; Karam Ali, *Muzaffar-nāmah* in *Bengal Nawabs*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1952, reprinted 1985), 10-78, [hereafter cited as *Muzaffar-nāmah*]; also of some use is the *Riyazu-s-salāṭīn* of Ghulam Husain Salīm Zaidpuri (born in Uttar Pradesh, government functionary, fl. 1750s-1780s); Ghulam Husain Salīm Zaidpuri, *The Riyazu-s-salāṭīn: A History of Bengal*, trans. Maulavi Abdus Salam (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1902) (hereafter cited as *Riyaz*). Reference sources of relatively equal reliability and authoritativeness offer an array of transliterations into English of the titles of these works and the names of various persons and places mentioned in them; for persons and places this chapter favors the transliterations from the online English edition of *Banglapedia: The National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, 2nd revised and expanded ed., chief ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012), this is a reference work produced according to very rigorous academic standards; some individual articles of considerable import offer useful bibliographies, listing scholarly sources often ignored by scholars in the Anglo-American world. Western military historians of South Asia as well as anyone interested in global military history should make more use of this extensive, authoritative and freely accessible work of remarkable scholarship. When *Banglapedia* does not provide a transliteration of the name of a person or place mentioned here, the present chapter uses the transliterations found in Kalikinkar Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 2nd ed., rev. (Calcutta: World Press Private, 1963); exceptions are made when citing the authors and titles of the particular English editions and translations of Persian-language narratives used here, so as to make bibliographic identification thereof more possible.

and local and regional practices and institutions continued to function.³ Mughal authorities during the late seventeenth century considered Bengal a sort of backwater.⁴ On the other hand, the very conquest and consolidation of Bengal into the Mughal Empire integrated it into the wider continental Eurasian and Indian Ocean littoral worlds more than its inhabitants had seen previously.⁵ The movement of individuals, small family units as well as larger population groups from various other Eurasian regions that this integration allowed materially affected the military capabilities of the *Nawabs*. This was so owing to the very structure of the military system of Bengal and other parts late-Mughal South Asia. The military system upon which the leaders of the Bengal *Subah* in the eighteenth century depended was quite different from that of their European contemporaries. These differences did not suggest inferior military capacity. In fact, in some aspects such as war finance and recruitment, the *Nawabs* enjoyed some advantages. They do suggest, interestingly, a relationship to spatial considerations that was certainly quite exceptional when compared to other regions.

One might term the armed forces of the Bengal *Subah* a “semi-institutionalized” army. The army was not organized into standing regiments in quite the same way as the regular armies of many European countries. Nor did the army of the Bengal *Subah* have much standardization of uniforms, drill, weapons and training that their European contemporaries were striving to achieve. Instead, the *Nawabs* relied upon a system established earlier during the Mughal period and that persisted after the Bengal *Subah* became effectively independent. An office-holder called a *mansabdar* was assigned a unit of revenue-producing land, called a *jagir*. The *mansabdar* was expected to use the revenue produced to maintain a certain number of troops, usually cavalry, with any remaining revenue from the *jagir* being theirs to keep.⁶

3 Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50-54.

4 Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 52-53.

5 The effects of this cultural integration affected many aspects of life, but one such was architecture; M.A. Bari, “The Mughal Architecture, Chapter 1: Historical Introduction,” in *Cultural Survey of Bangladesh*, vol. 2, *Architecture: A History Through the Ages*, ed. A.B.M. Husain (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2007), 232-35; for a general treatment of the effects of the influx and outgoings of people from the wider Eurasian world including during the medieval and early modern periods, see Van Schendel, *History of Bangladesh*, 39-46 and on the integration of Bengal into the wider Eurasian world under Mughal rule see Atul Chandra Roy, *History of Bengal: Mughal Period (1526-1765 A.D.)* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1968), 344-45.

6 Channa Wickremesekera, *‘Best Black Troops in the World’: British Perceptions and the Mak-*

The infrastructure of the Mughal revenue system (which also kept functioning after Bengal's *de facto* independence) provided another source of troops. Local and regional revenue-collectors were called zamindars. In the earlier part of the Mughal period in South Asia, zamindars had included officials sent to particular regions by imperial authority, but zamindars had always also included those who came from the range of local leaders of long-established networks of kinship and traditional patron-client relationships common to many pre-modern agrarian societies. Thus, some zamindars' positions originated from the period of the Mughal conquest while others had origins dating further back. Members of this latter group had been essentially adopted into the Mughal system and then inherited by the independent *Nawabs* like Murshid Quli Khan and his successors. By the eighteenth century the Bengal zamindars were functioning in effect as local or regional semi-independent warlords, with some of them holding positions as *mansabdars* as well.⁷

Underlying and indeed facilitating this system was a large, heavily armed rural population. Indeed, the presence of a heavily-armed peasantry ready and willing to sell their military labor distinguished eighteenth-century Bengal (and Mughal-era South Asia generally) from many other parts of the eighteenth-century world.⁸ Brokers of military labor, called *jemedars*, raised troops from the large pool of potential soldiery who then served under their personal command.⁹ As Channa Wickremesekera has pointed out, overall patron-client connections and not merely pay cemented these relationships.¹⁰ The result was that the armies of the Bengal *Subah* during the *Nawabi* era were forces in which personal relationships mattered

ing of the Sepoy, 1746-1805 (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 37-42.

- 7 Shirin Akhtar, "Land Control and Landed Society During the Nawabi Regime", in *History of Bangladesh*, ed. Sirajul Islam, vol. 3, *Social and Cultural History* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1997), 65; Roy, *History of Bengal*, 349-64.
- 8 The common population in seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century South Asia was profusely armed; some European travelers recalling seeing ryots (peasants) working the fields with matchlock muskets and swords lying on the ground nearby as they ploughed. Although this particular recollection dates from a Dutch traveler of the 1630s, accounts from the eighteenth century likewise recalled a well-armed peasantry; see Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6-7; useful to the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century background, as well as some late-Mughal eighteenth-century conditions is Dirk H. A. Kolff, "The Polity and the Peasantry" in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia, 1000-1800*, ed. Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202-231.
- 9 On the vitality and depth of the military labor market as well as the importance of *jemedars*, see also Jos Gommans, "Indian Warfare and Afghan Innovation During the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in History* 11, no. 2 (1995): 263-64.
- 10 Wickremesekera, 'Best Black Troops in the World', 39-43.

as much as institutional connections. Troops of smaller units were more loyal to their individual commander than to any formally-constituted state authority.¹¹

Thus, each nawab was confronted with the need to remain ever vigilant and ready to suppress or conciliate a potential rebel. Rulers like Sarfaraz Khan, Alivardi Khan, and Sirajuddaula depended upon the ability to recruit principal subordinates who were not just capable field commanders but politically astute and reasonably loyal, at least most of the time. “Reasonably loyal” in this sense did not need to mean unquestionably faithful all the time; it meant a willingness to at least consider abandoning any contemplated treachery when bribed by an agreed-upon amount of money, conciliated by honors, awarded a new office, or even just given assurances of respect.¹²

The geopolitical dimensions of this system deserve closer analysis, as they affected decision-making and indeed the outcome of wars. To rule the Bengal *Subah* meant accepting that borders had meaning only in certain circumstances. In South Asia overall during the Mughal period it is more useful to think about what Channa Wickremesekera has called “frontier zones” rather than frontiers.¹³ In some cases – such as in the conflict between Alivardi Khan and various Maratha chiefs in the 1740s or the rebellion of Alivardi’s general Mustafa Khan – contemporaries clearly recognized that the *Subah* had a border and that it had been crossed.¹⁴ Yet in so many other cases the same contemporary observers made clear that the Bengal *Subah* was not a polity in which the frontier was in any way a reliable indicator of the limits of the *Nawab*’s sovereignty. A regional governor or any of a number of zamindars could potentially rebel at any time, threatening to achieve an independence formally recognized by the Emperor.¹⁵

11 Kaushik Roy, “Military Power and Warfare in the Era of European Ascendancy in Bengal, 1700-1815” in *A Comprehensive History of Modern Bengal, 1700-1950*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, in association with Primus Books, 2020), 1: 36-37; Kaushik Roy, *The Oxford Companion to Modern Warfare in India: From the Eighteenth Century to Present Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 27; Wickremesekera, ‘Best Black Troops in the World’, 38; Kaushik Roy, *Military Manpower, Armies and Warfare in South Asia* (New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 55-57.

12 For an example of how conciliatory efforts and verbal promises during an in-person meeting could bring a recalcitrant subordinate back to enthusiastic loyalty, see the case in Alivardi’s 1742 campaign against the Maratha commander Bhaskar Pandit who had recently invaded the *Subah*. Alivardi was hindered by the disaffection of his general Mustafa Khan. A visit to Mustafa Khan’s headquarters with verbal promises of sincere intent resulted in Mustafa Khan’s enthusiastic return to fighting; see *Siyar*, 224-226.

13 Wickremesekera, ‘Best Black Troops in the World’, 36-37.

14 See for example *Tá’rikh-i-Bangála-i-Mahábatjangi*, 46-47, 50-55, 60, 63-64 and *Siyar*, 222.

15 Examples of rebellious zamindars are numerous, but see for instance see *ibid.*, 240, 249.

The actions of zamindars as *de facto* regional rulers meant that the sovereignty of the *Nawab* over the province was conditional, fractured and always contestable anyway. Analysis of geopolitics in early modern states calls for acknowledgement of the concept of “internal frontiers”.¹⁶ Such an approach is applicable to the Bengal *Subah*. Bengal, much like the larger Mughal Empire of which it was still nominally part, was in some ways a conglomeration of smaller polities whose status and whose geographical limits remained open to negotiation and contestability.

On occasions when the *Nawab* faced a threat, whether external invader or internal usurper, any campaign required constant awareness regarding the political disposition of the zamindars not just in the area of operations but all around the *Subah*. This awareness certainly might reach down to the operational level. One example comes from the campaigns of Alivardi Khan in 1741-1742 first against Baqir Ali Khan and then against the Maratha chief Bhaskar Pandit. Baqir Ali Khan had won control from Alivardi of the province of Orissa (Odisha) and taken prisoner the governor Alivardi had appointed, while Bhaskar Pandit soon thereafter invaded. Alivardi called for reinforcements from his nephew, son-in-law and governor of Patna (also known as Azimabad, and the capital of Bihar), Mirza Muhammad Hashim (better known as Zainuddin Ahmad Khan or sometimes called by his title Haibat Jang).¹⁷

Zainuddin was unable to march to Alivardi's aid right away, however, as he was occupied with suppressing the zamindars of Shahabad in Bhojpur. The geopolitical dimensions of military power (in the modern sense of those terms) certainly affected Zainuddin's decisions in this instance. These elements of spatiality were specific to the military-political milieu of eighteenth-century India. Some of Zainuddin's advisors had warned him that a military campaign against the zamindars of Bhojpur alone would not be sufficient to reduce them; it was necessary also to remove potential patrons nearby at Zainuddin's court. Otherwise, the recently-suppressed zamindars would just rebel again, and use their patron's influence to escape any consequences.¹⁸ The geopolitical element becomes apparent when one recognizes that it was the proximity of the rebellious zamindars' potential patron that was critical. Without a political system in which rulers expected that individual adventurers could and would move back and forth across a wider Mughal cultural expanse seeking offices and commands, the zamindars of Bhojpur would not

16 See for example Jeremy Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 26-27.

17 *Siyar*, 212-218; 232.

18 *Ibid.*, 218-219, 232; a shorter account of the campaign against Baqir Ali Khan is found in *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 27-28.

have had the options that they enjoyed, and Zainuddin's task would have been less complicated. Spatiality specific to the military-political system of eighteenth-century Bengal therefore affected the campaign on the operational level.

The Bengal *Subah* of the first half of the eighteenth century was of course hardly exceptional in the eighteenth-century world as a state in which the ruler claimed or desired more effective authority than they could actually exercise. Yet porous borders and ambiguous limits of sovereignty did not merely offer challenges; they also offered opportunities. In a military system where personal political connections and loyalties were so vital, the ability of an ambitious individual with entrepreneurial military competencies to traverse long distances in search of opportunities for service stood to benefit rulers as much as it benefitted the individuals who sought advancement or rebels seeking their sponsorship. The fact that Mughal sovereignty still persisted nominally, if not in effect, helped create a kind of cultural overlay that validated the comings and goings of various individuals. Moreover, the connection of the Mughal realm to the wider Eurasian and Indian Ocean worlds meant that the geographic expanse over which ambitious people could travel was even more substantial.

Here too then the spatial dimensions of military power become apparent in that Bengal's integration into the overall cultural and economic network of Mughal India and the wider Islamic world made it a favorable destination for ambitious individuals seeking offices and military commands. Indeed, Alivardi Khan himself had arrived in the *Subah* short of money and material goods, but certainly not lacking in ambition and capability. Accounts of war and politics in eighteenth-century Bengal make clear the importance of the comings and goings of those seeking a command or an office.¹⁹

Eighteenth-century South Asia was of course also not unique in its status as a region open to persons with military ambitions. Individuals with those entrepreneurial military competencies moved across European states as well, and in fact historians have recognized "military cosmopolitanism" as an important element of eighteenth-century European military culture.²⁰ Perhaps the eighteenth-century

19 For accounts of the impoverished but ambitious, capable and assertive Alivardi's arrival at the court of Shuja Khan see *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangī*, [1]-4; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 11-12; the ability to move freely throughout Mughal South Asia meant too that a dissatisfied courtier or commander could just leave; see the case of the Hidayat Ali Khan's taking offense at this patron, Zainuddin Ahmad Khan; *Siyar*, 248; on military adventurers also see Roy, *Military Manpower*, 56-57.

20 For example, in the Prussian context see Theodor Schieder, *Frederick the Great*, ed. and trans. Sabina Berkeley and H. M. Scott (New York: Longman, 2000), 46-47; I thank Dr. Mark Charles Fissel for his formulating the term "entrepreneurial military competencies".

South Asian situation is distinctive, though, because there the military system depended so closely upon access to individual adventurers, whereas many European armies were coming to rely increasingly more on institutionalization and bureaucratic structures.

The ability to traverse a wide geographical area while staying within the broader culturally-defined space of a Muslim world applied not just to enterprising individuals but to entire population groups. Eighteenth-century and modern observers alike have recognized the dependence of Alivardi Khan on the Afghan population of the region of Tirhut, in the northern part of the Bengal *Subah*, as a source of troops and commanders. Although Afghan people had lived in Tirhut in the seventeenth century, it was the more recent eighteenth-century influx of Afghans into Northern India overall during Alivardi's own lifetime that did so much to provide a source of troops as well as potential commanders.²¹ As for the Afghans in the Tirhut region specifically, the same Afghan commanders who could one day be enterprising *jemedars* ready to lead capable troops on Alivardi's behalf could a short time later lead a rebellion against him. With that dynamic of quickly shifting loyalties at play, it is easy to see how proximity in the case of Tirhut's military human resources represented both asset and potential threat in a military system like that of eighteenth-century Bengal. This further exposes the geopolitical dimensions of military power in the Bengal *Subah*.

Another example of the importance of the movement of military populations across the wider Islamic world comes from the forces of Safdar Jang, *Nawab* of Oudh, a nominal ally of Alivardi in the early 1740s though actually his rival. When Safdar Jang in December 1742 advanced threateningly into Bihar, his army consisted of not only forces recruited from usual Mughal sources, but troops who had recently been serving with the forces of Nadir Shah much further to the west and who had now come to Oudh to join Safdar Jang.²² Some European powers also benefitted from the willingness and ability of large groups of people with military capability to move across long distances to offer their service. Russian armies during the Seven Years' War, for example, included Kalmyk men who rode a thousand miles from their homeland to fight in Eastern Europe.²³ The relatively recent arrival of populations with military capability in the Bengal *Subah* and its

21 Upendra Thakur, "Alivardi and the Afghans of Tirhut", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 21 (1958), 376; Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar and Sons, 1932-1950), 1: 43-48.

22 *Siyar*, 239-40.

23 Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: the Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 220-23.

effect on the decision-making of leaders like Alivardi Khan and his subordinates was part of a broader pattern in the eighteenth-century Eurasian world. The fact that these populations could often cross what were only nominally political borders is further testimony to the geopolitical dimensions of raising and maintaining troops in the Bengal *Subah* of the eighteenth century.

Troops required leaders, however, and the spatial dimensions of the Bengal *Subah*'s dependence on a supply of ambitious individuals to serve as principal subordinates stemmed in part from the Mughal revenue system and administrative structure, which itself persisted even after the Bengal *Subah* had become *de facto* independent.²⁴ The revenue system was based fundamentally on spatially-defined administrative units such as the *sarkar* (a geographic subdivision of a province) and the *pargana* (a subdivision of a *sarkar*), similar to how the *mansabdar* system of raising military forces had as its base the *jagir*. Although there were multiple means by which the *Nawab* might conciliate a recalcitrant or disgruntled officer whose renewed allegiance was essential, awarding him a new territorial-based office was certainly among those means. For example, in early 1743 when Husain Quli Khan was thrown out as Deputy Governor of Dacca (Dhaka) for supposedly being short on the amount of revenue he was supposed to turn in, his post was given to one Yasin Khan. When Husain Quli Khan proved the accusations against him to be false he was restored to his post and Yasin Khan was thrown out, thus angering Yasin Khan because he himself had certainly done nothing wrong. Ataulah Khan, a high-ranking *mansabdar* and one of Alivardi's principal commanders, repaired the situation by ensuring that Yasin Khan received one of Ataulah Khan's own positions, the command of a post called Bhagalpur, which Ataulah Khan had held with a *mansab* of 2000 cavalry.²⁵ The overlapping of the zamindari (revenue collection) system with the *mansabdari* system meant that the *Nawab* could recognize or incentivize military service by intentionally giving a subordinate a zamindari that the nawab expected would yield far more in practice than the revenue officially due from the new zamindar to the *Nawab*.²⁶

Yet this potential had its limits, and the spatial dimensions of strategy and warfare were also at play in creating those limits because not all geographically-defined postings were desirable. For example, in May 1749 when Alivardi needed to replace the governor of the fort of Barabati near Cuttack in Orissa, few officers

24 Syed Giasuddin Ahmed, "State and Governance: Medieval Period", in *Cultural Survey of Bangladesh*, vol. 3, *State and Culture*, ed. Emajuddin Ahamed and Harun-or-Rashid (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2007), 448.

25 *Siyar*, 246-47; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 44-45, 61.

26 Akhtar, "Land Control and Landed Society During the Nawabi Regime," 40.

wanted it as the district was viewed as difficult to defend owing to its proximity to the bases of nearby Maratha forces.²⁷ It is hardly surprising that a posting in a constantly-threatened border region would be less desirable and many mid-ranking commanders in Europe and the Americas likely felt similarly. In Bengal, however, the geopolitical aspect took on a further significance given the semi-institutionalized nature of the army. In the Bengal *Subah* the distribution and re-distribution of offices that overlapped with spatially-defined military commands and revenue-producing areas was not merely part of the system but nearly its essence.

The constant negotiation and renegotiation to maintain the loyalty of principal subordinates required of the nawab ongoing cost-benefit analysis that was not particularly easy to execute. For example, in March 1745 Alivardi Khan regretted that he had earlier offered the deputy-governorship of Bihar to his Afghan general Mustafa Khan (also known by his title Babar Jang). When Mustafa Khan sought to claim his office, Alivardi realized he had actually offered a post he could not afford to give away after all. When Alivardi reneged on his promise, he tried to placate Mustafa Khan with assurances of high regard. Mustafa Khan, unpersuaded, rebelled and marched toward Bihar's capital, Patna, to seize it by force. As he was a senior commander with a substantial *mansab*, this rebellion posed a serious threat. The present governor of Bihar, Zainuddin, had to remain on the operational-level defensive until Alivardi could march to his aid, though with their combined forces Zainuddin and Alivardi eventually defeated Mustafa Khan.²⁸ This episode on the one hand affirms the importance of spatially-defined offices within the semi-institutional military system of the Bengal *Subah* with its attendant importance on interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, however, it illustrates the geopolitical constraints as well as geopolitical potential that leaders of the Bengal *Subah* during the eighteenth century faced. Territorial units were a medium of exchange within the system but the *Nawab* had to judge in which situation some part of the polity was simply too valuable to give to a particular subordinate.

Yet the territorial unit as a medium of exchange had value when dealing with external threats as well. It was cost-benefit analysis of the exchange that mattered the most. For example, after having fought Maratha invasions of his realm for nearly a decade, Alivardi Khan finally sought a decisive end to the Maratha threat in 1751 when he reached an accommodation with the Maratha chief Raghuji Bhonsle. Alivardi ceded Orissa to Raghuji along with a cash payment, while Raghuji

27 *Muzaffar-nāma*, 34-35.

28 *Siyar*, 255-278; a useful and well-documented overview of Mustafa Khan's rebellion is also found in Thakur, "Alivardi and the Afghans of Tirhut," 380-386.

agreed never to enter Bengal with his forces again.²⁹ Although it meant giving up a substantial part of his realm and although it did not fully end all vestiges of conflict with the Marathas, contemporaries regarded Alivardi's decision as a reasoned and cost-effective way of ending a long-recurring threat.³⁰ Given the importance of territorial units as a medium of exchange, this might be regarded as a geopolitical solution to the long-term strategic-level and operational-level military challenge that the Maratha invasions represented for the Bengal *Subah*.

In some cases the spatial dimensions of military power shaped not only the all-important recruitment and retention of enterprising individuals to serve as commanders but the recruitment of troops themselves. Although the availability of a large pool of military labor characterized the Bengal *Subah*, some areas within it offered different opportunities for commanders than others. For example, Alivardi's nephew Sayed Ahmed Khan, (also known by his title Saulat Jang) when governor of Orissa in 1741 found he could economize in maintaining his forces by hiring troops locally, as they were willing to serve for less pay than the troops he had brought with him from other regions. Although he may have been successful in so economizing in the short run, by doing so he antagonized some of his own lieutenants. This deprived him of support when he faced a rebellion shortly afterwards.³¹ This example shows that awareness of the spatial aspect of hiring troops and the variations within the *Subah* on that matter was useful, but a commander could not take advantage of such regional variations unless he could still successfully navigate the complex web of interpersonal relationships so critical to the military system. Here again then is another example of the complex relationship between geopolitics and military human resources in eighteenth-century Bengal.

A somewhat similar case is found in how Zainuddin Ahmad Khan tried to handle the presence of the militarily-capable Afghan population of the region of Tirhut. For Zainuddin as governor of Bihar, the proximity of Tirhut and its principal city of Darbhanga, the seat of many of the Afghan leaders, was simultaneously both asset and threat. Its nearness to Patna meant that on the one hand, the governor of Bihar (or the *Nawab* himself) could enjoy the advantages of a nearby region that might offer a steady supply of troops and enterprising, capable commanders. On the other hand, the same characteristics of the Afghan leaders of that region that made them such valuable subordinate commanders – audaciousness in the

29 Jadunath Sarkar, *Bihar and Orissa During the Fall of the Mughal Empire (With a Detailed Study of the Marathas in Bengal and Orissa)* (Patna: Patna University, 1932), 109-116. I thank Dr. Kaushik Roy for drawing my attention to the importance of Sarkar's work.

30 *Siyar*, 340-343; *Muzaffar-nāma*, 48; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 107-109.

31 *Siyar*, 212-214.

field, willingness to take the initiative, and personal ambition – meant that they were also threats. In a system without a fully bureaucratized military institution, subordinate commanders could come and go at will, sometimes taking their contingents with them when they left.

The consequences of this were apparent in Zainuddin's decisions as governor of Bihar during 1746-1747. In June 1746 two of Alivardi's particularly enterprising Afghan commanders, Samshir Khan and Sardar Khan, left his service over a monetary dispute and returned to their homes in Darbhanga. Their contingents combined numbered about 6000 troops, which was regarded as a fairly substantial force. Zainuddin later claimed that having both Samshir Khan and Sardar Khan, along with troops loyal to each man, so geographically close yet out of immediate employ was too much of a threat. Zainuddin persuaded Alivardi, against Alivardi's better judgment, to allocate funds to take both Afghan commanders and their troops into Zainuddin's own retinue.³² Some sources, however, allege that Zainuddin secretly wanted to recruit the Afghan generals so he could raise his own rebellion against Alivardi.³³ Even if this was true, the very fact that Zainuddin could use removing a nearby latent threat as a pretext for hiring the Afghan generals nevertheless substantiates the point that proximity of Tirhut and its Afghan population was both asset and threat. Once funded and able to pay their own troops Samshir Khan and Sardar Khan indeed rebelled, launching a violent uprising in which they not only killed Zainuddin but for a while even took over Patna.³⁴ Thus here again the spatial aspects of military human resources were at play in eighteenth-century Bengal, underscoring once more the impact of geopolitics on war.

Geopolitics of Strategic Orientation

The effects of the geopolitical dimensions of military human resources overlapped with effects of another perhaps even more critical aspect of the geopolitics of eighteenth-century Bengal. That aspect is what one might term "strategic orientation", with "orientation" meant in the directional sense. Economic, social and cultural life in the Bengal *Subah* of the *Nawabi* period tied it to all surrounding regions, and via the sea to the south, to the wider world. Even in antiquity, overseas

32 *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangī*, 69-71; *Siyar*, 285-86, 293-96; Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 103-105 recounts this episode and its consequences.

33 *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangī*, 70-71; *Siyar* 295-96 only mentions Zainuddin's ambition if not plans for outright rebellion as motive; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 43, makes no mention of this intent and only refers to his ambition in its account; Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 104 follows the accounts in *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangī* and *Siyar*.

34 *Siyar* 296-310; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangī*, 71-80; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 43-46.

trade links with Sri Lanka and the southern part of the subcontinent brought goods in and out of Bengal. Bengal's rivers, the geographic feature which does the most to fundamentally shape life in the region, provided the conduits for economic and cultural exchange and connected Bengal to the northern parts of the subcontinent. Yet overland routes to northern India, to Assam and to Southeast Asia also contributed to the economic and cultural vitality of the region, through all periods from ancient times onward into the eighteenth century.³⁵

The *Nawabs* were oriented in the general sense towards each of the surrounding regions or seas, and polities on all Bengal's borders (such as those borders existed) did matter in the broader life of the *Subah*. Yet the main orientation in political terms and especially in strategic military terms was often towards Bihar's capital, Patna. Events during Alivardi's reign, his own decisions and the decisions of his chief commanders bore this out. This is not to say that his campaigns did not range throughout Bengal. After all, the Maratha threat during the 1740s came from roughly the southwesterly direction.³⁶ Yet the focus on Bihar, and especially its capital Patna, was recurring.

It is perhaps tempting for modern Western historians to downplay the concern with which the *Nawabs* looked towards the northwest. A focus on the development of the British Raj might tempt Anglocentric historians to focus mostly upon the south. The subtitle of P.J. Marshall's classic volume in the New Cambridge History of India, *Bengal: the British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740-1828* uses a term that, at least to military historians, draws attention to the concept of coming from sea to land.³⁷ Marshall himself probably did not intend to convey the implication that only Bengal's southern sea frontier mattered, but Western historians often do not appreciate the *Nawabs'* focus on the Bengal *Subah's* northwestern "strategic direction."

Patna, rather than Murshidabad, Dacca or any other urban center in Bengal was the coveted prize of Alivardi's general Mustafa Khan (Babar Jang) during his 1745 rebellion against Alivardi.³⁸ Later in 1748 when Samsheer Khan and Sardar Khan successfully seized Patna, Alivardi's reaction was immediate and decisive. He

35 Aksadul Alam, "Geographical Location and its Influence," in *Cultural Survey of Bangladesh*, vol. 4, *Cultural History*, ed. K. M. Mohsin and Sharif uddin Ahmed (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2007), 37-40.

36 For summaries of the Maratha invasions on Bengal during Alivardi's reign see Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 45-94.

37 P. J. Marshall, *Bengal, the British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740-1828* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

38 *Siyar*, 255-71.

moved quickly to secure the loyalty of his most important subordinates and their troops. He promised their pay would be brought up to date – an affirmation that carried considerable weight in a system where many troops advanced their military labor on credit.³⁹ He ensured that this promise could not be seen as empty by going to great lengths to borrow the necessary funds from immediate relatives.⁴⁰

Maratha raiding forces were still operating in the vicinity of Murshidabad and Alivardi at first wrestled with the decision of whether to abandon his capital, even if temporarily, to march towards Patna.⁴¹ Although he of course tried to ensure the security of Murshidabad as best he could before marching to Patna to liberate it and although avenging his slain son-in-law Zainuddin was also certainly a motive, ultimately the priority was clear. Above all else Bihar and the critical city of Patna had to be recaptured and made secure once again. Further testimony to the city's importance possibly comes from the fact that the Maratha forces near Murshidabad abandoned their raiding in that area and themselves marched towards Patna to unite with the Afghan forces of Samsheer Khan and Sardar Khan.⁴² Alivardi reacted with great relief when he defeated the combined Afghan-Maratha forces at the Battle of Ranisari on April 16, 1748, freed Patna (where the Afghans had committed excessive abuses against the population) and recovered Bihar.⁴³

Despite that victory, Patna again remained a desired target. The city was the object of an attempted coup by the seventeen-year-old Sirajuddaula and his mentor, Mahdi Nasr Khan in June 1750.⁴⁴ On another occasion when Sharfunessa, wife and consort of Alivardi Khan, suspected planned treachery from Patna's governor, she warned Alivardi that Patna was a sort of gateway for armies to pass in and out of Bengal and its security should thus be a priority.⁴⁵

None of this is to suggest that Alivardi was uncommitted to defending his capital, Murshidabad. He certainly was, and in fact in his campaigns during the 1740s when he faced both Maratha invaders and various other threats simultaneously, he sometimes showed an outstanding ability to take advantage of interior lines of

39 For an example of the consequences of troops advancing their military labor on credit, see the case of Alivardi Khan's 1749 campaign against the Maratha-allied Afghan general Mir Habib, when a contingent of one of Alivardi's subordinates, Haidar Ali Khan, refused to advance further until they received their back-pay; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 87 and Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 84-85.

40 Siyar, 302-303; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 73-76.

41 Siyar, 303; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 74-76.

42 Siyar, 304; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 75-76.

43 Thakur, "Alivardi and the Afghans of Tirhut," 387-92; Datta *Alivardi and His Times*, 106-114.

44 On this episode see Siyar, 330-340 and *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 101-104.

45 Siyar, 313-14.

communication. An example comes from Alivardi's actions in December, 1742 when Safdar Jang was advancing threateningly into Bihar. Alivardi had barely finished evicting Maratha forces under Bhaskar Pandit from Orissa in the southwest, and still needed to be present there to reconsolidate his control of the province. Alivardi's quick return even just to his central position in Murshidabad was enough to deter Safdar Jang.⁴⁶ Alivardi's very ability to exploit interior lines to counter threats from multiple directions, however, underscores the geopolitical aspect of his strategic-level and indeed operational-level decision-making. The Bengal *Subah* from the perspective of its ruler was not so much a bridgehead to or from any other region but a polity with multiple land frontier-zones, across which multiple threats could and often did emerge sequentially or, worse, simultaneously.

The Geopolitical Context of the 1756-1757 Campaign in Bengal

All the above geopolitical considerations are useful not only for understanding the military decision-making of Alivardi Khan and his lieutenants themselves during the period of Alivardi's rule but for understanding the Bengal *Subah*'s role in wider conflicts as well, such as the Seven Years' War. Many modern histories of the Seven Years' War written by Western scholars tend to treat Sirajudaula's brief reign in isolation, centering more on British East India Company commander Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Clive's decisions and the connection to the Anglo-French conflict.⁴⁷ Siraj operated, however, in the same geopolitical setting

⁴⁶ Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 62-65.

⁴⁷ Some survey treatments severely misrepresent the campaign in Bengal in a way their authors do not for other theaters; for example, Daniel Marston, *The Seven Years' War* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2001), 46 claims Siraj was unaware of the conspiracy that led to the defeat at Plassey and his chief general Mir Jafar's impending defection; this kind of distortion stands in stark contrast to Marston's careful attention to the North American and various European theaters. In a few cases, works that are reasonably researched regarding North American and European theaters contain errors of basic fact regarding the campaign in Bengal. See for example William R. Nester, *The French and Indian War and the Conquest of New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 108, in which Nester refers to three Indian empires "the Mogul, the Maratha and the Deccan" misrepresenting the fractured nature of the Mughal polity by mid-century and misunderstanding that the Mughal viceroyalty of the Deccan still existed mostly nominally and with some practical meaning, and further claiming each of the alleged three empires "in turn were divided by scores of principalities or nabobs", implying no clear understanding that a nabob (the antiquated corruption of the modern preferred transliteration "*Nawab*") was an office rather than a geopolitical unit, also see William R. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 73 which claims that Clive himself became *Nawab* after his victory at Plassey. Nester in *First Global War*, 73 does not even mention Mir Jafar by name

as his predecessor and grandfather Alivardi Khan. To ignore this setting obscures the context of Siraj's own decision-making during his short reign and distorts the reasons for the outcome of the famous campaign of 1756-1757 that resulted in the East India Company's triumph.

Awareness of the overall geopolitical setting of the Bengal *Subah* reminds one that during some of the more critical periods of the 1756-1757 campaign, Sirajuddaula was facing multiple threats beyond simply just Clive and the East India Company. They came from the northwest, in and around Bihar. First, Siraj's cousin Shaukat Jang, a regional governor, rebelled and challenged Siraj for rule

but refers interestingly to "two of the Nabob's lieutenants." Even scholars who pay closer heed to the points of view of Bengali actors give less attention to their backgrounds in contrast to the great attention they give to the backgrounds of European actors; Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (New York: Longman, 2011) provides an example; Baugh's second chapter titled "Statesmen and Regimes" deals only with Britain and France; his third chapter "Origins: the contested regions, 1748-54" considers Acadia, Nova Scotia, the New York frontier regions, the Ohio Country and, as far as South Asia is concerned, the Carnatic but the political-military background and strategic setting of the Bengal *Subah* is only briefly examined and Sirajuddaula is introduced mainly in the context of being a threat to Clive, see *ibid.*, 282-297, esp. 282-84, although Baugh nevertheless deserves credit for at least mentioning such context as the earlier Maratha threat to Bengal during Alivardi's time; likewise he must not be too heavily criticized on this matter as his work is, after all, by his choice of subtitle seemingly more centered on examining the war through the lens of the Anglo-French conflict and otherwise impressively researched and well-documented in most aspects. Yet many modern Western accounts privilege the point of view of the British and French East India companies. When introducing the context for the campaigns of 1756-1757 in Bengal, they mostly concentrate on the background of European presence in East India giving relatively cursory attention to the overall political-diplomatic-military background and historical actors of South Asia. Stuart Reed in a recent study of the Plassey campaign begins by establishing the background of the East India Company and its strategic position. That much is admirable but this same account does hardly anything at all for the Bengal *Subah*; after an entire chapter titled "Mercantile Soldiering" about the Company, its background, politics and military forces, Reed introduces Sirajuddaula himself giving little background beyond a few sentences. Stuart Reed, *The Battle of Plassey, 1757: The Victory that Won an Empire* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Books, 2017), 1-17 and on Sirajuddaula p. 20; on the other hand, Reed deserves great credit for at least providing a summary and description of the military forces of the Bengal *Subah* that is not mired in the traditional Eurocentric claim that it was merely a massive untrained and ill-armed rabble; see *ibid.*, 129-134, "Appendix 2: The Bengali Forces"; a very careful and well-documented analysis of the campaign in its political aspects is found in Sushil Chaudhury, *The Prelude to Empire: Plassey Revolution of 1757* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000); useful insight into how the Mughal polity still existed nominally while provinces like Bengal and others became *de facto* independent is found in G. S. Cheema, *The Forgotten Mughals: A History of the Later Emperors of the House of Babar (1707-1857)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002); I thank Dr. Kaushik Roy for calling my attention to importance of the latter two authors and their useful work.

of the entire *Subah*. Shaukat Jang was governor of the region of Purnea, located to the north of the Ganges, east of Tirhut. Although a somewhat more remote region and immediately adjacent to neither Patna nor the Murshidabad region, Siraj could not ignore this threat. In between his conquest of Calcutta (Kolkata) and any preparations to face the inevitable East India Company's response, Siraj had to deal with this threat. Following the seizure of Calcutta on June 20, 1756, Siraj pivoted towards Purnea where he confronted and defeated Shaukat Jang at the Battle of Manihari on October 16, 1756, only to find shortly thereafter in December a renewed threat from the East India Company forces.⁴⁸ This situation underscores and further reflects the geopolitical reality faced by Alivardi and all rulers of the Bengal *Subah* during the eighteenth century. Their sovereignty over the area nominally within the borders of the *Subah* was always fractured and easily contested. Bengal had never been a completely internally cohesive frontier-defined polity for anyone to conquer or rule in the first place. Siraj had to deal with this reality as much as any other ruler and it conditioned his responses to the East India Company.

Perhaps an even greater threat came from further to the northwest, where the Afghan emir Ahmad Shah Durrani menaced Bihar. Both contemporary British and some South Asian sources alike remark that during February-April 1757 when Siraj suggested possibly coming to an accommodation with the East India Company, a main motivation was to remove distractions in the south so that he could deal with the threat coming from the northwest. Notably, Sirajuddaula's most loyal general, Raja Ramnarain and then-governor of Bihar, remained in Bihar during the same time period – the critical months of February to April – when most of Siraj's other chief subordinates were beginning to plot the revolt against him that came to fruition at Plassey.⁴⁹ In addition to guarding against the threat from the west posed by Ahmad Shah Durrani; Raja Ramnarain also was occupied fighting a particularly recalcitrant local zamindar, Kamgar Khan of the Mai region.⁵⁰ Although some studies by modern Western scholars do at least account for the threat of a second front that Ahmad Shah Durrani posed, they do little to recognize the broader geo-

48 Sarker, ed. *History of Bengal*, vol. 2, *Muslim Period, 1200 A.D.-1757 A.D.*, 471-83; Siyar, 386-407; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 118-126; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 62-73.

49 Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company, 1756-1757: Background to the Foundation of British Power in India* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 116-123; Gommans, "Indian Warfare and Afghan Innovation," 261 places these circumstances in the context of examining the seriousness of the Afghan threat.

50 Raja Ramnarain, in letters addressed to an unnamed ally, mentions spending several months in early 1757 fighting Kamgar Khan; see S. H. Askari, "Raja Ramnarain: [Part] IV," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 15 (1939): 24.

political background and context.⁵¹ Siraj was of course ultimately unsuccessful but his willingness to try to deal with threats from multiple directions and maintain the security of Bihar is consistent with the geopolitical realities recognized by his predecessors. That his choice of which way to pivot and when to do so was ultimately incorrect does not obviate the importance that he had to make that choice. That he attempted to do so, at least, was consistent with the geopolitical realities of ruling the Bengal *Subah*.

Other examples of Sirajuddaula's actions during 1757 that are more understandable when one considers the geopolitical context come from the last few days of the campaign and of Sirajuddaula's life. Most histories of the Seven Years' War that treat the conquest of Bengal end their account of the campaign with the Battle of Plassey. To do so is to miss the point that although Siraj remained free for only a mere three days after his battlefield defeat on June 23, 1757, during that period of about 72 hours he made critical decisions on matters that some contemporaries believe might have allowed him to recover the province had he chosen differently. And again, the same geopolitical considerations that his father Zainuddin Ahmad Khan, his uncle Sayed Ahmed Khan, and his grandfather and predecessor as *Nawab*, Alivardi Khan had to account for render Siraj's fateful decisions more understandable.

When Sirajuddaula decided to flee the battlefield at Plassey in the afternoon of June 23rd, 1757 even with his army disintegrating around him, one of his most reliable commanders killed and several other commanders clearly having defected, it might seem by a superficial analysis that all was lost. In fact, however, he still retained significant assets and in the days between the battle and his final capture made choices about how to use them. Perhaps the most tangible assets were rein-

51 See for example Michael Edwardes, *The Battle of Plassey and the Conquest of Bengal* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963), 104, 117; one clear, prescient, balanced and well-researched analysis of Sirajuddaula's situation facing multiple threats is found in Gupta, *Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company*, especially pp. 122-23 on Raja Ramnarain's role; for another example of a recent study that also considers the effects of the Afghan threat see William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: the Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 116; for an older treatment see J. F.C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954-56), 2:227 where Fuller considers how Ahmad Shah Durrani's threat shaped British and Siraj's decisions. Fuller is one of the few earlier Western military historians actually to acknowledge that Sirajuddaula faced other threats besides the Europeans and to recognize other generals who might have helped Siraj; although Fuller at least acknowledges some non-European perspectives he is hardly objective, using such as language as "the crafty Bengali" with "Oriental cunning" (v. 2, p. 230) to describe the wealthy merchant Omichund (who played a leading role in the conspiracy against Sirajuddaula).

forcements that were, in fact, already en route moving towards him. These were the troops of Jean Law de Lauriston, chief of the French factory at Cossimbazar, marching from Patna, where Siraj had sent him earlier when the British East India Company demanded that he evict any French forces from the environs of southern Bengal. Law's force was at the moment of Siraj's defeat moving rapidly towards Siraj's capital, Murshidabad. Law's detachment was small, numbering less than 200 men, but with European-trained infantry and a few guns it was still a relatively potent force. Law estimated when he began his march that he was about 6-7 days away from Murshidabad.⁵² Raja Ramnarain himself may have been on the way too with perhaps as many as 10,000 men. Ramnarain may not have been entirely free to march east right away, as during May and June his forces were still occupied with suppressing Kamgar Khan, but Ramnarain's letters suggest that he was on his way.⁵³ The fact Patna was the location of what amounted to a strategic reserve again underscores the importance of the *Nawabs'* strategic orientation towards the northwest.

Contemporaries believed that Siraj may well have been able to raise other forces as well, and perhaps even regain the initiative. In the first day after the defeat at Plassey the main choice that Siraj faced was whether to try to stay and defend his capital or gather as much money as he could and retreat with a small bodyguard towards a new base of operations further north or west. After some unsuccessful attempts to regain support among principal nobles in Murshidabad by making mass payments, Siraj decided to flee in the early hours of the morning of June 25th.⁵⁴ Sources are not clear on his destination; he considered Patna, Purnea, and Rajmahal.⁵⁵ The latter was a city on the Ganges about one-third of the way along

52 In the tense months leading up to Plassey, Siraj had sent Law and his forces away to Patna; *Siyar*, 409-410. Siraj had started sending messages recalling Law on June 12, but the first of his letters did not reach Law at Patna until the 22nd. Law does not make quite clear from his memoirs how soon thereafter he set out, but it was no later than the 24th, the day after Plassey; Jean Law de Lauriston, *A Memoir of the Mughal Empire: Events of 1757-1761*, trans. G.S. Cheema (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014), 118-120.

53 Askari, "Raja Ramnarain: [Part] IV," 24-25.

54 *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 134-35; *Siyar*, 414-415; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 77.

55 The eighteenth-century South Asian memoirs and narratives are unclear as to whether Siraj had a destination and route in mind when he left Murshidabad; Ghulam Husain, *Siyar*, 414-415 says merely that he headed for Azimabad (Patna) but Yusuf Ali says that he started for Purnia and then changed his mind en route and headed for Patna; *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngī*, 135; Karam Ali says he was headed towards Malda but on the way received intelligence that Mir Jafar's relatives and allies had learned of his intent and were waiting to try to capture him, which they ultimately did; *Muzaffar-nāmah*, 77; Ghulam Husain Salīm, *Riyaz*, 375 merely says he was headed upriver in the general direction of Purnia and Patna; in

the river route from Murshidabad to Patna, and that had been a base of operations during Alivardi's reign.⁵⁶

Of even more significance in terms of the geopolitical context than the exact destination, however, was the closely related choice of the route to get there. All three potential destinations lay roughly to the northwest. The quickest way for a small force to move in that direction would be to head to the Ganges river port of Bhagwangola, about fifteen miles northeast of Murshidabad, and from there travel by boat. The other option was an overland march. The slower rate of movement meant that pursuers would have a better chance of capturing and defeating Siraj's small party. On the other hand, moving by land route meant he might be seen by potential friends as well as foes. Additional friendly forces might rally, especially if Siraj combined a deliberate march with carefully placed payments to local zamindars and other potential commanders in the regions through which he passed. Memoirist, sometime soldier, and government advisor Ghulam Husain Khan, eyewitness to many events of the wars of Alivardi's time, was certain that had Siraj moved overland and distributed money and promises along the way he would have undoubtedly accumulated a substantial force of his own even before he linked up with any reinforcements.⁵⁷ There is no way to know whether Ghulam Husain was correct but his contention again underscores the importance of the same spatial aspects of military human resources so critical in the military system of the eighteenth-century Bengal *Subah* and that Siraj's predecessors had experienced.

The case of geopolitics and war in the Bengal *Subah* of the first half of the 1700s underscores the importance of integrating geopolitical considerations into the study of campaigns and into the study of strategic-level and operational-level military decision-making in military history. To rule, or attempt to rule, the Bengal *Subah* of the eighteenth century required an awareness of the spatial aspects of war – an awareness that was all the more critical given the intimate connection between force, space, people, victory and defeat. Whether or not the fact that Alivardi Khan often succeeded while Sirajuddaula ultimately failed exposes a differential in their qualities as military and political leaders, both operated in a strategic setting where the spatial aspects of military power mattered.

the absence of more detailed accounts, this evidence can be read as much as an ability to adjust to changing tactical circumstances as it can be read as evidence of indecisiveness.

56 Datta, *Alivardi and His Times*, 60, 88, 97.

57 *Siyar*, 414-415; Dalrymple, *Anarchy*, 130-133 is one of the few recent Western histories actually to cite South Asian primary sources on Siraj's escape from Murshidabad and quotes a section of from the *Siyar*, but omits the part cited here regarding Ghulam Husain's contention that Siraj could have raised additional forces by an overland march.

Italy as a Geographical expression.

The Italian Risorgimento in a Geopolitical perspective

BY VIRGILIO ILARI

« Oh, if the Piedmontese understood their true interests as the English do! »¹

« Italy was in painful position between two great alliance systems [...]. Because of her strategic position, Italy is almost as vital to the West as France [...]. Although surrounded by water on three sides, Italy has seldom looked out at sea. »²

The most cited sentence of Metternich is his famous definition of Italy as a ‘mere geographical expression’ (*‘Italien ist nur ein geographischer Ausdruck’*).³ The Austrian Chancellor also thought this of Germany.⁴ Common language, culture and identity – he thought – were not enough to create a true political unity among the different states in which both countries were divided. Metternich repeated this belief in his diplomatic note of 2 August 1847 to Lord Palmerston on the ‘revolutionary movement’ in Central Italy, arguing the impossibility of a federal union of the Italian states, whether in the form of a monarchy or a republic.⁵ The sentence, in its intentions not at all offensive, was taken up by Silvio Spaventa in No. 4 (16 March 1848) of *Il Nazionale*, the extreme wing of the Neapolitan constitutional movement, later becoming emblematic –

1 “Oh, se i piemontesi capissero i loro veri interessi come li capiscono gli inglesi!”. The Marquise Constance d’Azeglio née Alfieri wrote this in May 1860, concerned about the risky clerical positions held by her husband, Roberto Taparelli d’Azeglio. C. D’Azeglio, *Souvenirs historique tirés de sa correspondance avec son fils Emmanuel avec l’addition de quelques lettres de son mari le marquis Robert D’Azeglio de 1835 à 1861*, Turin, 1884, pp. 639-640.

2 George Kish, Littleton B. Atkinson, «Italy», in *Military Aspects of World Political Geography*, Air University, Air Science, Vol. III, Book 2, Part IV, World Powers and Strategic Areas, Maxwell AFB, 1954, pp. 650-657.

3 Hans Rieben, *Prinzipiengrundlage und Diplomatie in Metternichs Europapolitik 1815-1848*, Sauerländer, 1942, p. 159.

4 Alan Sked, *Metternich and Austria: An Evaluation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 40, 183.

5 *Allgemeine Zeitung*, München, Nr. 53, 22 Februar 1848, p. 844.

in the political lexicon of the Risorgimento and united Italy – of the anti-Italian contempt⁶ and the reactionary illusion of being able to ‘restrain’ (in the sense of Schmittian *Katechon*) the ‘ineluctable’ course of history.

In reality, Metternich’s sentence was well founded, and not only on the lesson of Murat’s Tolentino campaign (1815), but, above all, on his direct experience at the Congress of Vienna, where, together with Talleyrand, he had redesigned the geopolitical structure of the Peninsula upset by the wars of the French Revolution and the Empire (1792-1815).⁷ For more than three centuries, Germany and Italy had been contested by the Major European Powers, which determined the political structure of both countries, divided into multiple states too small to be able to escape external influences. Any balance based on the division of these spaces into spheres of influence between the rival great powers had proved fragile and incapable of preventing conflict. Metternich’s idea was instead to defuse rivalries by the concerted control of the Allied High Powers and a new France that had renounced to pursuit hegemony.

Recently, Miroslav Šedivý, a leading Czech historian, has reinterpreted German and Italian unifications as the conscious response of the national ‘educated classes’, bankers and entrepreneurs to the perceived ‘failure’ of the post-Napoleonic European order’ in ensuring modernization and geopolitical security that emerged after 1830.⁸ About Italy, undoubtedly Italian geographers also contributed to the intellectual construction of the Risorgimento,⁹ but it is significant that specialised historiography does not yet seem to have found the traces of a pre-1850 national geopolitical ‘consciousness’.¹⁰

6 Tullio De Mauro, «Il nome Italia e altre persistenze onomastiche, §. 5», in Id., *Storia linguistica dell’Italia repubblicana: dal 1946 ai nostri giorni*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2016.

7 Wolfram Sieman, «Metternich, der Wiener Kongress und Italien», *Römische historische Mitteilungen*, N. 1, January 2016, pp. 135-144. Miroslav Šedivý, *Metternich, Italy and European Diplomacy*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2018.

8 Miroslav Šedivý, «The Role of Geopolitics in the Italian Risorgimento during the 1840s. An Introductory Survey», *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 1, 2019, pp. 25-37. Id., *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum: The Italian Response to International Insecurity 1830-1848*, Austrian Academy of Science Press, 2021. Id., «The rise of the Sicilian question in the 1840s: the Italian reaction to geopolitical insecurity in the Mediterranean», *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 37, 1, 2022, pp. 89-109.

9 Federico Ferretti, «Corrispondenze geografiche: Annibale Ranuzzi fra Geografia Pura e Risorgimento (1831-1866)», *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 2011, pp. 115-139. Id., «Inventing Italy. Geography, Risorgimento and national imagination: the international circulation of geographical knowledge in the 19th century», *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 180, No. 4, Dec. 2014, pp. 402-413.

10 Adriano Roccucci, «Per una storia geopolitica del Risorgimento», in Id. (Ed.), *La costruzione*

Unlike English, Spanish, German and French identities,¹¹ Italian identity does not include a strong geopolitical, strategic and maritime consciousness, because it was not a product of the nation-state, nor the latter was a product of identity.¹² Celebrated by Virgil, Dante and Petrarch and dating back to the so called Roman-Italic confederation (3rd-1st Century BCE),¹³ Italian identity predates political unity by a thousand years. The united Italy has lasted for a century and a half (and in the last thirty years under a supranational regime) while tenacious traces remain, in the current regional identities, of the seven centuries in which, after the fall of Rome, Italy survived in her ‘hundred cities’, later weakly reunited in a dozen of dynastic or republican ‘ancient states’, plus the papal ones. But above all, there remains, in today’s Italian ‘national’ identity itself, a very strong trace of the original imperial and/or Catholic universalism, to which the same Risorgimento’s literature referred (even though Italy was the only country to achieve its union in open, fierce contrast with its own national Church.)¹⁴

The geopolitics of the early modern Italy was in fact defined by the Germanisation of the empire and then by the collision of the great national monarchies. Italian Wars (1492-1559) destroyed the illusion of an independence based on balance (1454) and then on the anti-French Holy League (1495) as well as the Machiavellian utopia of the unifying Prince (1515).¹⁵ The relative balance of the next century and a half was based on the ‘preponderance’ of Habsburg Spain, which governed it from Madrid through the *Consejo de Italia* (1556-1713), the governor of *Milanesado* and the viceroys in Cagliari, Palermo and Naples and connected it with Flanders – the other main epicenter of European conflicts – via the *Presidios* of Tuscany, Finale and the *Camino Español*.¹⁶

dello Stato-nazione in Italia, Viella, Roma, 2012, pp. 329-341.

11 Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The Creation of National Identities: Europe, 18th–20th Centuries*, Leiden, BRILL, 2021 (1st French ed. 1999),

12 Giovanna De Sensi Sestito, Marta Petrusiewicz (Eds.), *Unità multiple. Centocinquant’anni? Unità? Italia?*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2014.

13 Ilari, *Gli italici nelle strutture militari romane*, Roma, Giuffrè, 1974.

14 Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, “Liberali che non hanno saputo dirsi cristiani”, *Il Mulino*,

15 Alberto Asor Rosa, *Machiavelli e l’Italia. Resoconto di una disfatta*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019.

16 Marco Mostarda, Ilari, «Exploring the Italian military Paradox, 1450-1792», in Jeremy Black (Ed.), *Global Military Transformations: Change and Continuity, 1450-1800*, Fucina si Marte No. 12, Roma, Nadir Media, 2023, pp. 225-280.

*Geopolitics of the 'Enlightened Italy'*¹⁷

Captured by Benedetto Croce,¹⁸ the *siglo de Oro* of Spanish, Catholic and Baroque Italy was altogether removed from the Whiggish interpretation of Italian unity. But above all, it almost completely ignored the enormous geopolitical impact that the fatal Bourbon succession to the Spanish throne (1700) had on Italy.¹⁹ Until the Peace of Aachen (1748) and the Treaty of Aranjuez (1752), the Peninsula was the theatre of another thirty years long clash between the two halves of the former Empire on which the Sun did not set. On one side the Western and Oceanic half, now Bourbon, and on the other side the Eastern and Continental half, which remained Habsburg. The Apennine ridge, extended Northwards by the Ticino, became the geopolitical divide between two different Italies, the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic, one maritime, projected towards the Atlantic, the other continental, projected towards Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. In 1750, an English observer accurately coined the Peninsula's geopolitical fate as being 'either the Seat of Empire, or the Theatre of War'.²⁰

Between the two world wars, a minority current emerged in Italian historiography (Arrigo Solmi, Ettore Rota, Gioacchino Volpe), which anticipated the so-called 'Proto-Risorgimento' to the thirty years between the peace treaties of Utrecht and Aachen. The ideological implication of this interpretation was conservative, if not reactionary. In fact, backdating the prodromes of the independence and unity to the era of the Absolutism and Cabinet politics meant reinterpreting the entire Risorgimento according to the nationalist and realist criteria of the Power Politics, putting in the background the democratic ideals and criteria of socialist internationalism and liberal transnationalism, which saw it as the emancipation of the masses and/or the individual, and thus traced its prodromes to the Enlightenment and 18th-century reformism.²¹

And in fact the factual support for the heterodox interpretation was very meagre, based solely on the posthumous (1736, 1745) fortunes of Abbot Pier

17 Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*. V: *L'Italia dei Lumi (1764-1790)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1969.

18 Benedetto Croce, *Storia del Regno di Napoli*, Bari, Laterza, 1925.

19 A. Wess Mitchell, *The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire*, Princeton U. P., Oxford, 2018.

20 John Campbell, *The Present State of Europe*, Dublin, Faulkener, 1750, p. 371.

21 Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, Torino, Einaudi, 1969-1990. Id., «L'Italia fuori d'Italia», in Ruggero Romano, Corrado Vivanti (Eds.), *Storia d'Italia*, Torino, Einaudi, III, 1973, pp. 985-1481.

Maria Tosini's theories on the freedom of Italy²² and the Jansenist and papal sympathies for the Spanish *revanche* (or rather 'Farnesian', given that the input came from Elisabeth Farnese, the 'Italian' wife of Felipe V of Spain) attempted by Cardinal Alberoni to regain control of the Italian territories (Sardinia, Tuscany, Naples and Sicily) conquered in 1707-09 by the Habsburgs.²³

The heterodox thesis did, however, have one merit, albeit unconsciously: of emphasising the geopolitical significance of the opposing pro-Habsburg attitude of two giants of Italian thought, such as Giambattista Vico and Pietro Giannone – who personally paid the price, imprisoned in the fortress of Miolans not because of the secularism expressed in his *Triregno*, but precisely because of the position he took in the historical controversy between Venice and Naples over the 'dominion of the Adriatic', a dispute that Vienna, the new mistress of Naples, had inherited from the Spanish viceroys, and that had been punctuated not only by legal arguments but also by conspiracies, proxy wars and naval expeditions.²⁴

The Geopolitics of Italy and the British Seapower

In 1653 a Dutch squadron had beaten an English one off the coast of Leghorn. But even after the seizure of Tangier (1661),²⁵ then of Gibraltar (1704) and the naval cooperation in the 1708 Austro-Sardinian operations in Provence studied by Churchill in his biography of the 1st Duke of Marlborough, the use

22 *La Libertà dell'Italia dimostrata a' suoi Principi e Popoli dall'Abbate Tosini Bolognese* (Amsterdam, 1718, there was also published in French). Id., *Storia e sentimento sopra il giansenismo nelle presenti circostanze della Chiesa, alla Santità di N.S. papa Clemente XI*, Concordia [Amsterdam] 1717. Mario Rosa, «Tosini, Pietro», *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 2019. Later Tosini was considered a precursor of Vincenzo Gioberti's theory of 'Italian primacy' (G. Natali, «L'idea del primato italiano prima di Vincenzo Gioberti», *Nuova antologia*, LII, 16 luglio 1917, f. 1092, pp. 126-134.)

23 Ilari, «La Quadruplici e il Proto risorgimento. Con una bibliografia», in Elina Gugliuzzo, Giuseppe Restifo (Eds.), *Una battaglia europea. Francavilla, 20 giugno 1719*, Fucina di Marte No. 2, Roma, Aracne, 2020, pp. 19-30. Andrea Merlotti, «I Farnese. una dinastia 'all'italiana'», in S. Verde (Ed.), *I Farnese. Architettura, arte, potere, catalogo della mostra*, Milano, Electa, 2022, pp. 36-45.

24 Simone Paliaga, «Il dominio dell'Adriatico. Sarpi, Giannone e la sovranità contesa tra Venezia, Napoli e Vienna», in *Naval History*, Quaderno Sism 2014, pp. 217-230.

25 Matteo Barbano, «La presa della Margareta (1665): la colonia inglese di Tangeri tra corsa, politica e diplomazia», Università di Genova, 2016. Id., «Within the Straits: Tangeri, gli inglesi e il Mediterraneo occidentale nella seconda metà del XVII secolo», Palermo, *New Digital Frontiers*, 2019.

of the British Seapower in the Mediterranean and Italy was hindered less by the sailing technical problems (currents, winds and seasons) than by political factors. The Spanish/Farnesian revanche of 1717-19 failed mainly due to the 'balancing' intervention of the British Mediterranean squadron, which completely destroyed the Spanish squadron peacefully anchored at Cape Passero. This was a victory later celebrated by commemorative medals that compared the Spanish defeat of 1718 to that of 1588 and mocked the apothegm '*nunca nadie contra su señor*' attributed to the King Don Felipe I.²⁶ But part of the Whigs in the House of Commons had opposed the intervention, and Robert Walpole had even mocked Stanhope as the 'knight errant' of the Emperor Charles VI. and decisive had been a parliamentary initiative to publish and spread the alarm raised by an English merchant on the "risk of losing the Mediterranean trade" to Spain.²⁷

However, again in 1720 the hypothesis of ceding Gibraltar in the name of peace was considered and in 1733-34 England did not oppose the conquest of the Two Sicilies by Felipe V's cadet son, Charles of Bourbon: whose Kingdom was consolidated in 1744 by the failure of the attempted Habsbourg reconquest. Failure determined in the final analysis by the poor support from the British Mediterranean squadron,²⁸ not only weakened by the previous defeat under Toulon but also restrained by the British government, satisfied with having neutralised Naples by triggering its geopolitical decoupling from Spain.²⁹ But the Family Compact (1761) between the Bourbon Houses of France, Spain, Parma and Two-Sicilies renewed the British interest in the geo-strategic study of the Peninsula, as demonstrated by the very detailed economic-military reports drawn up in 1765 by the British ambassadors in Naples, Florence and Venice,

26 Minted by Georg Wilhelm Vestner (1677-1740). Donald McGrady, I. Cecil Beach, «The Hawk Vanquishes the Eagle: Notes on a Motif from Æschylus to D'Annunzio», *Romance Philology*, vol. 29, No. 2, 1975, pp. 193-201.

27 Jeremy Black, «Mediterranean Geopolitics: A British Perspective», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, 5, No. 18, giu. 2024, pp. 537-558 (pp. 542-44). Gigliola Pagano De Divitiis, *Mercanti inglesi nell'Italia del Seicento: navi, traffici, egemonie*, Padova, Marsilio, 1990 (*English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, CUP, 1998).

28 Sir Herbert William Richmond, *The Navy in the War of 1739-48*, CUP, 1920, II, pp. 131-137. Michel Duffy, «The Establishment of the Western Squadron as the Lynchpin of the British Naval strategy», in Id., *Parameters of British Naval Power, 1650-1850*, Exeter U. P., 1992, pp. 60-81. Richard Harding, *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy: The War of 1739-1748*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2010, pp. 121-218 («The Continental Commitment 1741-1744»). Jeremy Black, *British Politics and Foreign Policy 1727-44*, Ashgate 2014; Routledge, 2016/24.

29 Ilari, Giancarlo Boeri, *Velletri 1744. La mancata riconquista austriaca delle Due Sicilie*, Roma, Nadir Media, 2018.

published in 1997 by Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis.³⁰

The War of the Austrian Succession, the Seven Years' War and the Russian conquest of the Crimea (which gave rise to the first Eastern Question, with the King of Sardinia offering in 1783 to "go into the country with 25,000 men to defend Turkey")³¹ consolidated and extended French influence over Tyrrhenian Italy, later also absorbing Turin and Naples, from which the commercial projection towards Russia then started. The death of Angelo Emo (1792) and the French-Neapolitan foundation of Odessa (1794) marked the definitive demise of Venice, the once Marco Polo's *Porta d'Oriente* (Gateway to the East), fatally absorbed by its *Terraferma* (continental inland).³²

Italy's new involvement in the anti-hegemonic coalitions and wars of succession (1692-1748) cemented the Italian courts' sympathetic aspiration for the neutrality of the Peninsula, which, thanks to the reversal of alliances and the Austro-French axis, was not directly involved in the Seven Years' War.³³ However, the eighteenth-century idea of 'Nation'³⁴ remained, at least in Italy, the Roman idea of particular identities within a universal *communis patria*, and therefore had an individualist meaning, at the same time 'cosmopolitan'³⁵ and

30 Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis, Vincenzo Giura, *L'Italia del secondo Settecento nelle relazioni segrete di William Hamilton, Horace Mann e John Murray*, Napoli, ESI, 1997.

31 Michelangelo Castelli, *La politique sarde et la Question d'Orient en 1783-84. Documents diplomatiques extraits des Archives du royaume*, Turin, 1855. M. S. Anderson, «The Great Powers and the Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1783-4», *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 37, No. 88 (Dec. 1958), pp. 17-41.

32 Ilari, Federico Moro, «I 'Geniali della Moscovia'», in Ilari (cur.), *Italy, I Intermarium*, 2019, pp. 25-44.

33 Ilari, Piero Crociani, Ciro Paoletti, *Bella Italia militar. Eserciti e Marine nell'Italia pre-napoleonica (1748-1792)*, Roma, USSME, 2000, pp. 11-23 («Introduzione») e 37-39 («La geopolitica fra mercantilismo e pacifismo»). Andrea Tanganelli, *I reggimenti austro-italiani nella guerra dei sette anni (1755-1763)*, Fvcina di Marte N. 6, Roma, Nadir Media, 2022. Id., «Il Battaglione di Marina Toscano e la spedizione nel Coromandel», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, I, N. 3, giu. 2020, pp. 261-302.

34 Federico Chabod, *L'idea di nazione* (1943/44), ed. by A. Saitta & E. Sestan, Bari, Laterza, 1961/67. Angela De Benedictis, Irene Fosi, Luca Mannori (Eds.), *Nazioni d'Italia: Identità politiche e appartenenze regionali fra Settecento e Ottocento*, Roma, Viella, 2013. Beatrice Alfonzetti, Marina Formica (Eds), *L'idea di nazione nel Settecento*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013. Luca Mannori, «Le molte patrie del giurista preunitario. Discorso giuridico e questione nazionale dall'antico regime all'unificazione», in Giovanni Cazzetta (Ed.), *Retoriche dei giuristi e costruzione dell'identità nazionale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, pp. 37-70.

35 Franco Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment: Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century*, ed. by Stuart J. Woolf, New York U. P., 1972.

‘European’.³⁶ The historiographical concept of the Italian Risorgimento encompasses three generations (1789-1870), but the aspiration to independence only took shape after 1820 and the aspiration to geopolitical unity only after 1849, and was always subordinate to the original and main purpose of the Risorgimental move, i.e. the enlightened modernisation of the political and socio-economic institutions within the old states. Until 1789, the Italian sovereigns also supported reformism, which was functional to their centralising needs: there was, if anything, greater resistance in the ancient aristocratic republics (Genoa and Venice). The ‘Jacobin’ turn was, according to Vincenzo Cuoco’s famous and widely shared opinion, a “passive revolution”³⁷ induced by the ‘exportation of French democracy’. In Naples, the main ideological laboratory of the future Risorgimento narrative,³⁸ the French example and support was also the elites’ weapon against the political maturation of legitimist populism. The passive revolution was in fact also a class struggle and between opposing criteria of social representation, and then a savage civil and social³⁹ war, with mutual appeals to the foreign Powers.⁴⁰

Geopolitics of Napoleonic Italy (1796-1814)

The Italian ‘*républiques soeurs*’ of 1796-99 felt themselves to be ‘sisters’ of France, but not to each other, as evidenced by the reinforced rivalry between Genoa and Turin and between Milan and Bologna and the mutual estrangement of Venice, Rome and Naples. The Cispadane (1796) and later Cisalpine Tricolour was the insignia of the two ‘Italian’ legions of 1796 and 1800 framed in the *Armée d’Italie*.⁴¹ Bonaparte therefore used the adjective in Metternich’s sense,

36 Federico Chabod, *Storia dell’idea di Europa*, ed. by A. Saitta & E. Sestan, Bari, Laterza, 1961. Federico Ferretti, *Geographies of Federalism during the Italian Risorgimento 1796-1900*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

37 Vincenzo Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione napoletana del 1799, seguito dal rapporto al Cittadino Carnot di Francesco Lomonaco*, ed. by Fausto Nicolini, Bari, Laterza, 1913.

38 Benedetto Croce, *Studii storici sulla rivoluzione napoletana del 1799*. 2a ed. corretta ed accresciuta, Torino, Loescher, 1897. Id., *La rivoluzione napoletana del 1799. Biografie, racconti, ricerche*, Ed. nazionale, Bibliopolis, 1999.

39 Joseph Bonaparte, during its reign in Naples, qualified the legitimist uprisings as a classical «poor’s war against the rich». Albert Du Casse, *Mémoires et correspondance politique et militaire du roi Joseph*, Paris, Perrotin, III, 1855.

40 Ilari, Crociani, Paoletti, *Storia militare dell’Italia giacobina (1706-1802)*, Roma, USSME, 2000, Vol. II, *La guerra peninsulare*.

41 E. Ghisi, «Saggio di raccolta di documenti da servire per una storia completa del tricolore», *Il Risorgimento italiano. Rivista storica*, III, 1910, N. 3 giugno, pp. 293-333 e N. 4 agosto, pp.

i.e. geographical and not geopolitical.⁴² Nor, in my opinion, can the secret ‘Italian’ network of the leftist minorities disappointed by Bonaparte⁴³ be mistaken for a desire for geopolitical unity. The same applies to the anti-French invectives as Vittorio Alfieri’s *Misogallo* (1799). Still in 1805, an illustrious Apulian chemist, Pietro Pulli, declared himself to be “of all countries, Neapolitan by birth, of Milanese nationality and French by service”.⁴⁴

During the 1692-1748 wars the Italian theatre, limited to the Alpine, Ligurian and Po Valley areas, had been generally secondary, and often subordinate to the main German theatre. In 1792 the French Republic reopened the Italian Front attacking from Savoy and Provence but was blocked on the Western Alps for almost four years by a tenacious Austro-Sardinian resistance, with the British squadron flanking and barring the Tyrrhenian islands and coasts. In 1796 Napoleon broke through at the junction between the Maritime Alps and the Apennines⁴⁵ and turned *Alta Italia* into the decisive front for the wars of the Revolution, both militarily (extending it from the Adige to the High Danube) and politically (founding a personal protectorate in Po Valley and Euganean Italy).⁴⁶ Moreover, he extended it to the Central Italy, perceiving the double geo-strategic value of the whole Peninsula and her advanced bulwark (the Ionian Islands and Malta) as a projection of strength towards Central and Southern Europe as well as towards the Levant and India, realising the Venetian dream (1504) and Leibniz’s advice to the Sun King (1671) to conquer Egypt, thinking of connecting from Suez with the French bases in the Indian Ocean and the Sultan of Mysore fighting against Britain.⁴⁷

Broken at Seringapatam and Abukir, the eastern projection remained in Napoleon’s plans for the Italian Peninsula. Echoing the Caesarian reading of the

517-547.

42 Ilari, Crociani, Paoletti, *Storia militare dell’Italia giacobina (1706-1802)*, Roma, USSME, 2000, Vol. I, *La guerra continentale*.

43 Umberto Carpi, *Patrioti e napoleonici. Alle origini dell’identità nazionale*, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 2013.

44 Crociani, Ilari, Paoletti, *Storia militare del Regno Italico*, Roma, USSME, T. I, vol. II, 2, p. 782.

45 Ilari, Crociani, Paoletti, *La guerra delle Alpi (1792-1796)*, Roma, USSME, 2000.

46 Guglielmo Ferrero, *Aventure Bonaparte en Italie: 1796-97*, Paris, 1936 (trad. it Milano, Garzanti, 1947; ed. by Sergio Romano, Corbaccio, 1996).

47 Emanuele Farruggia, «The Long Route to Egypt From Saint Louis to Bonaparte», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, vol. 4, N. 19, giu. 2024, pp. 495-534. Ilari, «L’Affaire Dubuc (1787-1805). Napoleone, l’India e le Spie», *Rassegna dell’Arma dei Carabinieri*, LXVI (2018), N. 1, pp. 175-194; N. 2, pp. 111-135.

Hexagon (*Gallia divisa in partes tres*), Napoleon implemented a new tripartition of the *Stivale*.⁴⁸ Subalpine and Tyrrhenian Italy up to the Sesia and Gari-gliano Rivers became French, gradually annexed to the Empire. The Kingdom of Naples thus passed from Bourbon family patrimony to the patrimony of the Bonaparte clan, while the annexation of the Ionian Islands to France (1807) filed away the alternative of making Taranto the 'Gibraltar of the East'.⁴⁹

But even more important was the creation of a new republican state ('cis-alpine', then, since 1802, 'Italian') in the eastern Padania, uniting the Austrian Duchies (Milan, Mantua, Modena) with Novara and the Papal Legations, and compensating Austria with the Venetian dominions, except for the Ionian Islands under French protectorate. Having self crowned Emperor of the French at the end of 1804, in 1805 Napoleon proclaimed himself 'King of Italy' and girded himself with the Iron Crown, signifying the restoration of the ancient *Regnum Italiae* or *Italicum* of the Franks (774-1014), which included the entire Peninsula north of the Garigliano River, except Piedmont and Liguria, yet annexed to France, and Parma, Tuscany and Rome, which followed few years later. Even if this small Kingdom of Italy was in fact a mere 'Italic' Kingdom (a personal dynastic Kingdom 'in' Italy), the proclamation challenged the Habsburg Dynasty, whose title of Holy Roman Emperor depended on that of King of Italy and the Romans. The subsequent war, with the lightning Austerlitz campaign, cost Austria her German title as well as her Venetian dominions, which were annexed to the Kingdom of Italy. Thus that 'Kingdom of Venice' predicted in 1763 by a brilliant English futurologist seemed to come true.⁵⁰ So much so that it was briefly considered to replace the eagles of the Italic regiments with the Lion of St. Mark and it was planned to restore the ancient Venetian Seapower under the Italian colours. But in 1809, following the second Austrian defeat, Istria and Dalmatia were united with Croatia and Slovenia to form the Illyrian Provinces of the Empire, thus undermining the maritime projection of the Italic Kingdom and consoling the Emperor's stepchild and viceroy of Italy with minor territorial gains (Trentino and Marche) at the Austrian and Papal expenses.

Italy and Poland are the only European countries to have included Napoleon

48 Laura Di Fiore, «The Respatialization of Italy between French Republics and Napoleonic Domination», in Matthias Middell, Megan Maruschke (Eds.), *The French Revolution as a moment of Respatialization*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 203-222.

49 Giuseppe Carlo Speziale, *Storia militare di Taranto negli ultimi cinque secoli*, Bari, Laterza, 1930.

50 Samuel Madden, *The Reign of George VI (1900-1925). A Forecast Written in 1763*, republished by Sir Charles Oman, 1899.

in their Pantheon of precursors of the united Fatherland. But there is a fundamental difference between the two countries: namely that in the case of Poland, it was a restoration, albeit partial and in the form of a French war prey, of a pre-existing, albeit fragile, confederate unity and national sentiment. In Italy, however, it was a matter of separate successions of the Bonaparte clan (Paolina, Eugenio, Elisa, Giuseppe and then Carolina) and a conspicuous transfer of power and wealth from land rents to merchant and financial speculation. And undoubtedly 'Boney the Monster' was really the midwife of the later Anglophile bourgeoisie which led the Risorgimento. But the emperor judged a united and independent Italy to be unacceptable to France. However, the idea of independence, formulated by Jacobin dissident circles in 1799 and picked up after 1809 in Southern Italy by the *Carbonari* conspiracy, gained some traction in the course of 1813, prompting Murat to a separate armistice with Lord Bentinck and then to open defection.⁵¹

First to ride on the back of Italian independence, however, were the Austrians, with the vague promises proclaimed on 10 December 1813 by General Nugent, who, having liberated Dalmatia, had landed with a small raid force at the mouth of the Po, outflanking Prince Eugene's *Armée d'Italie* deployed on the Mincio River. This encouraged Murat, supported by Fouché, to propose to Napoleon that he himself proclaim Italian independence "*en une ou deux puissances qui auraient le Pô comme limite*".⁵² An idea that Caulaincourt, who had just succeeded Taillierand at the Imperial Foreign Office, had already carefully examined and dryly rejected because, in addition to its doubtful immediate effectiveness, it would have dealt a mortal blow to France, depriving it "*du commerce du Levant*" as well of the "*prépondérance sur la Méditerranée*" and making Italy "*la première puissance du Midi*", strong by its 16/24 million population and by "*sa position entre une chaîne de rochers et des deux mers*".⁵³ Lord Bentinck, who wanted to be the Wellesley (later Lord Wellington) of the Italian Peninsula, agreed with Caulaincourt and Napoleon, and it was precisely for such a vision of the geostrategic fate of a united Italy that he endeavoured to convince his government to encourage and support Murat's initiatives, even putting at risk the Austrian alliance.

But what was the real attitude of the Italians? The social base of the First Empire was a perfect plutocracy, guaranteed by the Code Napoléon as well as

51 Maurice Weil, *Le prince Eugène et Murat, 1813-1814*, Paris, Fontemoing, 1902, 5 vols.

52 Murat, de Naples, 28 dic. 1813 (Weil, *Le prince Eugène et Murat*, III, pp. 291-293).

53 Fouché, de Rome, 27 dic. (Weil, *Le prince Eugène et Murat*, III, pp. 296-298).

by the gendarmerie, that its organizer in Italy, General Radet, confidentially defined as an “armed magistrature” for the class struggle between productive and parasitic classes.⁵⁴ After Russian disaster, merchants and speculators, ruined by the counterproductive effects of the continental blockade,⁵⁵ were calling for the British Liberators, yet unwilling to lift a finger to hasten their arrival. The Croatian commandos that landed in Comacchio and the Anglo-Italian regiment that later landed in Leghorn carrying the ambiguous proclamations of Nugent and Bentinck that spoke of Italian independence, were greeted by a chilling ‘wait-and-see’ attitude. Italians, in fact, were well aware and mindful of the failure of the popular uprisings of 1796-1809, militarily exploited by Austrian and British commanders but politically feared by the fugitive sovereigns who only wanted appeasement with the new occupier.

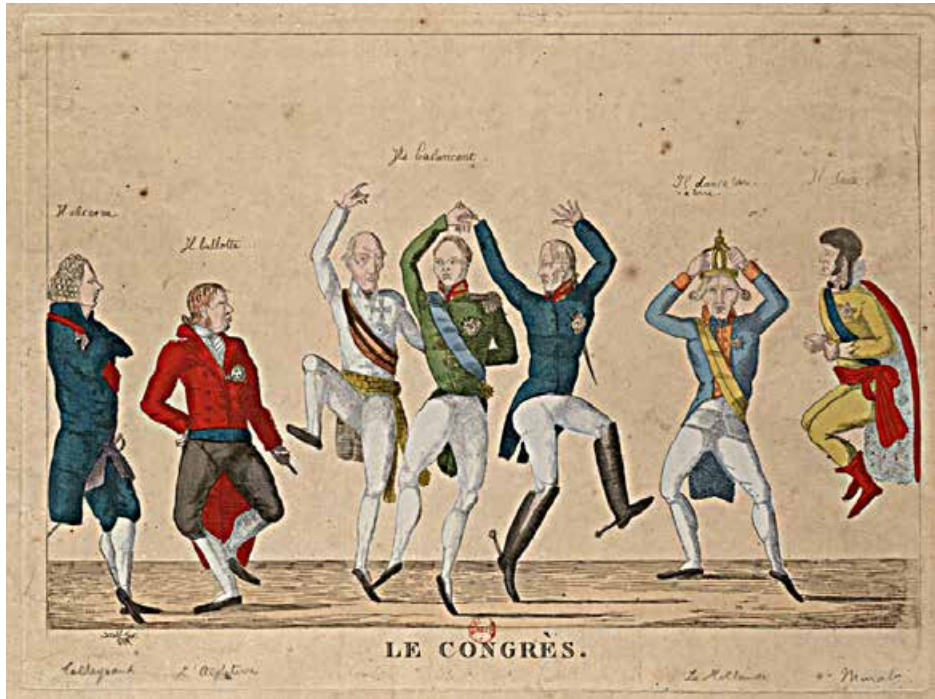
Furthermore, in Italy the Anglophile and anti-French sentiment was balanced by the anti-Austrian one, and this explains, in my opinion, the Italian *attendismo* in the 1813-15, contrasting with the German support for *Befreiungskrieg* (Liberation war). In February 1814, when the French-Italian army still was bravely stopping the Austrians on the Mincio and the Murat’s Army on the Panaro River, in Milan the opportunist insiders were planning regime change; until the savage lynching of Finance Minister Prina by a puppet crowd provoked in April the armistice of Schiarino-Rizzino, the French retreat across the Alps and the Milan welcoming to the Austrian army.

Austro-British Geopolitics of the Italian Restoration

After Waterloo, Britain’s priority became the penetration in South America by supporting the independence of the Spanish colonies and Brazil and later the liberal modernization of the two Iberian states. Disappointing Ugo Foscolo, in 1815 the British government ignored the Bentinck’s plea for restoring the Republic of Genoa, allowing the Kingdom of Savoy to annex its ancient rival. In compensation, the Congress of Vienna recognized Britain’s protectorate over the Ionian Islands, which lasted until 1864, and, together with Malta, ensured

54 Étienne Radet, *Notes secrètes pour M. le maréchal Masséna à brûler après lecture* (secret notes ... to burn after reading), Milan, 7 sept. 1805. In Édouard Gachot, *Histoire militaire de Masséna: la troisième campagne d’Italie (1805-06)*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1911, p. 13 nt. According to the Radet’s note, «il n’y a[vait] en Italie ni esprit public ni énergie» (there was neither public spirit nor energy in Italy).

55 Ilari, «‘Vaincre la mer par la terre’. Trade War, War on Trade, War on Neutrals», in Jeremy Black (Ed.), *The Practice of Strategy. A Global History*, Fvcina di Marte No. 17, 2024, pp. 349-370.



Forceval, *Le Congrès de Vienne*, Collection de Vinck, BNF Gallica, wikimedia commons. Vintage satirical print depicting the Congress of Vienna: Alexander I of Russia (in the center, dressed in a green uniform) dances with the other sovereigns of the victorious powers, Francis I of Austria and Frederick William III of Prussia. On the left Talleyrand, follow Britain. On the right, the King of Holland, and, in a yellow uniform, Murat, not admitted to Congress.

full control of the Italian routes to the Black Sea and the Levant.⁵⁶

After all, two centuries of wars had amply demonstrated that it was in fact the British Soft and Sea Power that really decided the political outcome of the land campaigns in the Mediterranean theatre. British interventions there ever had been a mix of financial ‘subsides’ to the allies, privateering, smuggling, raiding and landing, ensured by the direct or indirect, permanent or temporary, control of the Insular system. A peripheric or ‘Peninsular’ strategy Britain also applied in the other two Peninsulas of the Mediterranean, the Balkan and the

⁵⁶ Maria Paschalidi, *Constructing Ionian Identities: The Ionian Islands in British Official Discourses; 1815-1864*, PhD, UCL, 2009.

Iberian, and then in the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts of South America.⁵⁷

Let us remember that during the wars of the Revolution and the Empire, from Corsica, Elba, La Maddalena, Capri, and then Ponza, Messina, Malta, Cephalonia and Lissa it was the iron discipline of Nelson and Collingwood's Mediterranean Fleet that wiped out the French Seapower and finally bent the Napoleonic economy with smuggling, conquering the wallets and thus the hearts and minds of the merchant and speculators, afraid of a sea trade reduced to a paltry cabotage in convoys, ever threatened by swarms of privateers and boarding lances of the British frigates.⁵⁸ And also the command of the Adriatic, disputed for two centuries between Venice and Naples, was conquered by the Royal Navy with seasonal raids of a couple of vessels from Malta, concluded with the destruction at Lissa (1811) of the French-Italian Division on its first sailing from Ancona and the subsequent blockade of Venice.⁵⁹

For his part, Austria inherited in 1815, under the name of 'Lombardo-Veneto', the Kingdom of Italy minus Trentino, Modena, the Legations and the Marches, returned to their previous sovereigns. In abstract, it would have been conceivable for Austria to use the name of Italy: but, as Kissinger later underlined in his 1954 study on Metternich, Austria was too weak to nurture real ambitions and violate the very principle of 'restoration' by offending the other sovereigns of the Peninsula.⁶⁰ It was in fact Metternich himself who imposed on the Congress the strict observance of the sovereignty of all states, weak and strong, while recognising the Great Powers' responsibility for maintaining the balance.⁶¹ Suffice it to say that the Iron Crown itself, although included among the regalia of the Lombard-Venetian Kingdom, was never worn by Francis I and just once by Ferdinand I in 1838, three years after his succession. Instead, Austria preferred, with foresight compared to its means, to annex Venice, with a *Terraferma* extended to Ticino and Brenner and a projection towards Istanbul and Egypt.

57 Piers Mackesy, *The War in the Mediterranean, 1803-1810*, London, Longmans Green, 1957. Ilari, «Seapower and Insurrection. The Peninsular Warfare during the Napoleonic Wars», in Alexandre Vautravers, Matthew Goulding (Eds), *Counterinsurgency*. Security Forum 2011, Webster University, Geneva, pp. 30-41.

58 Crociani, Ilari, Paoletti, *Storia militare del Regno Italico*, II, *Il Dominio dell'Adriatico*, Roma, USSME, 2002. Ilari, Crociani, *Le marine italiane di Napoleone: le marine ligure, toscana e romana (1797-1814)*, Milano, Acies, 2014. Idd., *La marina napoletana di Murat (1806-1815)*, Milano, Acies, 2016.

59 Ilari, Crociani, *La reale Marina Italiana (1805-1814)*, Milano, Acies, 2017.

60 Kissinger, Henry, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22*, 1954. Sked, 2008.

61 Šedivý, 2018, p. 33.

Metternich was in fact well aware that the victory of 1814 had caused an overextension of the empire, both in Germany and in Italy, which in the long run was unsustainable. In 1815, during the Hundred Days, Italy had attracted a third of the Austrian forces, divided into two armies, a smaller one that together with the few Sardinian forces not yet well reconstituted, had attacked the Hexagon from the Rhone valley,⁶² the other larger one against Murat who had proclaimed Italian independence from Rimini, and who was quickly outflanked and routed at Tolentino.⁶³ The double intervention occurred again in 1821, this time at Novara in the brief Piedmontese civil war, and at Rieti against the Neapolitan constitutionalists. It is interesting to note that the risk of political destabilization of Italy is not taken into consideration by the “example” (*Beispiel*) of War Plan⁶⁴ Clausewitz drew up in 1828, two years before the threat of Louis Philippe’s liberal France against Charles Felix’s reactionary Piedmont.

The *Beispiel* presupposed the restoration of the Waterloo coalition but with Russia neutral, and advocated the concentration of 350,000 Prussians, Dutch, English and North Germans in the Netherlands and 300,000 Austrians and South Germans in the Upper Rhine to converge on the Loire, ignoring Switzerland and leaving in Italy only 50,000 Austrians for cover and possible diversion to Provence and Dauphiné. “Wanting to conquer France from the Rhone,” Clausewitz added, “would be like wanting to lift a rifle by the tip of the bayonet.”

The lesson of the plan is the marginality, if not irrelevance, of the Italian front in the event of war between the Reich and France. An assessment that we will see shared by Engels later, and which is found in the war plans of the Triple Alliance (which envisaged transferring a quarter or a third of the Italian forces to the Rhine) and then in the Alpine campaign of June 1940.

Geopolitics of the liberal uprisings and the First War of Independence (1820-1849)

This was therefore the real geopolitical situation of Italy in the thirty years of the Restoration (1814-1847), not seriously shaken by the constitutional uprisings born out of the unease of the veterans of the Napoleonic wars (1819

62 Ilari, «La politica di sicurezza e la campagna in Savoia e Delfinato», in Ilari, Crociani, Ales, *Il Regno di Sardegna*, cit., 2008, pp. 441-535.

63 Maurice Weil, *Joachim Murat, roi de Naples: la dernière année de règne mai 1814 – mai 1815*, Paris, Fontemoing, 1909-1910, 5 vols. Ilari, Crociani, Giancarlo Boeri, *Storia militare del Regno murattiano (1806-1815)*, Inverio, Widerholdt Frères, 2007, 3 vols.

64 The *Beispiel* is at the End of *Vom Kriege* (book VIII, chapter 9).

the famous Manchester ‘Peterloo’, 1820-21 the Spanish and Italian pronunciamientos, 1825 the Russian Decabrist) and easily repressed, but more seriously threatened by the Italian and Polish backlashes of the Parisian Revolutions of July 1830 and February 1848, which saw the inclusion of Polish and Hungarian irredentism in the Anglo-Russian Cold War.⁶⁵

The only truly geopolitical aspects of the uprisings of 1820-21 and 1830-31 were: a) the French attempt to reassert themselves on the Adriatic by exploiting the fragility of the papal state: b) Mazzini’s idea and action of transnational revolution against the multi-ethnic (and Britain’s antagonist) empires and c) the Sicilian quest for independence from Naples (1820-1849). From 1805 to 1815 Sicily had been the ‘insecure base’⁶⁶ of the British Mediterranean forces and the seat of important English economic interests (as merchants firms in Messina or the Nelson’s ‘ducea’ in Bronte⁶⁷), and the Sicilian aristocracy founded its independence from Naples upon the 1812 constitution imposed by Lord Bentinck. Its revocation, with the fusion of the two crowns in 1816, provoked the two separatist insurrections of 1820-21 and 1848-49, both repressed by huge Neapolitan expeditionary forces, in both cases undermining the contemporary constitutional and liberal moves in Naples.⁶⁸

The Eastern Crisis of 1840 undermined the Anglo-Austro-Neapolitan axis and, following the suggestions of the very influential British consul in Palermo, Lord Palmerston discretely encouraged Sicilian separatism since 1846, provoking however in 1849 a strong parliamentary reaction led by Wellington.⁶⁹ The almost incredible Austrian resilience, the second Sicilian-Neapolitan war and the democratic extremism of Leghorn and Rome undermined the fragile ideological and political compromise on which the Italian league was based. So determining

65 Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean 1800-1850. Stammering the Nation*, OUP, 2019.

66 Desmond Gregory, *Sicily: The Insecure Base. A History of the British Occupation 1806-1815*, London and Toronto, Fairleigh Dickinson U. P., 1988. Ilari, Crociani, Boeri, *Le Due Sicilie nelle guerre napoleoniche*, 2 voll., Roma, USSME, 2008.

67 Gianluca Pastori, «La ducea di Nelson. La Sicilia nella politica britannica da Lord Bentinck all’ammiraglio Mundy», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy*, cit., I, *Intermarium*, pp. 81-92.

68 Luigi Tirrito, *La Rivoluzione siciliana e i suoi rapporti colla lega italiana*, Italia, 1849.

69 David Brown, *Palmerston and the politics of foreign policy, 1846-1855*, 2002. Ilari, «‘Civis Romanus sum’. La protezione diplomatica degli investimenti stranieri», in Ilari e Giuseppe Della Torre (Eds.), *Economic warfare*, quaderno SISM 2017, Roma, Nadir Media, pp. 155-170. Ilari e Viviana Castelli, *Vita e Tempi del Colonnello Forbes (1808-1892). Un inglese ‘italianissimo’ tra Risorgimento e Guerra Civile Americana*, Fucina di Marte N. 8, Roma, Nadir Media, 2022, pp. 62-74 («Sicilian connection»).

the Neapolitan defection, the papal disavowal, the Piedmontese capitulation and the repression of the republican attempt in Genoa, the legitimist insurrection in Tuscany, the French and Spanish-Neapolitan intervention against the Roman Republic, and finally the surrender of Venice.

The war nevertheless produced a permanent geopolitical effect, definitively replacing the Austrian mortgage with the rival French and English “preponderances” and establishing the primacy of the Subalpine Kingdom and the geopolitical and ideological supremacy of Tyrrhenian Italy over Adriatic Italy. And more in general, “After the revolutions of 1848, liberals helped create a conservative international order that has shaped the world since”.⁷⁰

Geopolitics of Italian Unity (1850-1870)

The Piedmontese unification of Italy was a diplomatic masterpiece by Cavour, strong in the credit acquired with the semi-equal participation in the Anglo-French expedition to Crimea, taking advantage of the desperate British need to replace the losses suffered at Inkerman. As Carlo Catinelli from Gorizia, former lieutenant of Bentinck and Nugent and a staunch Austrian patriot, wrote in 1858, «to make Italy it was necessary to unmake Europe». ⁷¹ In fact, the Italian question combined complex aspects of international law and diplomacy,⁷² but also ideological and geostrategic ones. And the Italian influences in the dynamics between Prussia, Austria and the German Confederation were important.

As early as 1848, the prospect of an Austrian defeat and a permanent Italian confederation had aroused strong concerns in Germany, even among democrats, about the possible consequences for the security of the Reich.⁷³ On the verge of the Second war of Italian independence, Friedrich Engels addressed the issue in

70 Samuel Moyn, «Europe’s false dawn», *The New Statesman*, 16 May 2023. See too Daniel Bussenius, *Der Mythos der Revolution nach dem Sieg des nationalen. Mythos Zur Geschichtspolitik mit der 48er-Revolution in der Ersten Republik Österreich und der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933/34*, Diss., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2011.

71 *La questione italiana. Studj* di Carlo Catinelli, Gorizia, Paternolli, 1858 (trad. fr. par Henri Schiel, Bruxelles et Leipzig, Émile Flatau, 1859).

72 Steve Soper, «International Law and the Risorgimento», Columbia Seminar in Modern Italian Studies, March 8, 2024. Adrien Féline, *Du congrès et des confédérations italienne et germanique*, chez Ledoyen, Paris, 1859 (trad. it. Firenze, Tipografia Torelli, 1859). Eugenio Di Rienzo, *Il Regno delle Due Sicilie e le potenze europee: 1830-1861*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2012.

73 Miroslav Šedivý, *The Victory of Realism. The German Quest for International Security*, Paderborn, Brill Schöningh, 2024, pp. 263 ff.

a long essay⁷⁴ in which ironically mocked the nostalgic Catholics of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation refuting the thesis, dominant in the German military and opinion press, that “the Rhine defends itself on the Po”, and that therefore it was in the vital interest of the German Confederation to support Austrian sovereignty over Lombardy-Venetia. From a detailed analysis of the campaigns of 1796-1848, Engels concluded that the only possible defense of the Tyrol was not on the Ticino but on the Mincio River, and that Upper Italy could be “useful to Germany only in case of war, but only harmful in peace”. After 1848 it was clear that Lombardy could not be held in case of war and the occupation “only served to make the hatred of the Italians against us Germans more ardent”. “As long as we retain Lombardy – wrote Engels – Italy is necessarily France’s ally in any French war against Germany. “Italy is necessarily France’s ally in any French war against Germany. As soon as we give it up, that ceases. But is it in our interest to keep four fortresses and, on the other hand, to secure for ourselves the fanatical enmity and for the French the alliance of 25 million Italians?”⁷⁵

Despite the pro-Italian sentiment of British public opinion, the prospect of a French protectorate over Italy also worried the Conservative government of Lord Derby, who in 1859 worked to dissuade the new king of the Two Sicilies Francis II (who had at the last minute promised the constitution and adopted the Tricolour) from entering the war against Austria. But the new cabinet that took over in June – the so-called Triumvirate of Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone – aimed at the unification of the entire peninsula precisely as a counterweight to France, as Caulaincourt and Bentinck had foreseen in 1813.⁷⁶ Under the pretext of non-interference in the internal affairs of the peninsula, Palmerston endorsed the revolutions in Tuscany, Emilia and Romagna and rejected the Neapolitan request for an Anglo-French naval blockade against Garibaldi’s expedition, while the discreet dissuasion exercised by Admiral Rodney Mundy’s squadron cov-

74 Friedrich Engels, *Po und Rhein*, Berlin, Verlag von Franz Duncker, 1859. Marx, Engels, *Sul Risorgimento italiano*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1979, pref. di Ernesto Ragionieri (ed. Agostino Bistarelli, Manifestolibri, 2011).

75 Engels, *cit.*, pp. 250-251.

76 F. A. Simpson, «England and the Italian War of 1859», *The Historical Journal*, vol. 5, No. 2, 1962, pp. 111-121. Richard B. Elrod, «Great Britain, the Balance of Power, and the Italian Question, 1859-60: A Reconsideration», *The Historian*, vol. 35, No. 3, 1973, pp. 398-417. C. T. McIntire, *England Against the Papacy 1858-1861: Tories, Liberals and the Overthrow of Papal Temporal Power During the Italian Risorgimento*, CUP, 1983. Frederick G. Schneid, *The Second War of Italian Unification 1859-61*, Bloomsbury, 2012.

ered the landing of the Thousand in Sicily.⁷⁷ The government also allowed the formation of a British legion which, having landed in Naples already occupied by Garibaldi, participated marginally in the battle of the Volturno.⁷⁸

As Catinelli had predicted, the unification of Italy triggered a series of geopolitical chain reactions. Russia lost its Bourbon referent, while maintaining solid family ties in Sicily. The Roman question and French support for the legitimist claims of Francis II moved Italy towards Prussia, excluding the support for the Polish-Lithuanian insurrection demanded by the Italian democrats.⁷⁹ In 1866, despite the defeats of Lissa and Custoza, Italy's parallel war for the liberation of the Veneto helped the Prussian victory over the Austro-Bavarian coalition, and in 1870 the capture of Napoleon III at Sédan, followed by the proclamation of the German Empire in the palace of Versailles, allowed the capture of Rome. Definitively separated from Germany, Austria had to share its Danubian empire with Hungary (1868), and the Balkan polarization placed it in increasing collision with Russia, to the point of compromising the Russo-German axis that since 1813 maintained an ever more precarious stability of Eastern Europe and these changes laid the foundations for 1914.

Peutingerian Italy, a stop in the journey from Thule to Taprobane

Considered on a global scale and in terms of *Longue-durée*, the Italian and European remaking of 1848-70 appears to be a backlash of three factors: a) the Western imperialist expansion in Asia and Africa; b) the Anglo-Russian collision (the Great Game) along the Eurasian Rimland; and c) the railway and telegraph revolution that made it possible to connect London to Hong Kong via the Mediterranean, without having to round the Cape of Good Hope.

From this perspective, it appears that the main determinant of the Italian Risorgimento was the contemporary Austro-French-British conflict over the

77 Sir George Rodney Mundy, *Her Majesty's Ship Hannibal at Palermo and Naples During the Italian Revolution, 1859-1861 with Notices of Garibaldi, Francis 2., and Victor Emanuel 2.*, London, John Murray, 1863.

78 Ilari, Castelli, *Vita e tempi del Colonnello Forbes*, 2022, *cit.*, pp. 209-261 («The British Legion (1860-61)»). Elena Bacchin, «Brothers of Liberty: Garibaldi's British Legion», *The Historical Journal*, vol. 58, No., 3, 2015, pp. 827-853. Sutcliffe, «British Red Shirts: A History of the Garibaldi Volunteers», in Nur Aielli, Bruce Collins (Eds.), *Transnational Soldiers. Foreign Military Enlistment in Modern Era*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 202-218.

79 Alessandra Visinoni, «Quando Marx parlò male di Garibaldi: l'appoggio italiano all'insurrezione polacca del 1863», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy*, I, *Intermarium*, 2019, p. 176-185.

opening of the Suez Canal (1846-1869). Involved in the foundation of the British Empire and transformed into a segment of the first railway section (London-Brindisi) of the Indian Mail, Italy returned as it is depicted in the puzzling *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a medieval remake of a supposed Augustan *itinerarium pictum* between Extreme Thule (the British Isles) and Taprobane (Ceylon).⁸⁰

It was Saint-Simon who revived the ancient Venetian idea of a Canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea: Prosper Enfantin, who took over the leadership of the Saint-Simonian movement, tried in vain to build it between 1833 and 1838, but it was only the ingenious sponsorship by Metternich, in 1846, that gave substance to the *Société d'études du canal de Suez*, composed of French, British and Austrian experts, coordinated by the chief engineer of the Lombard-Venetian railways Alois (Luigi) Negrelli, a Trentiner from Fiera di Primiero.⁸¹

From utopian, the project thus became geopolitical and resumed the Venetian one of 1504 to conquer Egypt and dig the supposed Cleopatra Canal, to counter the Portuguese aims in Ethiopia that threatened Islamic-Venetian trade.⁸² In 1840, amidst the controversy over the French defeat in the Eastern Question, Leibniz's *Consilium Aegyptiacum* was republished in Paris.⁸³ A map printed in Milan in 1853 shows the Peninsula seen from a bird's eye view from the vertical of the Brenner Pass, with the Adriatic pointing straight towards Alexandria.⁸⁴ An Austro-Venetian Canal would have inevitably privileged the commercial axes of the Adria-Danube and Don regions to the detriment of the Western ones. Sabotaged in Egypt by the French adventurer Ferdinand de Lesseps and frozen by

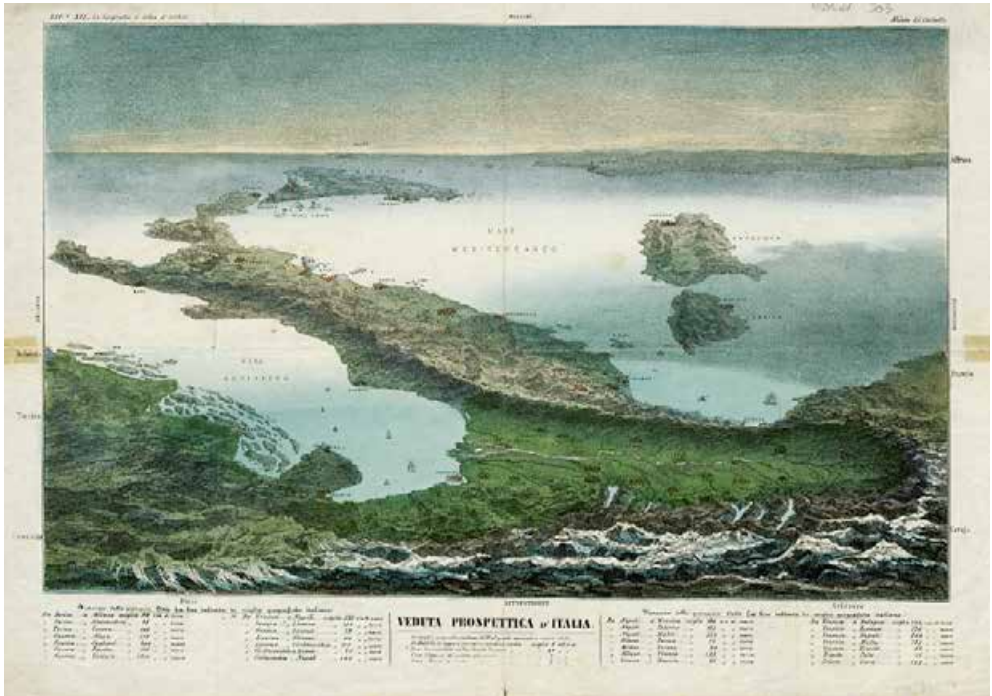
80 Hans Gross, *Zur Entstehungs-Geschichte der Tabula Peutingeriana*, Inaugural Dissertation, Bonn, 1913. Richard J. A. Talbert, *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, CUP, 2010. Emily Albu, *The Medieval Peutinger Map. Imperial Roman revival in a German Empire*, CUP, 2014. Silke Diederich, «Empire and Landscape in the Tabula Peutingeriana», in Marietta Horster, Nikolas Höckler (Eds.), *The Impact of the Roman Empire on Landscapes*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2021, pp. 372-397.

81 Andrea Perrone, «London connection. L'unità italiana, il controllo inglese di Suez e la fondazione della Società Geografica Italiana», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy, Il Suez*, 2019, pp. 27-38. Marco Valle, *Suez: il Canale, l'Egitto e l'Italia: da Venezia a Cavour, da Mussolini a Mattei*, Roma, Historica, 2018. Barbara Curli (cur.), *Italy and the Suez Canal, from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Cold War, A Mediterranean History*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2022.

82 Renato Fulin, «Il Canale di Suez e la Repubblica di Venezia, MDIV», *Archivio Veneto*, N. 2 (1871), pp. 175-213.

83 Emanuele Farruggia, «Leibniz's Last Crusade: The Philosopher as a Strategist. Leibniz's *Consilium Aegyptiacum* and its afterlife», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, 4, N. 16, ott. 2023, pp. 25-58.

84 *Veduta prospettica dell'Italia dal Brennero*. Litografia Corbetta, Milano, 1853.



Italy: bird's eye view from the Brenner Pass (Lithography Corbetta, Milan, 1853)
(Regione Lombardia, Cart Sto 1493, CC BY-NC).

the revolutions of 1848-49, the Saint-Simonian (rather Austro-Venetian) project was thus definitively shelved by the Crimean War. A provident regicide sided Egypt on the pro-Ottoman coalition and handed over to Lesseps the direction of the cutting of the Isthmus with the support of France.

In the same 1846 in which Metternich had planned the eastern projection of the Danubian Monarchy through Venice, Cavour had developed the geopolitics of the Italian railways in function of Genoa,⁸⁵ the historical hub of both Italian trade and emigration “from the Apennines to the Andes”.⁸⁶ The Mont Cenis tunnel and the intervention in Crimea also earned Piedmont the presidency of the international scientific commission charged with selecting the project for the Canal, “entrusted to the subalpine minister and Venetian exile Pietro Paleocapa, former general director of public works in Venice and designer of important

⁸⁵ Camillo Benso di Cavour, *Le strade ferrate in Italia*. Ed. La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1976.

⁸⁶ It is the title of the penultimate «monthly story» in Edmondo De Amicis, *Cuore*, Milano, Treves, 1886.

interventions at the port mouths of the Lagoon. The Negrelli project won, even if death prevented him from directing the works, which began on 25 April 1859, two days before the beginning of Austrian hostilities against Piedmont which would lead to the decisive French intervention in the second Italian war of independence”.⁸⁷

“Excluded from the French Turin-Suez axis that ‘cut the T’ of the Gibraltar – Malta – Ionian line”,⁸⁸ Britain attempted to sabotage the Canal enterprise by discrediting it in the business world and warning Constantinople that it would have brought about the end of nominal Egyptian vassalage. But in the meantime Palmerston exploited Napoleon III’s belated repentance towards Italian unity to take over the leadership, as always combining Soft, Sea and Financial Power to remove the borders (papal and Bourbon) that hindered the construction of the Adriatic railway line to Brindisi. It is no coincidence that Garibaldi’s first act as dictator in Naples was to give the contract to Palmerston’s paymaster.

Twice rejecting (in 1844 and 1849) Austrian rule and geopolitics, Venice had already renewed her repudiation of the Sea pronounced in 1797. Even more than Lissa and Custoza, the dark 1866 depicted in *Senso* (the Camillo Boito novel and later the Luchino Visconti cinematic masterpiece)⁸⁹ ratified the definitive shift of the Adria-Danube projection to Trieste, a centuries-old competitor of Venice. The Isthmus was cut in 1869. In 1870, the year of Sedan and Porta Pia, the first voyage from London to Hong Kong took place via Brindisi, Suez, Bombay and Calcutta, celebrated in Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days*. Paralyzed by the *débâcle*, France had to accept the British condominium of the Canal, made hegemonic by the financial dependence of Egypt.⁹⁰ Under the *vaudeville* (Sevastopol, Solferino, Querétaro, Sedan) the geopolitical outcome of the Second Empire was the subordination of France to the British Empire and the birth of the First Anglo-French West, with its Italian and Turkish client states.

87 Perrone, 2019, p. 30.

88 Perrone, *ibidem*.

89 Colin J. Partridge, *Senso: Visconti’s Film and Boito’s Novella : a Case Study in the Relation Between Literature and Film*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991.

90 David S. Landes, *Bankers and Pashas: International Finance and Economic Imperialism in Egypt*, Harvard U. P., 1979 (it., Bollati Boringhieri, 1990).

The geopolitical legacy of the Risorgimento on united Italy

Brindisi was the inclusion of united Italy in the Indian Mail, as well as in the contemporary Mediterranean section of the British Empire's telegraph cable.⁹¹ But in 1882 Italy refused the condominium over Egypt offered by an England unsure of its own self-sufficiency and reacted to the French occupation of Tunisia by appealing half-heartedly to Bismarck's Three Emperors, heirs to Metternich's Holy Alliance. As long as German Seapower did not compromise the historic Anglo-Prussian axis, liberal Italy was able to reconcile participation in the Triple Alliance (1882-1914) and what Lenin called the "poor people's imperialism"⁹² along the route of the Indian Mail. An ungrateful thorn in the side of the Troisième République, Italy obtained a role in the administrative and financial control of Turkey, Persia and Egypt,⁹³ in the *ante litteram* "G8" of 1900 that put an end to the Chinese Empire,⁹⁴ in the farcical European Armada against Venezuela that provoked the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine⁹⁵ and in the English proxy war waged by Japan against Russia.⁹⁶

Poor thing, respect to the Lloyd Triestino line and then to the Berlin-Vienna-Baghdad railway, 'our' India Mail had already foundered at the end of the century, as *Civiltà Cattolica* noted with satisfaction,⁹⁷ even before the Italian neutrality of 1914 forced the Entente to divert the imperial mail to Marseilles. The reason was that in Brindisi there was not and could not be a real port, and

91 Cosmo Colavito, «Il cavo Mediterraneo», in Ilari (cur.), *Italy, II Suez*, 2019, pp. 39-50.

92 «империализмом бедняков» (V. I. Lenin, «Imperializm i sotsializm v Italii», *Kommunist*, N. 1-2, 1915) translated by Palmiro Togliatti as «imperialismo straccione» (ragged imperialism). Valerio Castronovo, «Il mito dell'Italia grande proletaria», dans *Opinion publique et politique extérieure en Europe. I. 1870-1915, Actes du Colloque de Rome (13-16 février 1980)*, Publications de l'École Française de Rome, 54-1, 1981, pp. 329-339.

93 Giampaolo Conte, *Il Tesoro del Sultano. L'Italia, le Grandi Potenze e le Finanze Ottomane (1881-1914)*, 2018; Id., «Il debito d'Oriente. L'imperialismo finanziario e il default ottomano ed egiziano di fine Ottocento», in Ilari, Giuseppe della torre (Eds.), *Economic Warfare*, Quaderno SISM 2017, Roma, Nadir Media, pp. 181-192.

94 Mario Romeo, «L'Ottavo Nano. L'Italia dal fiasco di San Mun alla Kaiser's Kreuzzug contro i Boxer», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy, II, Suez*, 2019, pp. 351-366.

95 As for the 1898 Italian gunboat operation against Colombia see Francesco Tamburini, «Le operazioni di "gunboat diplomacy" della Regia Marina contro la Colombia nel 1885 e nel 1898», *Bollettino d'Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare*, a. XX, giugno 2006.

96 Alessandro Mazzetti, «Garibaldi a Tsushima. Gli incrociatori corazzati dell'Ansaldo e le dreadnought russe di Vittorio Cuniberti», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy, II, Suez*, 2019, pp. 381-394.

97 *La Civiltà cattolica*, LI, S. XVII, Vol. XII, fasc. 1208, 6 ottobre 1900, pp. 252-253 («La decadenza del porto di Brindisi»).

that the new kleptocracy had been concerned with grabbing bribes on the railways, ignoring Nino Bixio's warning about the lack of development of the port system,⁹⁸ while the Roman political axis gravitated, if anything, towards the Tyrrhenian ports, exporting emigrants and hopes in *Lamerica*.⁹⁹

The realism of the liberal governments was however balanced by socialist internationalism and by the transnational subversion of Mazzini and Garibaldi against the Habsburg, Tsarist and Ottoman empires. After 1849 the three souls of the republican left took different paths. Emblematic was, after 1860, Marx's contempt for Garibaldi for having handed Naples over to Victor Emmanuel, and for not having "come out" in favor of the Polish insurrection during his 1864 triumphal welcome in London (thus violating the commitment the Hero of the Two Worlds had taken seven months earlier during the secret revolutionary congress in Brussels).¹⁰⁰

But the flag of the "oppressed peoples" was blatantly biased by double standard; it denied Irish and Indian oppression and contrasted Italian irredentism with Yugoslavian irredentism. Unlike France, England was therefore against Italian intervention in the Great War, foreseeing that it would compromise the hope of a Slavic insurrection against Hungarian domination.¹⁰¹ Italian irredentism in lands with a Slavic majority degenerated into nationalist expansionism, while the growing collision with the geopolitical reorganization of the Eastern and Balkan front imposed by the Entente led Italy, even before the advent of fascism, into the revisionist and revanchist front of the defeated, including Soviet Russia.

98 Giuseppe Cucchi e V. Ilari, «La crociera del *Maddaloni* a Singapore e Batavia (1873)», in Ilari (cur.), *Italy, Il Suez*, 2019, pp. 317-328.

99 Massimiliano Italiano, «La Valigia delle Indie. Politica, ambizioni e affari dell'Italia post-unitaria», in Ilari (cur.), *Italy, Il Suez*, 2019, pp. 51-66.

100 Luciano Canfora, *Augusto figlio di Dio*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2015, pp. 52-54. Lucy Turner Voakes, «The Risorgimento and English literary history, 1867–1911: the liberal heroism of Trevelyan's Garibaldi», *Modern Italy*, vol. 15, 2010, No. 4, pp. 433-450. Sul viaggio Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, New Haven & London, Yale U. P., 2007, pp. 330 ff. Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe, «Garibaldi in London», *History Today*, Apr. 2014, pp. 42-49.

101 Andrea Perrone, «Isaiah Bowman, l'Inquiry e la 'Vittoria Mutilata'», in Ilari (Ed.), *Over There in Italy. L'Italia e l'intervento americano nella grande guerra*, Quaderno SISM 2018, Roma, Nadir Media, pp. 165-186. Ilari, Marco Cimmino, «Legioni Redente. I malriposti calcoli geopolitici dell'Italia 'liberatrice di (alcuni) popoli oppressi'», in Ilari (Ed.), *Italy, I, Intermarium*, 2019, pp. 269-288.

Censored or sweetened by the canon of the Risorgimento,¹⁰² the external determinant of Italian unity is therefore at the origin of that contradictory internationalist nationalism that detonated the “suicide of civilized Europe” (Benedict XV). The outcome was the destruction of the multi-ethnic European empires, but also the seizure of the British one by the American financier, the no less epochal exit of Russia from Europe and the permanent chaos in the *Intermarium* from the Baltic to the Caspian Sea. The famous sentence attributed to Massimo D’Azeglio, “Italy is made, now we need to make Italians”, perfectly expresses the ideological root and the political limit, denounced by Antonio Gramsci, of the Italian Risorgimento. “Making” in fact meant “remaking” the Italians according to the totalitarian needs of capitalist modernization. All over Europe, that great social experiment was underway that George L. Mosse called the “nationalization of the masses”¹⁰³ and continues today under the name of neoliberal “nation building.”¹⁰⁴ However, the Italian nature is Catholically accommodating and therefore tougher than average, as indicated by the sentence (attributed to Giolitti, before Mussolini and Churchill) that “governing Italians is not difficult: it is useless.” (After all, it is well known that, given the choice, the Italian hell is preferable to the German one).

102 Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita*, Einaudi, Torino 2006², Id., *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011. Francesco Mineccia, «Fare gli italiani: la divulgazione della storia nazionale nel primo cinquantennio postunitario», in Maria Marcella Rizzo (Ed.), «L’Italia è». *Mezzogiorno, Risorgimento e post-Risorgimento*, Roma, Viella, 2013, pp. 243-260.

103 George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*, New York, Fertig, 1975; Cornell U. P., 1975. Eugen Weber, *Peasant into French. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford U. P., 1976.

104 Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, William J. Folt (Eds.), *Nation Building in Comparative Contexts*, New York, Atherton, 1966. Frank Collyer, «From nation building to neoliberalism: The development of sociology in Australia», in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology*, 2017, I, pp. 82-94.



Milan, Arch of Peace in 1955 (Collezione cartoline Abertomos, wikimedia commons). The first stone was laid in 1807 to celebrate the victories and the coronation of Napoleon as King of Italy. Suspended on 19 April 1814, the work resumed in 1826, dedicating the arch to the Peace of Vienna between the European nations, with 14 bas-reliefs representing the Allied victories of 1813-15, the Congress of Vienna and the foundation of Lombardy-Venetia; in 1837 a bronze Peace wheeled by a *sestiga* (six-HP chariot) was placed on the top. The Arch was inaugurated on 10 September 1838 during the Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria Royal coronation with the Iron Crown in the Monza Cathedral (*L'Arco della Pace in Milano descritto e illustrato da Defendente Sacchi*, Milano, coi torchi di Omobono Manini, 1838). It had its definitive consecration in 1859 with the entry into Milan of Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel II after the victory of Magenta. Respecting history, and moreover thus saving further expenses for political updating (possibly even of bad omen), the new Piedmontese ruler maintained the 14 reactionary panels (they now still are in place), only replacing the Austrian inscription («IMP. ET. REGI. FRANCISCO I. AVGVSTO. ADSECTORI. PERPET. FAUSTITATIS. PARENTI. PVB. PACE. POPVLIS. PARTA. LANGOBARDIA. FELIX. D.D. ») with the following two: « ENTRANDO COLL'ARMI GLO-RIOSE / NAPOLEONE III E VITTORIO EMANUELE II LIBERATORI / MILANO ESULTANTE CANCELLÒ DA QUESTI MARMI / LE IMPRONTE SERVILI / E VI SCRISSE L'INDIPENDENZA D'ITALIA / MDCCCLIX » (on the side facing the countryside) and « LE SPERANZE DEL REGNO ITALICO / AUSPICE NAPOLEONE I / I MILANESI DEDICARONO L'ANNO MDCCCVII / E FRANCATI DA SERVITÙ / FELICEMENTE RESTITUIRONO / MDCCCLIX » (on the side facing the city).

Against the Great Game

Genealogies of a Historiographical Delusion

BY LUIGI LORETO

“ ‘My dear child, this is only a game’
said Miss Clarke reprovingly ”

Cyril Hare, *With a Bare Bodkin* (1946)

I

Expressions, or, rather, semantic formulas, which acquire a historical, or rather historiographical, meaning, almost always have a strange history¹. They are often taken at their face value, which simply means giving them a meaning which is more or less that of the author who refers to them. They are often given, as it's well known, a different meaning, and several different meanings, from the original one. They often accumulate several different and not always reconcilable meanings in their history.

In some cases, even more perverse, at the moment they are born, they are not actually even used to indicate what one imagines they should mean; in other words, if the realities that *ex post* it's assumed they semantically describe actually exist, their contemporaries don't identify them with these formulas.

Even worse is the case of expressions whose pedigree are mere an invention, if not only the results of quotation errors. There was no great game and there has never been one. This is the study of a rather peculiar case that includes all of those listed above. Most of all, the last one.

II

From an occasional letter, occasionally quoted, a formula is born that is destined to become of emblematic and current use. Or so it seems. According to the historiographical common belief, the expression 'The Great Game' was coined by

1 We will speak of formula when it seems to have a theoretical meaning behind it, whatever it may be, more or less precise, of expression when it rather seems like an occasional combination of an adjective and a noun.

Captain Arthur Connolly in two letters sent to the then Major Henry C. Rawlinson (later Major-General Sir Henry) and reported by the historian John Kaye and subsequently adopted and spread by Kipling in his *Kim*. Substantially to mean the Anglo-Russian contest for Central Asia².

This vulgate is established starting from the opening page of an excellent article published in 1973 in *Asian Affairs* by Gerald Morgan, a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army, who had served in the Far East, though not in India, and who was the biographer of Ney Elias, his uncle, to demonstrate – against the different Soviet thesis, especially that of N. A. Khalfin –, quite rightly, the non-existence of any organized intelligence structure of the Raj and even less in function of an anti-Russian Central Asian policy. Surely the essay is to be traced back to the framework of his research work destined to flow into his later book on Anglo-Russian rivalry; in it the future vulgate is subsequently repeated with some variations. In particular according to Morgan, referring to Kipling, “the expression ‘The Great Game’ (...) is not his invention”, “in fact it was popular usage in the Army and by the members of the Indian Civil Service long before he wrote the book, which was first printed when the game was nearly over in 1901”, “Connolly may have been the first to use it”³. Morgan also makes a reference, that, as we shall see, is incomplete, to only one of Kaye’s books, *Lives*.

In fact, the article lacks a precise definition of what is meant by the formula, but implicitly it’s clear that it means “the hundred year-long rivalry between Russia and Britain in Central Asia” during which, according to Soviet historiography, “we had (...) a Machiavellian system which flooded Central Asia with agents, British as well Indian”⁴, that is, both the organization and the Anglo-Russian Central Asian conflict. In his book, however, Morgan defines it directly, “the expression (...) came to be applied to the struggle for supremacy in Central Asia”⁵.

2 With an oscillation between a greater emphasis on the cloak-and-dagger component, “the cloak-and-dagger struggle between Britain and Russia for control over swathes of central Asia that raged through the 19th century” to quote Peter Hopkirk’s obituary in *The Times*, or instead its complete and programmatic exclusion. Malcolm Yapp, “The Legend of the Great Game”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 111, 2001, 180 – who does not like the first – represents the two types of employment as too distinct, which instead often, although not always, get mixed up by varying the accent.

3 Gerald Morgan, “Myth and Reality in the Great Game”, *Asian Affairs*, 4, 1973, 55; the reference to widespread use returns in Id., *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1810–1895*, Frank Cass, London 1981, xiii.

4 Morgan, *Myth*, 55; 55–6; 60–61.

5 Morgan, *Rivalry* 15; but differently in the *Introduction* to the volume, xiii, on which more below.

But above all, curiously, he fails to grasp the absolute contradiction between his thesis, which is correct in demonstrating the non-existence of an Anglo-Indian intelligence with an anti-Russian function, and the initial affirmation of a widespread existence of the formula. That is, if that were the case, to indicate what?

This vulgate still constitutes the common opinion today – peculiarly it refers almost only to the article and not to the subsequent book and with the progress of time it tends to completely forget Morgan. Morgan, who as an excellent historian does not like the widespread use of the expression⁶, singularly does not realize that his article from eight years earlier is the main culprit. The first subsequent book, from 1975, a popular history narrative, by an expert in Anglo-Indian history, Michael Edwardes, refers summarily to Kaye and Conolly but also knows and quotes Kipling, meaning by the formula “a contest for political ascendancy in Central Asia between Britain and Tsarist Russia”⁷.

Almost immediately after the publication of Morgan’s book, it is one of the best historians of the Empire, Edward Ingram, who, in a *review article*, acts as the first driving force with the formulation of an effective synthesis whose terms clearly connote the subsequent consolidation, “This phrase was invented by Arthur Conolly on his way to a nasty death in Bokhara, was taken up by Sir John Kaye, and was immortalized by Rudyard Kipling in *Kim*”⁸. Moreover, Ingram raises the question of the historical object to which it is permissible to refer when using it – to which we will return later. It is worth noting that Ingram also came from having published in 1980 a special issue of his new journal, the later glorious *IHR*, dedicated to the great game.

In the 1990s, two widely circulated books acted as *relais* – the first one actually imposing the formula – or rather the expression – on the widest public. In 1990, a bestseller by a journalist, Peter Hopkirk, drew general attention to the formula and the events connected to it as an obvious and conscious consequence

6 Morgan, *Rivalry* 16.

7 Michael Edwardes, *Playing the Great Game. A Victorian Cold War*; Hamish Hamilton, London 1975, vii-viii; 160. In 1980 David Fromkin, “The Great Game in Asia”, *Foreign Affairs* 58, 1980, 936 reproduces the common narrative, citing Kaye only indirectly. Although his book refers centrally to the Great Game, to which the final chapter is eponymously entitled, and presupposes Morgan’s article, David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914*, Methuen and Co., London 1977 has no interest in repeating the genealogy, not surprisingly given the sense in which he adopts it, on which *infra*.

8 Edward Ingram, “Review Article: Approaches to the Great Game in Asia”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, 1982, 455; Id., *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834*, Oxford, OUP, 1979, 5 generically places the appearance of the expression in the 1830s.

of the Soviet invasion of 1979⁹.

Hopkirk, Chief Reporter of *The Times*¹⁰ – and perhaps not without ties to MI6¹¹ – admittedly did not invent the formula or the subject, but he certainly represents the turning point from a historiographical point of view with respect to its diffusion outside of the strict British historiography. For Hopkirk, without Morgan's cautions anymore, Conolly "had first coined the phrase (...) although it was Kipling who was to immortalize it"¹² and it is as it "became known to those who risked their necks playing it", its "vast chessboard (...) stretched from (...) Caucasus (...) to the Tibet (...) across Central Asia (...) The ultimate prize (...) was British India"¹³. Accordingly he acts as a *relais* in the diffusion of the vulgate.

However, the analogical role of the Soviet invasion should not be exaggerated, as, after Hopkirk, Yapp also tends to do¹⁴; not only is his own major book, as Ph.Diss., much earlier, but Gillard's book and the first part of Ingram's interventions are also precedent. And, even more, it's precisely the latter that, as already mentioned, dedicates the second of the four issues of his 1980 *IHR* to "Essays in Celebration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Beginning of the Great Game in Asia"¹⁵; the planning of the volume could only have preceded the invasion which took place in December 1979. There are curious extrinsic coincidences between history and historiography.

Similarly, nine years later, the vulgate is taken up by the American journalist Karl Meyer, with some minor differences. Mainly due to errors. It is Kaye who "quoting from Conolly's letters", simply referred to as sent to a friend – with-

9 Cf. Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game. On Secret Service in High Asia*, John Murray, London 1997³ (Kodansha Int., New York 1994), xi; cf. also Seymour Becker, "The 'Great Game'. The History of an Evocative Phrase", *Asian Affairs*, 43, 2012, 61 as to its diffusion. The actualizing setting is also the motivation in Fromkin's 1980 article.

10 See Obituary, *The Times*, Tuesday August 26 2014.

11 Ours is only a hypothesis based on the too many unlikely coincidences of his biography, although certainly not hidden by him.

12 Hopkirk, *Game*, 1.

13 Hopkirk, *Game*, 2. Hopkirk does not cite the article in his bibliography, but only the book. The genealogy is repeated similarly in his last book *Quest for Kim. In Search of Kipling's Great Game*, John Murray, London 1996, 6-7, where however the meaning of the formula is expanded, 29.

14 Yapp, *Legend*, 179; similarly Becker, *Game*, 61; 73-4, who more generally connects its use to the Cold War, which however, given the chronological latitude of this one, has little significance.

15 *The International History Review*, 2, 1980. Ingram, as we shall see later, dates the great game to begin in 1829.

out specifying who he was – “introduced the term (...) later taken up and given universal currency in *Kim*”¹⁶. It’s always about “the clandestine struggle (...) for mastery of Central Asia”, except to insist on “the rise of spy services” as its major component¹⁷. It’s not surprising, then, that the 1990s see the rising of the expression “New Great Game”, used in the most disparaged meanings (it will not be dealt here) and reaching, moreover, the highest niveau of politics, as in the case of US Deputy Secretary of State Talbott. Of course, he recalls Kipling (and Flashman!)¹⁸.

The next *relais*, in the first decade of the 21st century, is Rob Johnson’s study, in some other respects very thorough but not without inaccuracies. In addition to recalling *Kim*, after having indicated Conolly as “the first to use the expression” and recalled the two letters in the citation of Kaye’s *Lives*, Johnson believes, with a double error, that the expression was already current before Kaye’s book but manages to bring only one example, in reality much later and inappropriate¹⁹. Like Meyer, Johnson returns to insist on the espionage dimension, whose actual existence he tries to demonstrate, always understanding the great game as “the nickname given to the struggle to secure and maintain geo-strategic supremacy in Asia” but functionally “in order to protect India”²⁰.

In 2013 the vulgate returns in the book of a Russian historian who introduces numerous entirely erroneous variants, as we shall see. Conolly is “the first

16 Karl E. Meyer – Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows. The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Asia*, Counterpoint, Washington, DC 1999, xxiii; 127; 203.

17 Meyer – Brysac, *Tournament*, xviii. The vulgate returns in Matthew Edwards, “The New Great Game and the new great gamers. Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder”, *Central Asian Survey* 2, 2003, 84; 98 nt 3.

18 [Nelson S.] Talbott, “A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, Address at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Baltimore, Maryland, July 21, 1997, US Dept. of State Archive, online. It seems improbable that he has read *Kim*, but, though from the point of view of political rhetoric, is correct in saying they are to be left “where they belong – on the shelves of historical fiction”. For Flashman novel *infra*.

19 Robert Johnson, *Spying for Empire. The Great Game in Central and South Asia, 1757-1947*, London, Greenhill Books, 2006, 50; 261-2 nt 1 who recalls the use of the expression “big game” – but big is not great – by Younghusband in his 1896 book, whereas Kaye’s book – which Johnson cites, like Morgan, in the second edition of 1904 – is from 1867; in a subsequent historiographical review Id., “A Plain Tale of Pundits, Players and Professionals. The Historiography of Great Game”, in Christopher R. Moran – Christopher J. Murphy eds., *Intelligence Studies in Britain and the US. Historiography since 1945*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh U. P., 2013, 183; 185; 194 he repeats the positions with some minor modifications. Younghusband’s expression is also clearly of an occasional nature and not the use of a consolidated formula, “we are both playing at a big game”.

20 Johnson, *Spying*, 21; 33-5; later Id., *Tale*, 183; 185; 186; 192-3.

to scribble” the expression, Kaye “discovered the reference”, Kipling “brought fame and publicity to the phenomenon”²¹ and the “vocabulary seeped into the lexikon of politicians, diplomats and travelers”²². Sergeev, however, believes it is necessary to take the object of the expression in a broader sense, not strictly political-military, and global²³, correctly playing down the espionage tale at his turn, “as a polyphonic multifaceted process”²⁴, however identifying it as “Russo-British relations in Asia”.

The most recent literature, of the last decade or so, continues to follow this trend unchanged²⁵. On the other side, even if already much earlier, at least starting from Hopkirk, the awareness of the archetypal role of Morgan’s article progressively disappears.

Finally – significantly – the vulgate, at least in the Kaye-Kipling part, finds its consecration in the first two subsequent online editions of the OED, with the related meaning, “The struggle for power and influence in southern central Asia and the north-west borders of India and present Pakistan, spec. that between Britain and Russia in the 19th cent.”²⁶. Therefore the online OED does not ap-

21 Yevgeny Yuryevich Sergeev, *The Great Game 1857 – 1907. Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia*, Woodrow Wilson Center Pr., Washington 2013, 3-4; 6.

22 Sergeev, *Game*, 6 without being able to report anything other than the quotation from Yungghusband already used by Johnson and one from Henry Wigham where the expression does not even appear (*sic*), but only the term game.

23 Sergeev, *Game*, 2.

24 Seergev, *Game*, 21.

25 Cf. Georgiy Voloshin, *Le nouveau grand jeu en Asie centrale: Enjeux et stratégies géopolitiques*, L’Harmattan, Paris 2012, 17 nt 2; Geoffrey Hamm, “Revisiting the Great Game in Asia. Rudyard Kipling and popular history”, *International Journal*, 68, 2013, 395-6 (limited to *Kim*); Michael B. Share, “The Great Game Revisited. Three Empires Collide in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang)”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67, 2015, 1102, who refers exclusively to Kipling; Heather A. Campbell, “Great Game Thinking. The British Foreign Office and Revolutionary Russia”, *Revolutionary Russia*, 34, 2021, 240 who depends entirely on Meyer’s variant; Ead., *The Decline of Empires in South Asia. How Britain and Russia lost their Grip over India, Persia and Afghanistan*, Pen and Sword, Yorkshire-Philadelphia 2022, 1-2; 144 nt 1, with some doubts about *Kim*’s role in spreading the expression. In the midst of the vulgate, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “Game Over? Russia’s Conquest of Central Asia Reconsidered”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 23, 2022, 641-2, ignoring Kaye and jumping directly from Conolly to Kipling, and with the historiographical paradox we recall below. Taline Ter Minassian, *Sur l’échiquier du Grand Jeu. Agents secrets et aventuriers (XIX-XXI^e) siècles*, Nouveau Monde, Paris 2023, 14-7; 18; 121 ff. ignoring Kaye and insisting again on the espionage side. And even in his masterpiece James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State. British Colonial knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., 2012, 10-1.

26 OED online, s. v. *great game*, originally published as part of the entry for *great*, *adj.*, revised

pear to be aware of its contemporary and not historical genesis, despite the cases recalled, all occasional. Instead, the printed *editio maior* correctly limited itself to recording only the Kiplingian formulation and, above all, in its exact meaning and in its specific and actual sequel ²⁷.

But – going back – before Morgan? We shall see, retrospectively, from where in turn Morgan’s formalization descends.

III

Any vulgate tends to know soon or later a dissenting voice – as every dissenting voice to a vulgate tends throughout to disappear. Vulgates go on unaffected – they have a kind of ideological inner propulsion.

Malcolm Yapp – a renowned specialist of the period though not a historiographical “Great Gamer“, as he used only a couple of times the expression in his book of twenty years before²⁸ – is the dissenting one²⁹. In a small masterpiece of the historiography of ideas, a lecture held at the British Academy on 16 May 2000, he concludes that “the use of the term in what is now its most familiar meaning of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia is fairly recent and became common only after the Second World War. It was not totally unknown before that period, but it was rare” ³⁰.

Yapp’s lecture remains almost completely ignored thereafter³¹ – if not

in September 2013; last modified in July 2023.

27 OED 1989², s. v. *great*, VI, 798, with only three quotations, the oldest being that of Kipling, in the sole meaning of “spying”. Based on what we shall see, it should be remarked that the OED online simply errs in wanting to identify a specific semanteme, the one reported, which instead simply does not exist, except for intelligence. The meaning in the cases in question, including that of intelligence, in any case, is and remains included in the general meaning of “amusement“.

28 Malcolm Yapp, *Strategies of British India. Britain, Iran, and Afghanistan, 1798-1850*, OUP, Oxford 1980, 5; 20 does not define the expression but nevertheless means Anglo-Russian antagonism *per se*.

29 Together twelve years later with Seymour Becker, a specialist on Russian penetration in Central Asia, in a very erudite article, which is however confused in some places and not free from contradictions. In part, unintentionally, he continues also to presuppose the vulgate, not only attributing to Kipling the substantial meaning of Anglo-Russian conflict but also, self-contradicting the rest of his own intervention, a central role for the novel in the popularization of the phrase, Becker, *Game*, 61;71;74.

30 Yapp, *Legend*, 187.

31 An exception is the later essay by Johnson, *Tale*, 185 who acknowledges how Yapp draws attention to the “rarity” of the expression but maintains his substantialist position, as we shall see. Hamm, *Revisiting*, 396-7; 400 is well aware of it but not really on the main point, like

worse³², as shown by the unaltered continuation of the vulgate and – as seen – even the consecration of it in the OED. None of the authors we have considered refer to – let alone discuss – it in their simple reception of the consolidated genealogy. They even don't quote it in their bibliography³³. As – one must say – in his turn Yapp does not discuss the preceding works, only just quoting them³⁴. Yapp indeed was right – at least in part, as the term *was* totally unknown, as we shall see.

IV

So much quoted, apparently *Kim* has rarely been really read, or at least correctly understood. Too often we found erroneous descriptions as to what the great game is in it³⁵. Even not by Morgan³⁶. In that uncanny, multi-layered novel that is Kipling's *Kim* – a strange and rare case of a blend of *Bildungsroman* and spy-story – the expression appears 14 times, significantly concentrated however in the second part only. It is used allusively and elliptically and includes the whole spectrum of episodes in which the relevant protagonists are involved – Kim, Mahbub, Creighton, Lurgan, Babu. The fact that Kipling uses the expression with capital letters is not a sign of an intention to highlight it in particular or of an abstract theoretical representation of it but is only a usual stylistic feature of the writer³⁷. In particular, the activity indicated in the use of the expression in the complex of episodes into which the novel is subdivided can be gathered in the following groups:

now Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia. A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., 2021, 12. Ter Minassian, *Sur l'échiquier*, 13-4; 16-7 knows his lecture and Becker's article but does not follow them, partly as she misunderstood the main point, partly for her substantialist approach.

32 Schimmelpenninck, *ib.*, goes so far to quote him, and Becker, as his source for – referring the vulgate!

33 So e. g. in the books of Johnson, Sergeev and Campbell. Mayer – Brysac, *Tournament* in their Second edition of 2006 don't mention him, see the up-to-dated Bibliography, 632 ff.

34 Yapp, *Legend*, 180 nt; similarly Becker, *Game*, 73, a part discussing Johnson's book.

35 An example is Edwardes, *ib.*, who speaks of tsarist intrigues as a central theme, as does Sergeev, *Game*, 6 who adds an "intelligence gathering network beyond India's frontier" and as does Johnson, *Spying*, 30; Id., *Tale*, 194.

36 Cf. Morgan, *Myth*, 55. Yapp, *Legend* read it, but not without some misunderstandings; and much more is misunderstood by Becker, *Game*, 71-2, and surprisingly by Hopkirk, *Quest*, 29 ff. who keeps unchanged the meaning of "...Anglo-Russian struggle for the mastery of Asia..." ; 239 ff.

37 Hopkirk remarked it well, he counts however a greater number of occurrences of the expression, albeit including indirect ones, Hopkirk, *Quest*, 7.

- receiving and transmitting documentation relating to an insurrectional conspiracy in the North³⁸
- attempts at physical elimination of agents, such as Mahbub³⁹ – with his significantly scandalized comment, “it annoyed him vehemently that people outside his tribe and unaffected by his casual amours should pursue him for the life”
- arms trafficking in Quetta, and acquisition by copying and not by subtraction of the relevant documentation⁴⁰ – which, moreover, corresponds to a widespread historical reality
- military-geographic information activities, mapping of Indian territories not directly under British control⁴¹
- theft and transmission of compromising correspondence from an allied prince⁴²
- mutual protection of agents⁴³
- counterintelligence and theft of documentation from hostile agents⁴⁴.

On the other hand, there is nothing that concerns – even *marginally* – a policy of English expansion in Central Asia – barely recalled with allusive expressions such as, for example, “the Back of Beyond”⁴⁵. And least of all in direct competition with the Russians. These appear only marginally as a disturbing element on the periphery. Russia is the “sympathetic Northern Power”⁴⁶ that provides counter-intelligence information to the federated princes of the North. And their role in the narrative economy is also peripheral. It is only in the final episode – rather an anticlimax and which remains rather hazy in its outlines – that the Russians make their sole appearance in the novel and then only in the form of two rather uneasy agents – one of whom turns out to be a French⁴⁷, an allusion to the Franco-Russian alliance –, and in a tragicomic manner which can

38 Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, Oxford, OUP, 1987 (1901), 20; 35 ff.; 221 ff. for the sequel.

39 Kipling, *Kim*, 137 ff.

40 Kipling, *Kim*, 168 ff.

41 Kipling, *Kim*, 170 ff.; 228; the same in reference to hostile agents, 241; 253.

42 Kipling, *Kim*, 173 ff.; 199 ff.

43 Kipling, *Kim*, 199 ff.

44 Kipling, *Kim*, 222 ff.; 241; 248 ff.; 253 ff.; 278-9.

45 Kipling, *Kim*, 21. The fact that Mahbub might imagine one day meeting the Amir of Afghanistan, Kipling, *Kim*, 170, detracts little. Even less that the Rajah of a border state with anti-English sentiments writes a letter to the Czar entrusted to two isolated agents, Kipling, *Kim*, 279.

46 Kipling, *Kim*, 21; 22.

47 Kipling, *Kim*, 224.

be traced back to anything but the worried evocation of an impending Russian threat to the subcontinent, which, if anything, comes out entirely ridiculed.

What is relevant, even in their activity, is not the preparation for a Russian invasion – which instead is expressly indicated as little less than a fantasy and ironically alluded to by Babu to the two agents⁴⁸ – but an internal destabilization, with their presence, of the five subsidiary *border* states of anti-English sentiments.⁴⁹

The only conceptual set that therefore falls within the expression corresponds to that component of intelligence which consists in the acquisition and transmission of information (*humint*) – including the most adventurous dimension, of what today are called covert operations –, *not* their evaluation – a phase of whose existence Kipling seems to be totally unaware⁵⁰, as surprisingly is also Hopkirk in his *Quest*. And this also in its component of contrast both by the Anglo-Indians and by the adversaries, that is, of impediment of the acquisition and transmission of information – the typical object of counter-intelligence.

And precisely the diffusion in space and time, “The Game is so large that one sees but a little at a time”, is the typical connotative characteristic of intelligence; the great game is permanent, only “When everyone is dead the Great Game is finished. Not before”⁵¹. Kipling does not know the term intelligence, but it is no coincidence that he uses the term Secret Service⁵², with which, in some of its uses, the Game is substantially synonymous⁵³. In other words, the great game is both the active and direct espionage activity and the organization that carries it out⁵⁴.

48 Kipling, *Kim*, 267-8.

49 Kipling, *Kim*, 222 ff.; 279, 281. Curiously, the marginal dimension of the Russian component in the novel, while already captured, albeit briefly, by Yapp, *Legend*, 184-5, is not by Morgan, although it is entirely in line with his thesis; nor by Becker, *Game*, 71-2, who instead emphasizes it by making it the centre of the novel on which he projects the anti-Russian concern that Kipling would show elsewhere in his production, but substantially exaggerating in a general idea what are interventions linked to historical contingency; the same objection should be raised against Hopkirk, *Quest*, 30 ff.; 238 ff. who equally insists on the assumed writer’s Rus-sophobia.

50 Not only because of the absolute lack of references but also positively *e.g.* in Kipling, *Kim*, 21, where the information collected is automatically taken as a basis for government decisions.

51 Kipling, *Kim*, 221.

52 Kipling, *Kim*, 175.

53 Kipling, *Kim*, 200, 203.

54 It is no coincidence that the two foreign agents in the final episode also have their great game, Kipling, *Kim*, 248; the point is not understood by Becker, *Game*, 72.

And that this notion is conscious in Kipling is indicated by his definition at the beginning of the novel of the activities of Mahbub Ali, alias Agent C 25.1B, “Twice or thrice yearly C.25 would send in a little story, baldly told but most interesting, and generally —it was checked by the statements of R.17 and M.4— quite true. It concerned all manner of out-of-the-way mountain principalities, explorers of nationalities other than English, and the gun-trade —was, in brief, a small portion of that vast mass of ‘information received’ on which the Indian Government acts”⁵⁵. Mahbub “spied for the Colonel” Kim himself summarizes before even being introduced to what the great game is⁵⁶. And this meaning also comes back in the application of the formula to the Russian and French agents⁵⁷.

In turn, the beginning of the great game for Kim — “Here begins the Great Game”⁵⁸ — consists in the introduction by the baffling Lurgan Sahib — a true forerunner of the famous Q in the 007 cinematography — to the stock in trade of the under-cover agent — disguises, memorization, observation. Mahbub and his colleagues — and as it will be, in Creighton’s wishes, also for Kim — belong to a secret section of the India Survey Department⁵⁹. Kipling — in fact — supposes or, better, imagines, the intelligence system as inserted within it⁶⁰.

There is also an element that unifies the various episodes covered by the Game and that is the functional one, the single objective of such intelligence activities. And that is to ensure the security of India; a security that is essentially internal, in none of the episodes is it ever a question of countering external threats. And that is substantially conceived in an Anglo-Indian key and not only a British one. The great game expressly “never ceases day and night, *throughout India*” (our italics)⁶¹; the geography of its activity as “part of the Great Game” that Kim traces confirms this, extending from Quetta to the South and finally, in the last mission, to the North⁶².

In the only episode — the final one — in which foreign agents appear, their aim, as mentioned, is to destabilise the already unsympathetic princes of the North. Kipling’s great game is thus the activity of gathering and transmitting

55 Kipling, *Kim*, 22.

56 Kipling, *Kim*, 117.

57 Kipling, *Kim*, 248.

58 Kipling, *Kim*, 147.

59 Kipling, *Kim*, 21; 118.

60 Hopkirk’s hypothesis, *Quest*, 56 ff.; 123 ff. is explicit; however, 127 ff. remains a confused assimilation of Popplewell’s book, and partially erroneous.

61 Kipling, *Kim*, 175,

62 Kipling, *Kim*, 224.

intelligence (*humint*), including the equal and opposite activity of counter-intelligence, in order to ensure internal control of India⁶³.

But somebody indeed read and perfectly understood the novel – and its meaning relating to British Imperial History. It has been Hanna Arendt in 1951. In a greatly interesting page on the foundations of British imperialism she in fact intends Kipling's great game as the British secret service of which *Kim* constitutes the "foundation legend"⁶⁴.

V

There was also no Kipling's great game meaning an Anglo-Russian contest for Central Asia⁶⁵. But in reality there never was also the Secret Service and its intelligence operations as assumed by the great novelist. Now, simply there never was such a thing as a Secret Service in India during Kipling's *Kim*'s years. As has already been shown by Morgan⁶⁶ and above all in a more recent

63 The point is not grasped by Yapp, *Legend*, 185 who also erroneously refers to intelligence outside India, as does Johnson, *Tale*, 194, which is not the case in the novel. Yapp tend to see also a sophic key in the term but wrongly, although there is in the novel as such. Becker, *Game*, 61; 71-2; 74 wrongly intends it as a simple extension also to the counterespionage of the Anglo-Russian conflictual dimension and in general of rivalry in Central Asia which it maintains as its main meaning.

64 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harvest Book, San Diego et al. 1973⁴ (1951), 216-221, quotation 217.

65 It is possible of course to imagine that the formula existed meaning the Anglo-Russian contest, that Kipling had heard of it, and, without fully understanding it, re-employed in his novel in its quite different meaning. Everithing is possible – a proof remains in need.

66 Morgan, *Myth*, 55; 56; 57; 5-9; 64-5; again Id., *Rivalry*, 134-5; 136 ff.; 139 ff.. 144 ff., who notes that not only cannot the Survey Department be traced back to intelligence tasks but also that pundits were never sent to West Turkestan; Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence. British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904-1924*, Routledge, London 1995, 13-56; Yapp, *Legend*, 190-1, who however ignores Popplewell, but points out well the symmetry of the Russian situation. This is also clear and recognized by Hopkirk, *Game*, 422 ff.; differently, wrongly, Meyer – Brysac, *Tournement*, 203; see also the acute criticism of Hamm, *Revisiting*, 396-7; 398. The arguments of Johnson, *Spying*, 30 ff.; 165 ff.; 251 ff.; also Id., *Tale*, 185; 189; 192 ff., don't really succeed in overcoming those of Morgan and Popplewell; he himself recognizes the absence of an organized central intelligence structure before the beginning of the twentieth century. The Indian Army Intelligence Department, created on the basis of a previous structure in 1880 and understaffed with only 5 members, carries out a typical intelligence activity, like its counterpart in Whitehall, the DMI then DMO, that is, analysis – diametrically opposed to Kipling's Secret Service; the collection of information is mainly ethnographic-cultural in nature, although obviously for control purposes, expressly relative

reconstruction of great detail by Popplewell, everything falls into the category of “old myths about...the British secret service in India”⁶⁷. It’s simply a reality that does not exist and that will only begin to emerge in the period 1907-1909 – and in part only temporarily – with the appearance of revolutionary nationalism, completely unknown to Kipling and his times. A “small spy service”, quite embryonically and truly of a “makeshift character”⁶⁸. Nor do we see how it could have been otherwise if only in 1909 the SIS/MI6 was established in the Metropolis⁶⁹.

Or, to put it another way, Kipling’s great game is a mere figment of his imagination. Whether there was no need for it, as Popplewell believes⁷⁰, is another matter. The Siege of Chitral in 1895 and, above all, the Great Frontier Rising of 1898-99 indicate – albeit limited to the periphery of the NWF – the opposite. And it is likely that Kipling had these events in mind when he wrote *Kim*.

VI

Sir John William Kaye was not a historian like any other – though for his times his profile was not a quite uncommon one. Apart from his being a senior civil servant, he was *the* historian of the (later) First Afghan War, and he was the historian of the Great Mutiny. In the sense that he is the first and almost instan-

(though not exclusively) to the interior of India, and only under this aspect of the object does it recall Kipling’s, but it does not have even a minimal structure of agents on the territory, although at least on one occasion the problem was actually raised. Above all, it has no espionage and counter-espionage functions, cf. Morgan, *Myth*, 57; Id., *Rivalry*, 146. For it L. P. Morris, “British Secret Service Activity in Khorassan, 1887-1908”, *The Historical Journal*, 27, 1984, 658 ff.; Hopkirk, *Game*, 422 ff. (erroneous however in *Quest*, ib.); Johnson, *Spying*, 150; 174-5. Besides, the gathering of intelligence outside India concerns the Asian continent as a whole (mainly the Far East) and takes place through legations and military commands, cf. Hevia, *Security*, 70 ff.

The mission of Colonel Charles Maclean as consul to Meshed from 1886 to 1892 is an exception, recognized as such by Morgan, *Myth*, 61; for it Morris, *Service*, 657-75; Johnson, *Spying*, 175-8 who discovered the interesting NA HD 2/1, but, unlike what Johnson, *Tale*, 194, writes more recently, no relationship can be recognized between what emerges from HD cit. and *Kim*, either geographically or in terms of activity. To be true Popplewell, cit. – like Yapp, cit. – does not take the Department into consideration and also omits to consider the Maclean episode.

67 Popplewell, *Intelligence*, 30.

68 See Popplewell, *Intelligence*, 10 ff.; 69 ff.

69 E. g. Alan Judd, *The Quest for C – Mansfield Cumming and the Founding of the Secret Service*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.

70 Popplewell, *Intelligence*, 40 nt 39.

taneous historian of the two events⁷¹.

The formula appears in at least five of Kaye's major books – contrary to Morgan's references only to *Lives*⁷² – and, it is explicitly conceptualized as such, often used in quotation marks. On the other hand, the use remains rhetorical, rather than defining, with blurred contours. The formula has a narrative semantic field, not an epistemic one. The formula makes its first appearance as the title of the first paragraph of chapter I of book IV of volume I of the first edition of 1851 (in the 2nd ed., IV book, chapter II of the 2nd vol.) of his *History of the War in Afghanistan*⁷³.

The chapter concerns the events of January–September 1840. The paragraph refers to the intelligence received by the British Resident in Herat, Pottinger, regarding the preparation of a Russian military expedition to Khiva to remove obstacles to Russian trade routes and to an analysis of its reasons. But the formula is not used in the text where Kaye acutely comments: “But it was believed that Russia had other objects in view than the liberation of her slaves and the safety of her commerce ; and that if the British army had not occupied Afghanistan, this manifesto would not have been issued by the Czar. It was regarded, indeed, as a counter-movement called forth by our own advance; and candid men could allege nothing against it on the score of justice or expediency. There was something suspicious in the time and manner of its enunciation. But there was less of aggression and usurpation in it than in our own manifesto. The movement was justified by the law of nations. There was outwardly something, indeed, of positive righteousness in it, appealing to the best instincts of our nature. And, if there were behind all this outside show of humanity a political desire to keep in check a rival power, that was now intruding in countries far beyond its own line of frontier, it can only be said that our own movement into Afghanistan was directed against a danger of the same kind, but of much less substantial proportions. But the expedition of Russia into Central Asia excited the alarm of our statesmen in Afghanistan, though it did not rouse their indignation. There was, at all events, in it much food for anxious consideration”⁷⁴.

The great game is instead expressly spoken of further on in a very different

71 About him Edward J. Rapson, Kaye, John William, in Sidney Lee, (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Smith, Elder & Co., London 1892, 30, 253–4; Edward J. Rapson, (revised by Roger T. Stearn), Kaye, Sir John William (1814–1876), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, Oxford 2004 (online ed.).

72 Morgan, Myth, 55; Id., *Rivalry*, 17.

73 John W. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, Richard Bentley, London 1851, I, 496 ff.

74 Kaye, *History*, 1851, I, 499.

way. In short, it is Sir William Hay Macnaghten's project of political, even territorial expansion as advisor to Lord Auckland and political agent with the British expeditionary force to Afghanistan and thereafter envoy to the court of the Emir.

Kaye is not unequivocal regarding the identification of Macnaghten's actual objectives, but he intends in summary at least that "he thought still of the 'great game' of the annexation of Herat and the subjugation of the Punjab"⁷⁵; the formulation of the 1st edition is different and worth comparing, "the one dominant thought in Macnaghten's mind of the great and beautiful game that was to be played by the annexation of Herat and the coercion of the Sikhs; and still he continued to write to Lord Auckland that there was nothing else to be done"⁷⁶.

More broadly, however, "It was, indeed, a great game on which Macnaghten was then intent – a game so vast that the Subjugation of the Punjab and Nepaul was regarded as a petty contribution to its success. These grand schemes dazzled him, and he could not see the dangers which grew at his feet"⁷⁷; what Kaye implies is Macnaghten's idea of a punitive expedition to Bokhara, obviously only as a show of force, recalling another letter of his in which he writes that the objective is "to release Stoddart [the British officer and envoy kept prisoner by the Emir], to [let the Emir] evacuate all the countries on this side of the Oxus, and to pay the expenses of the expedition, we should have achieved all that is desirable"⁷⁸. It's clear that the strategic function is to ensure the security of India and it is undeniable that this has in its background the Russian expedition to Khiva: Kaye quotes a letter from Macnaghten, "Depend upon it we shall never be at our ease in India until we have subjugated the Punjab and Nepaul"⁷⁹.

However, the formula in the sense in which Kaye uses it in the context and in the whole of the discussion refers to the expansion itself and not to its reason, which, moreover, as we shall see, Kaye will indicate a few years later as specious. As he writes a little further on, Macnaghten complains that Lord Auckland does not allow him to carry out his projects, because "I gather that his Lordship's intentions are essentially peaceful, both as regards Herat and the Punjab"; this is in a letter to Rawlinson, quoted by Kaye in this regard, and where he adds, with a reference whose meaning becomes essential in the light of what we shall see shortly, that "Oh! for a Wellesley or a Hastings at this juncture"⁸⁰.

75 John W. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, Richard Bentley, London 1857², II, 81.

76 Kaye, *History*, 1851, I, 534.

77 Kaye, *History*, 1857², II, 44.

78 Kaye, *History*, 1857², II, 42-3.

79 Kaye, *History*, 1857², II, 45.

80 Kaye, *History*, 1851, I, 550; Id., Kaye, *History*, 1857², II, 81.

Fifteen years later, compared to the same historical context, the formula has an even more limited meaning. Kaye refers to Burnes' mission to Kabul to secure an alliance with Dhost Mohammed's Afghanistan and its substantial failure, despite his best efforts, because "other counsels were prevailing at Simlah – that great hotbed of intrigue on the Himalayan hills – where the Governor-General and his secretaries were refreshing and invigorating themselves and rising to heights of audacity which they never might have reached in the languid atmosphere of Calcutta". And he writes that, on his return, referring to Auckland's evil counsellors who had effectively prevented the agreement by changing policy, "it's said that the secretaries received him with eager entreaties not to spoil the 'great game' by dissuading Lord Auckland from the aggressive policy to which he had reluctantly given his consent". The allusion is of course to Macnaghten.

This great game is however identified in an immediate policy with a very specific object, "They conceived the idea of reinstituting the old deposed dynasty of Shah Soojah" replacing Dhost Mohamed⁸¹. It's no coincidence that it is the Afghan insurrection that causes that "The great game had exploded"⁸². What is meant in a broad sense by the formula is at most the extension, in the sense of political projection, of power projection rather than conquest, of the Anglo-Indian empire in the *direction* of Central Asia, essentially meaning Afghanistan.

The great game here is the extension, more by projection than direct, of British power from India towards Afghanistan. Kaye expressly observes how "Lord Auckland was growing more and more distrustful of the benefits of extending the 'great game' all over Central Asia" in 1840⁸³. Therefore the great game does not intrinsically have Central Asia as its object, but instead Central Asia is the object of an *extension* of the great game, which can therefore only mean, and in the broadest sense, the projection, direct or indirect, of Anglo-Indian imperial power⁸⁴. More generally, Kaye observes, Auckland "inclined towards peace (...) would not have given himself up to the allurements of a greater game", without the pressure of his "evil counsellors" in the sense which we have seen of interfering in the internal and dynastic politics of Afghanistan. In fact, to understand what Kaye really means at the ground of the formula, one must consider how

81 John W. Kaye, *Lives of Indian Officers*, A. Strahan and Co., London 1867, II, 35-6.

82 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 113.

83 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 97.

84 Yapp, Legend, 182, on the other hand, understands this differently when he speaks generically of Kaye's "usage" of the formula in "(...) an uneasy adventurist quality similar to (...) imperialism (...) in liberal formulations of the 1870s".

its use in relation to the Afghan affair is marginal compared to other uses in the historian's overall work.

In his biography of Metcalfe and in that of Malcolm, respectively three and five years after the first edition of the history of the Afghan war, the formula is used with reference to two contexts that are not only objectively and chronologically different but expressly distinct, and accordingly with two meanings. On the one hand, it is question of the conquest of India with Wellesley, "the recent great conquests in Central India; the treaties and the acquisitions that had attended them. We were rapidly becoming masters of the whole continent of India, in spite of the principles, and in spite of the policy, of the Company"⁸⁵; on the other, of the advanced defence of India after Tilsit with an agreement with Afghanistan and Punjab. It is no coincidence that these are explicitly two different great games, as indicated by the fact that the chapter relating to the first bears the title "The Great Game ended" referring to the arrival of Cornwallis in India and the halt to the expansion policy of his predecessor, "The occasion was one which, if it did not warrant a demonstration of military power, at all events invited a display of diplomatic address. It was sound policy, in such a conjuncture, to secure the good offices of the princes and chiefs who were dominant in the countries which were supposed to lie on the great high road of the invader. If the rulers of Afghanistan and the Punjab could be induced to enter into friendly alliances with the British Government for the resistance of invasion from the North, it seemed to Lord Minto and his colleagues that more than half of the danger which threatened our position would be at once removed. Already was French intrigue making its way at the Persian Court. That was the sure commencement of the great game that was about to be played — the safest and the wisest commencement. It was a great thing, therefore, to re-establish our ascendancy at Tehran — and a great thing to achieve the diplomatic occupation of the countries between Persia and India before our enemies could appear upon the scene. To accomplish the former object John Malcolm"⁸⁶.

In the second case, the background is certainly the – imaginary – scenario of a Russian threat to India, but the object of the great game is the defence of India as such, not an Anglo-Russian conflict.

Symptomatically, however, in the second volume of the biography of Met-

85 John W. Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, Richard Bentley, London 1854, I, 168-70; Id., *The Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, GCB*, Smith, Elder, and Co., London 1856, I, 310. Similarly in John W. Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry St. George Tucker*, Richard Bentley, London 1854, 210.

86 Kaye, *Metcalfe*, I, 240; Id., *Malcolm*, I, 315.

calfe the expression is used – although not in quotation marks – to refer to Metcalfe’s constitutional policy in Canada as governor⁸⁷. While in Malcolm’s biography it is used synonymously for diplomatic activity, “the great game of diplomacy”⁸⁸.

In fact, even in *Lives* the use of the term in relation to Afghanistan is marginal⁸⁹; what the formula mainly means – or rather, describes, since its use remains elliptical – is the conquest of India, or rather the conquest of an empire in India⁹⁰. As such it is referred, attributing the specific objective to him, initially to Wellesley and then continuing in the 1820s, thereby specifically delimiting its chronological setting, even if, as we will see, this does not prevent Kaye from reusing it in a similar sense for subsequent chronological contexts. It’s no coincidence that, in the biography of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Kaye observes “the territorial acquisitions of Lord Wellesley alarmed Lord Cornwallis. It seemed to him that our empire was growing too large, and that we should find it difficult to administer its affairs with advantage to so immense a population. On this subject he wrote from Culford, in August, 1804, putting the whole case in a few pregnant sentences: “By the last accounts from India, affairs appear to be in a most prosperous state. You have dictated the terms of peace and have obtained every possession in India that could be desired. The question here from many persons is, Have we not too much? (...) Lord Wellesley had been playing the great game with such success, that he had brought our Indian Empire to the very verge of bankruptcy. And the game was not yet played out. What, then, was to be done? Lord Wellesley was insubordinate”⁹¹, on the other hand “War is always popular in India; and there was scarcely a man in the two services, from the veteran warrior Lake, to the boy-civilian Metcalfe, who did not utterly abhor and vehemently condemn the recreant policy of withdrawing from the contest before the great game had been played out”⁹², however “Lord Wellesley had already begun to see plainly that it was totally impossible to play the great game any longer with an exhausted treasury, and with our credit at the lowest ebb”⁹³. The expression then refers to the extension of the empire into central India in 1816-1817, “the

87 Kaye, *Metcalfe*, II, 555.

88 Kaye, *Malcolm*, I, 61.

89 This marginality is not detected by Yapp, *Legend*, 182.

90 Cf. also already Yapp, *Legend*, 182: “paramountcy”.

91 Kaye, *Lives*, I, 121-2.

92 Kaye, *Lives*, I, 124.

93 Kaye, *Lives*, I, 126; also 237.

great game was to be played in Central India”⁹⁴.

Further on, in the biography dedicated again to Metcalfe in *Lives*, the formula returns, this time in quotation marks, again in reference to Wellesley, Metcalfe “Young as he was (...) expounded his views, in favour of the prosecution of the ‘great game’, with all the resolution of a veteran politician”⁹⁵.

In Kaye’s last work – dedicated to the Mutiny, or rather the “Sepoy War”, as he better understood to call it at the time –, without any reference to the Afghan affair, it is used, by now antonomastically, to indicate the conquests first of Wellesley and then the pure and simple substitution of the Mughal Empire, from which even Wellesley “had recoiled”.

Kaye writes very effectively that while “The ‘great game’ of Lord Wellesley embraced nothing so stupendous as the usurpation of the Imperial throne”⁹⁶, in the 1820s and 1830s “Time passed; and the English in India, secure in their great possessions, dreading no external enemy, and feeling strong within them the power to tread down any danger which might arise on Indian soil, advanced with a firmer step and a bolder presence. They no longer recoiled from the thought of Empire. What had appeared at the commencement of the century to be perilous presumption, now seemed to be merely the inevitable accident of our position. The ‘great game’ had been imperfectly played out in Lord Wellesley’s time; and ten years afterwards Lord Hastings saw before him the results of that settlement where nothing was settled and resolved to assert the supremacy of the British Government over all the potentates of India. Times were changed both at home and abroad, and our feelings had changed with them. The Company had not quite forgotten that it had been established on a ‘pure mercantile bottom.’ But the successes of our arms in Europe had given us confidence in ourselves as a great military nation”⁹⁷.

It is therefore also evident that Kaye does not use the expression in a definitively unambiguous manner. In concrete use the concept is neither fixed nor univocal. On the contrary, it remains very varied in its nuances. It is however comparatively easy to identify a minimum common element, a lowest common denominator, which also corresponds to the main use, as imperial conquest/expansion, direct territorial or indirect as power projection; and a marginal con-

⁹⁴ Kaye, *Lives*, I, 260; 401.

⁹⁵ Kaye, *Lives*, I, 377; also 388.

⁹⁶ John W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India: 1857–1858*, W. H. Allen & Co, London, 1870, II, 3.

⁹⁷ Kaye, *Sepoy*, II, 8.

tingent application included therein, an indirect expansion into Afghanistan in a preventive anti-Russian function.

In other words, in Kaye's overall historiographical use the formula arises only to indicate the English imperial conquest, or at least the expansion of its power, its power projection, being applied from time to time to chronologically relevant geostrategic areas, such as central India in the 1810s, as well as Afghanistan in the late 1830s ⁹⁸.

This is even more confirmed as the Russian geopolitical factor is well present and highlighted as the cause, albeit specious, of the politics of the late 1830s, "evil advisers, who were continually pouring into his [scil. Lord Auckland's] ears alarming stories of deep-laid plots and subtle intrigues emanating from the Cabinet of St. Petersburg, and of the wide-spread corruption that was to be wrought by Russian gold. It was believed that the King of Persia had become the vassal of the great Muscovite monarch, and that he had been instigated by the Government of the Emperor to march an army to Herat for the capture of that famous frontier city, and for the further extension of his dominions towards the boundaries of our Indian Empire"⁹⁹. But precisely these are only indirect threats to India, and above all they are defined not in any reference whatsoever, even passively, to the formula of the great game, but in another way, "had the Russian power taken the place of the French in the great drama of intrigue and aggression"¹⁰⁰. If Kaye ever coined a phrase to indicate the indirect Anglo-Russian conflict it should be that of "great drama".

Kaye, that is, is well aware of the Russian political thrust in Central Asia and beyond, Persia and even Afghanistan, as well as of an Anglo-Indian political line – represented by Auckland's councilors – which, in his view more speciously than anything else, is aimed, albeit indirectly, at countering it, but, and then all the more significantly, he does not even marginally refer the formula to either. Commenting on Alexander Burnes' letter to Sir John Hobhouse of December 1838, where there is a precise indication of the need for an English anti-Russian defence line in Afghanistan¹⁰¹, he makes no mention, in any sense, of the formula.

98 Yapp, *Legend*, 184, fails to grasp that what changes is not the basic notion but only its geographical application, therefore it is not a question of "two different models of the great game".

99 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 34; 38-40.

100 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 35.

101 Kaye, *Lives*, 38ff.

VII

And Connolly's letters? There are two of them. And an annotation. The second letter is in so far important also because, being already quoted in his Afghan war book – ignored by Morgan –, shows that Kaye should have had a transcript of probably both of them already by ca. 1850. He directly disposes – we don't know how – of Conolly's papers¹⁰². Secondly, apparently the originals are not preserved any longer¹⁰³. We only have their quotation by Kaye. Thirdly, the expression in them has quite a different meaning from the one currently attributed to them. And lastly, Kaye's formula and what he means by it's quite independent from them¹⁰⁴. Besides, against Morgan, it has to be noted that Kaye never "was at pain to trace its origin", nor "He concluded that the first user of it was (...) Conolly"¹⁰⁵ – Kaye, as seen in all the passages referred to, does not pose the problem and does not express any attribution.

According to Kaye, Conolly wrote to Maj. Henry C. Rawlinson, then Political agent at Kabul, that "You've a great game, a *noble* game before you, and I have strong hope that you will be able to steer through all jealousy, and caprice,

102 It is worth remembering that expressly – already from the subtitle "from the unpublished letters and journals of political and military officers employed in Afghanistan throughout the entire period of British connexion with that country" – Kaye insists on his availability and therefore use of private personal archives as specific reason for his book on the Afghan war, "Circumstances having placed at my disposal a number of very interesting and important letters and papers, illustrative of the History of the War in Afghanistan, I undertook to write this Work. There was nothing that peculiarly qualified me for the task, beyond the fact that I enjoyed the confidence of some of the chief actors in the events to be narrated, or – for death had been busy among those act's – their surviving relatives and friends. I had been in India, it is true, during the entire period of the War; but I never took even the humblest part in its stirring scenes, or visited the country in which they were enacted. It was not, therefore, until I considered that no more competent party might be disposed to undertake the Work—that the materials placed in my hands might not in the same number and variety be placed in the hands of any other writer" (Kaye, *History*, 1851, I, v).

103 They are not in Rawlinson's family archive preserved at the RAS, *List of the RAS Collections of Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895)*, (Box IV/7). See also R. Parsons, "A Brief Description of the Collection of Rawlinson Papers at the Royal Asiatic Society", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25, 2015, 481–97, with a useful chronological-biographical note. Only part of Kaye's archive is preserved, BL, IOR/H/724a-727, relating to the Mutiny, and some of his papers appear to have been lost in a fire in his study after the publication of the Afghan book, cf. Hopkirk, *Game*, 177, but unsourced.

104 Yapp, *Legend*, 182 is wrong to believe that Conolly "bequeathed" the phrase to him and similarly Becker, *Game*, 62-3; 65; 74 that Kaye "borrowed" it from Conolly.

105 Morgan, *Rivalry*, 15.

and sluggishness, till the Afghans unite with your own countrymen in appreciating your labors for a fine nation's regeneration and advancement. These are not big words, strung for sound or period." (italics J. W. K.)¹⁰⁶. Kaye does not mention the exact date of the letter, only putting it some days after another one of 24 July 1840.

Conolly does not specify what he is referring to, but the context makes it clear that it is the political-military mission in Afghanistan¹⁰⁷; this is confirmed by a subsequent letter of 4 August, "Nothing can be done ahead, unless Afghanistan is properly settled, and I have confident hope of your being highly instrumental to this desirable end."

On 22 August, in the second missive, again to Rawlinson, now in Kandhar, he wrote that, while wanting to keep Russia out of Toorkistan (Turkestan)¹⁰⁸, "If the British Government would only play the grand game – help Russia cordially to all that she has a right to expect – shake hands with Persia – get her all possible amends from the Oosbeks, and secure her such a frontier as would both keep these men-stealers and ravagers in wholesome check – take away her pretext for pushing herself in, letting herself be pushed on to the Oxus; force the Bokhara Ameer to be just to us, the Afghans, the other Oosbeg States, and his own kingdom (...) and we shall play the noble part that the first Christian nation of the world ought to fill"¹⁰⁹.

Manifestly between the two is a handwritten note by Conolly in connection – but we don't know where, whether at the bottom or on another sheet, nor actually when¹¹⁰ – with his transcription of three letters from Macnaughten including the one to the Governor of Bombay of 20 July in which Macnaughten writes of

106 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 101. It has not yet been noticed that in the text "*your* countrymen" must probably be a transcription error by Kaye, since Rawlinson's countrymen are not different from Conolly's!

107 Differently, but wrongly, Yapp, *Legend*, 181. Hevia, *State*, 11 is the only one, acutely, also to pose the problem, however, partly differently from us, considering the reference "to govern everything from Kandhar (...) to Herat".

108 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 103.

109 Kaye, *Lives* II, 104; Id., *History*, 1851, I, 540 nt; 1857², II, 71, with some minor differences.

110 So not necessarily "in copying Macnaughten's letter" as Becker, *Game*, 64, believes, who has the great merit of having drawn attention to the text; even less can one agree with Sergeev, *Game*, 3; 335 nt 2 who believes that Conolly "scribbled the combination of the three words 'the great game' in an annotation on a copy of a letter from the British envoy in Kabul to the governor of Bombay" and "reproduced this word combination in a private message to (...) Rawlinson", erroneously citing Hopkirk, *Game*, 123 who writes nothing of the sort, clearly confusing him with Becker who, moreover, is not even cited in the bibliography.

“a beautiful game”. Kaye reports “Conolly himself writes: “if we play the great game that is before us, the results will be incalculably beneficial to us, and to the tribes whose destinies we may change from violence, ignorance, and poverty to peace, enlightenment and varied happiness”¹¹¹.

It is clearly the second letter that Kaye has in mind when, referring to the exploration travels of the very young Conolly in 1829-30, he writes that “Perhaps there was even then obscurely taking shape within him some previsions of the “great game in Central Asia”, which he afterwards believed it was the especial privilege of Great Britain to play“¹¹² and speaks of “a scheme which, according to his perceptions, embraced nothing less than a grand Anti-slavery Confederation”¹¹³.

What Conolly refers to with the expression – in both adjectival variants, which is an indication of the purely occasional nature of it and of the combination¹¹⁴ – is therefore the political control of Afghanistan as a springboard for a projection into Turkestan with a civilizing function, specifically of an anti-slavery confederation¹¹⁵.

Furthermore, when he speaks of the great game Conolly is not referring to a context of which he is part but to that of Rawlinson and, at the most, in general to the Anglo-Indian one. Finally, Conolly does not use the expression in his 1838 book, *Journey to the North of India*, London 2 vols. This confirms that in his case too the expression has an extemporaneous origin. The reference to Macnaghten’s letter of 20 July 1840, in which this writes to the Governor of Bombay

111 Kaye, *History*, 1851, I, 526 nt.

112 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 70.

113 Kaye, *Lives*, II 97.

114 The point has not been grasped so far. In particular not even by Becker, *Game*, 62 who also notes that *grand* is not *great*. And it is therefore wrong to speak of a specific conception, as he claims at 74, indicated by Conolly with the expression.

115 This is precisely what Morgan, *Myth*, 55 also noted; Id., *Rivalry*, 15-6 speaks of a sense of “spiritual and anti-slavery crusade” and emphasizes that Conolly is not referring to the Russians; and is largely clear already to Henry W. C., Davis, “The Great Game in Asia, 1800-1844” (Raleigh Lecture on history. Read November 16, 1926), *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 12, 1926, 227-8; 244; 254; Ingram, *Approaches*, 456 in turn captures how “it was the British who had a great game to play, nobody else”; Yapp, *Legend*, 181; those who instead consider Conolly’s inclination anti-Russian are therefore wrong, such as Meyer – Brysac, *Tournament*, xxiii; Johnson, *Spying*, 51 ff.; Sergeev, *Game*, 4, who moreover attributes to an interpretation by Kaye the idea of confederation which is instead expressed in Conolly’s letter. Becker, *Game*, 65; 74 somewhat confusedly, on the one hand correctly recognizes the first meaning, of cooperation with Russia, on the other attributes to him a concern regarding Russian aims, 64.

about a “beautiful game”, and which Connolly transcribes, in our opinion confirms the occasional nature of both expressions rather than the hypothesis that Conolly “copied” it from the latter¹¹⁶. This is not a conceptual derivation from Macnaghten but simply a stylistic conditioning, so much so that the meaning is completely different, Macnaghten refers to the idea of a reconquest of Herat to then be returned to Afghanistan.

Russia – in any role, even as a prerequisite – does not fit into anything. In other words, Conolly *does not* have in mind – even in part – a rivalry with Russia for control of Central Asia. So much for an Anglo-Russian rivalry, Conolly writes of a major collaboration between the two powers in civilizing the region

The “birth” of the great game cannot therefore be attributed – and in what sense, moreover? – to the letter of the unfortunate officer for the simple reason that it says nothing in particular. Finally, it should be stressed, as further confirmation of the randomness of Connolly’s expression, that in his letter the accent is expressly on “noble” (underlined) and not on great.

Note how in the same period Alexander Burnes writes that “The fact is, I have been playing the boldest game”¹¹⁷. The use of the term in relation to one’s own activities is both widespread and generic, as is obvious for this type of term. Or otherwise, instead of the Great Game we would have the Boldest Game. And, conversely, it is an interesting confirmation that Kaye does not relate Connolly’s text to *his* idea of the great game – which, let us remember, he mentions in quotation marks –, not even in the sense extended to Central Asia. In other words, Kaye – contrary to the genealogy established by Morgan – does not include (his) great game in Conolly’s game.

Nor can it be argued that even in his personal meaning Kaye’s formula somehow derives from Connolly’s letter. Everything rules it out. Firstly, because there is no logical-semantic connection between Conolly’s use of it and Kaye’s basic use; secondly, more simply, because Kaye himself does not establish any connection between the two. Thirdly, because the use of the formula in Kaye’s books precedes his quotation of Conolly’s second letter. Again, Kaye does not employ his formula referring to Conolly’s correspondance neither in Conolly’s meaning.

116 So instead Morgan, *Rivalry*, 16, welcomed by Becker, *Game*, 63.

117 Kaye, *Lives*, II, 41.

VIII

Kipling then, who given their importance and diffusion, and even more so as a reporter of the Indian *Civil and Military Gazette* and later *The Pioneer*, has almost certainly read Kaye's books, has probably absorbed, more or less unconsciously, the expression but has made a completely different use of it, as is consequent and natural in a writer. What remains common to both is the substantial focus on India (as British) of the content given from time to time to the expression. In Kaye it – as seen – is not always exclusive, but even when partial, in the case of the Afghan affair, it remains paramount.

On this basis, secondly, it is not possible to establish any genealogy of its subsequent use¹¹⁸, any *lignée*, even of the expression, let alone its meaning, between Conolly, Kaye and Kipling and even less with the few and rare, occasional other occurrences that we shall presently see. At most, one can hypothesize a distant and vague, rather unconscious than intentional echoing in some cases which nevertheless remains devoid of any substantial meaning at the level of the history of ideas and is therefore almost irrelevant.

And above all, the expression never means an Anglo-Russian rivalry, least of all *the* Anglo-Russian rivalry. The *negativum* that emerges from the analysis of Kipling's and Kaye's notions is even more important than their identification itself. Their mere existence, and in widely circulated books, makes it simply impossible to suppose the parallel existence of a use of the expression – and even less so in the official mind – to mean an Anglo-Russian contest for Central Asia, or even a sheer Russian menace to India. One would have to suppose otherwise the existence and circulation of the formula in a third meaning, alongside the other two, without the effect of their removal and without any attestation of it remaining.

And Kaye was not a historian like any other – but as Secretary in the Political and Secret Department of the India Office in the late Sixties, just when he wrote his books, he should have known Indian *interna*. And accordingly it is even more impossible that he employed an internal, current formula in a quite different meaning.

What Kipling's use would attest, in turn, does not find confirmation in reality, as we have seen. And furthermore, if Kipling were to attest, simply by taking it over, the widespread existence of a notion of great game in the official mind,

118 Not even of semantic modification, if only for the attribution of an erroneous meaning, as Becker, *Game*, 71, confusedly, seems to intend. Hevia, *Security*, 11-2 who establish a direct use by Kipling of Kaye is wrong for the reasons in the text.

his use would be conceptually univocal. Which is not the case.

Neither Anglo-Indian nor British official mind at *Kim*'s date knew of a great game – neither as Anglo-Russian rivalry nor as Secret Service. Nor, looking at the period after *Kim*, does Kipling give “universal currency” to the expression. First because it does not refer to Anglo-Russian rivalry, but above all because it does not reappear until H. W. C. Davis' lecture of 1926 and also not much thereafter. Even Maud Diver, we shall see, does not employ it in derivation from him. We will return soon to all that. Though he did it in another way – the correct one, though much later. As synonym with secret service but only from the 60s of the 20th century – we will not deal with this one here.

IX

In a way it was a German statesman who “invented” the great game. On one occasion between 27 May and 1 June 1885 Bismarck “pour employer son expression même, trouve que vous ne voulez pas jouer le grand jeu”. A few days later “admettait la renonciation de votre part à ce qu'il avait appelé le grand jeu”¹¹⁹. But the Chancellor is not referring to the Anglo-Russian rivalry. Bismarck's words, reported by Hatzfeld to Courcel, the French ambassador in Berlin, refer to French policy towards the Anglo-Egyptian question.

A few years after Kaye's *Lives*, in 1875 a pamphlet is published which bears the title *The Great Game: A Plea for a British Imperial Policy by a British Subject* (London 1875). Anonymous in the first edition, its author appears to be, in the second edition, published soon after in the same year, a Walter Millar Thorburn, a civil servant of the province of Madras,¹²⁰. The author is a young barrister, recently graduated from the University of Edinburgh and just entered the India Civil Service, where he remained until 1902, also holding the office of district judge¹²¹.

In reality it is a long *pladoyer* for an imperial federation, a not uncommon theme in the last quarter of the 19th and in the first of the 20th century. Inside, the expression is used only twice in a manner directly taken from Kaye, of conquest of India, and in the first case also for Wellesley, in the second with an

119 Documents diplomatiques français. 1871-1914. 1e série, 1871-1900, VI, 8 avril 1885, 30 décembre 1887, nr 28, p. 37; nr 32, p. 50.

120 An edition appears at the same time anonymously in Toronto (Willing & Williamson) with a preface by an also anonymous Canadian; W. M. Thorburn, *The Great Game. A Plea for a British Imperial Policy*, Wm. H. Allen, London 1875².

121 *The India List and India Office List for 1905*, Harrison and Sons, London 1905, 629.

extension to Disraeli, “We may with confidence look to him as one both able find willing to play out Lord Wellesley’s Great Game on a larger stage, and make Britain not merely the Paramount Power of the Indian Peninsula, but the Paramount Power of the shores of the Indian Ocean, and beyond all rivalry the First Power on the face of the earth”¹²². But in reality the eponymous use must rather refer to its subtitle: the object of the great game is the configuration of the British Imperial Policy. It is consequently possible to deduce the rhetorical and non-specific value of its use. Thornburn takes it from Kaye, he also uses it, in the specific context, in his sense, but he makes it its own in the other one. It undoubtedly attests to the diffusion of Kaye’s books.

An experienced publicist of the Empire and convinced imperialist, co-founder in 1885 of the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Demetrius C. Boulger, uses, in a single context, the expression in his *England and Russia in Central Asia* of 1879¹²³. Contrary to what Yapp believes¹²⁴, he does not formalise “the Great Game in Central Asia” in the sense of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia nor “Boulger took the phrase from Kaye’s History of the Afghan War but changed its meaning to give it the sense it afterwards acquired”, but simply derives directly from Kaye’s use of the expression as regards consolidation in Afghanistan, as shown by the simple fact that the expression is used by Boulger strictly in relation to the episode of Conolly’s mission in the aftermath of which his letters to Rawlinson were written, “In the year 1839 not only had Afghanistan been conquered by a British army, but the bold scheme had been conceived by a few men, remarkable for their foresight, of raising a powerful barrier in Central Asia from amongst the Tartar States of Turkestan to any encroachment on the part of Russia”¹²⁵.

It is the synthesis of Kaye’s pages that we have seen on the overall situation with particular reference to Macnaghten, as Boulger writes expressly in the second volume summarising the lessons of the Afghan war with respect to the present – 1879 –, “Such is the story of our two wars against Afghanistan and our brief occupation of the country, as told in the pages of Sir John Kaye and by other authorities”¹²⁶.

¹²² Thornburn, *Game*, 30; 214.

¹²³ London, W. H. Allen.

¹²⁴ Yapp, *Legend*, 192.

¹²⁵ Boulger, *England*, I, 185.

¹²⁶ Boulger, *England*, II, 172, Boulger obviously means the two distinct military campaigns of what today is called the First Afghan War.

And that great game and rivalry are clearly distinct by him is equally explicit, "The Afghan wars of almost forty years ago possess a peculiar vitality to the present day. The causes then at work are still in existence. There is still a divided Afghanistan and an enfeebled Persia, upon both of which the Russian statesmen have sought to work for their own purposes. There is still the great game in Central Asia, greater and more complicated than ever before, and there is still, with all its wide-stretching ramifications, the rivalry of England and Russia"; great game is the English projection into central Asia as outlined by Kaye¹²⁷. The Anglo-Russian rivalry is an issue in itself, even if the two are connectable.

At most, Boulger accentuates the formalization of Kaye's analysis, as shown both by the use of the entire phrase in quotation marks and by the reference to it in the summary of the lessons of the war of 1839-42. In any case, neither his use, nor even less that of Thorburn¹²⁸, fits into any genealogy of the progenitor formula, as no one subsequently quoted them in relation to the formula.

Curzon does not use the expression. With one exception. Always grandiloquent in rhetorical emphasis, focusing on the strategic effects of the Transcaspian railways, he observed, in 1889, how "It means that the power of menace, which the ability to take Herat involves, has passed from English to Russian hands; that the Russian seizure of Herat is now a matter not so much of war as of time; and that the Russians will thus, without an effort, win the first hand in the great game that is destined to be played for the empire of the East. These are the advantages as regards situation and opportunity which their Transcaspian conquests, and the railway as its sequel, have placed in the Russians' hands. I now propose to show to what extent they will be able to use them, and what are the counter advantages or possibilities to be credited to Great Britain"¹²⁹.

Here the expression, which, as mentioned, does not recur in his other works – e.g. significantly in his *Frontiers* of 1908 –, has only an occasional character, among other things not recurring elsewhere even in the volume of almost five hundred pages. In it – used in lower case and without quotation marks – great has a strictly attributive, not predicative, function. It is a game which happens to be great for its stakes. In any case, the Anglo-Russian contest is represented *not* as in act, and certainly not in reference to the past, whether continuing or

127 See also Boulger, *England*, II, 229 where is the siege of Herat in 1837, and again as understood by Kaye, to be defined: "It was but the prelude to the great game in Central Asia."

128 Becker, *Game*, 69 hypothesizes Boulger's knowledge of these, in itself probable given the publicist's interests, but hardly related to the specific point, too general.

129 George N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London and New York 1889, 296-7.

concluded, but hypothesized for *the future* and therefore cannot refer either to the Russian advance in Transcaspia, nor to a Central Asian contest, nor to the defence of India. But at most it concerns the definition of a future scenario of conflict, which Curzon, analyzing the possibilities of a Russian invasion of Afghanistan, outlines immediately below.

On this basis, a conscious theoretical construction of a geopolitical nature must be excluded – as after all is also in the case of Boulger and that of Durand, which we will consider immediately. And if Curzon is at least familiar with Kaye's Afghan book and his biography of Malcolm, the expression is, at best, an echo with a manifestly different meaning.

Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, not coincidentally Secretary of the Indian Foreign Office and the architect of the Durand Line of 1893, in the two-volume biography of his father, who had participated in the expedition to Afghanistan and had completed his Indian career as Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, is one of the other rare cases of direct reception of Kaye's expression¹³⁰. In a long *Appendix* expressly dedicated to a criticism of Kaye's judgment on Lord Ellenborough, Durand notes how "Almost his first act on arriving in India was to subordinate all political officers in Afghanistan to the military commanders", and explains it with the fact that "it must be remembered that the measures of Macnaughten and his political staff had been to a great extent the cause of our disasters, and further that when Lord Ellenborough landed in India the 'great game' was practically at an end. At any time and under any circumstances it must be desirable in a country like Afghanistan, where the conditions of warfare are wholly different to those (...) in Europe, to concentrate in the hands of one man...supreme control"¹³¹. Accordingly he follows the narrow and limited secondary meaning of Kaye, the expansion into Afghanistan.

It is with this in mind that we should understand his other reference to the expression, when speaking of the functions of the Indian Foreign Office he identifies them as "The conduct of this [*scil.* with the neighbouring foreign powers] correspondence, which often involves questions of great difficulty and imperial interest, and the watching of the 'great game' beyond our north-western frontier, towards which, whether for good or evil, Russia is steadily advancing, are duties of no light weight and importance"¹³². That is, he refers it precisely to Afghani-

130 *The Life of Major-General Sir Henry Marion Durand, KCSI, CB, of the Royal Engineers*, W. H. Allen, London 1883, 2 vols.

131 Durand, *Life*, I, 459.

132 Durand, *Life*, I, 281.

stan and its internal affairs, although, as in Kaye, presupposing the geopolitical role of Russia, but, just like him, always in the background and not as a direct Central Asian rivalry.

It is no coincidence that the book was published a year after the end of the Second Afghan War. Admittedly, a game you are watching is not a game you are a part of. Considering his functions as Secretary of the Indian FO this is an indication that the formula was not current and above all not in any other meaning in the official mind of the Raj.

Maud Diver, born at Murree in northern India in 1867, was a “novelist and writer of books on India (...) The eldest daughter of the late Colonel C. H. T. Marshall, Indian Army (...) Most of her early life was spent either in the country of her birth or in Ceylon”¹³³. Her books, however, would have been written in England, where she had been living since 1896. Diver uses the expression from 1908 onwards in basically two ways. The first is a simple juxtaposition of terms, to which we will return; the other repeating it directly from Kaye, in the sense used in relation to the Afghan events. Significantly this is the case in her two fictionalized biographies of Eldred Pottinger, “And so an end of Charles Stoddart and Arthur Conolly; brave spirits both, whatever their failings: two units merely, among the scores of good men and true who had, by that time, been sacrificed to the Simla Cabinet’s hypothetical ‘great game’ in Central Asia”¹³⁴, “Lives, honour, money, prestige, flung broadcast to the four winds of heaven, had availed — precisely nothing; and all was as it had been before Simla secretaries dreamed of the Great Game in Central Asia. But whatever the faults and follies of the ‘high in place’, it could at least be said of the armies tramping wearily back across the Punjab, with dust of its high roads in their throats and in their eyes, that they had done what they could”¹³⁵. The presupposition of Kaye, already noted by Yapp¹³⁶, as the main source is expressed in the Introductory Notes to the two books¹³⁷.

But precisely in his sense, of English projection in Central Asia, almost literally also taking up his critical judgments¹³⁸, not in the sense of Anglo-Russian ri-

133 Obituary, *The Times*, 17 October 1945; cf. Sandra Kemp – Charlotte Mitchell – David Trotter, *Edwardian Fiction. An Oxford Companion*, Oxford-New York, OUP 1997, 100-1.

134 Maud Diver, *The Hero of Herat*, Constable, London 1912, 218; 345; also 220.

135 Maud Diver, *The Judgment of the Sword*, Constable, London 1913, 565; 640; similarly in Ead., *Kabul To Kandahar*, Peter Davies, London 1935, 16; 17.

136 Yapp, *Legend*, 187.

137 Diver, *Hero*, viii; Ead., *Sword*, ix.

138 E.g. Diver, *Judgment*, 640, and quotations *supra*.

valry as, contradictorily instead, Yapp himself writes¹³⁹, who was the first to draw attention to her. Only in her last book, which however is from 1945, does she go a little further, “In 1839 the fear of Russian invasion, not altogether unfounded, was magnified by a group of Simla Secretaries eager to play their own part in ‘the great game’ of extending England’s political influence into Central Asia”¹⁴⁰. But we are precisely twenty years after Davis’ lecture, who perhaps she presupposes.

On the other hand, but for this very reason just as significantly, the expression appears with completely different meanings and as an occasional use of the two terms. In *The Great Amulet*, a spy novel from 1909 and set in a typical context, “Whereas Sir Henry had eyed him thoughtfully from between narrowed lids. For all his great brain, he was a man of one idea: and that idea—“The North safeguarded.” Mere men, himself included, were for him no more than pawns in the great game to be played out between two Empires, on the chess-board of Central Asia. But [in the original] there are pawns, and pawns”¹⁴¹. Sir Henry Forsyth is the Indian Foreign Secretary in the novel. Here the meaning is that of a metaphor for international politics and as such it returns elsewhere¹⁴². In her first novel the expression refers to war, “the great game of war”¹⁴³, and it returns again in the 1909 novel. This usage is reminiscent of the one we will see¹⁴⁴ in John Buchan a few years later.

And the set of meanings is so wide to the point of becoming, at least on one occasion, even cricket¹⁴⁵. Diver was not only connected to Kipling’s family, a close friend of his sister, but cites *Kim* in another connection as little read in 1945¹⁴⁶. On this basis it is significant that she neither feels the need to connect her use of the expression with that of Kipling, nor above all does she perceive the intrinsic contradiction between the two. Thus further demonstrating that her use is substantially devoid of a previously consolidated theoretical substratum in either direction, Kaye’s or Kipling’s.

139 Yapp, *ib* .

140 Maud Diver, *The Unsung. A Record of British Services in India*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1945, 96.

141 Maud Diver, *The Great Amulet*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London 1909, 366.

142 Diver, *Herat*, 98; referred to by Yapp, *ib* .

143 Maud Diver, *Captain Desmond, Vc*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1908, 3.

144 Diver, *Amulet*, 318.

145 Maud Diver, *Royal India*, London 1942, 256.

146 Diver, *Unsung*, 15.

X

A series of rare occasional uses even genetically does not constitute an ideological genealogy. There is only one thing more difficult to prove than a *negativum*. And that is a *silentium*. But a *silentium* is one of the most important sources. We will see now how to reconstruct it. The case against is essentially constituted by both the silence and the frequency of completely different and – equally – occasional uses of the expression.

Not only those who have a complete knowledge of documents relating to the context of the First Afghan war have not found any use of the expression¹⁴⁷, but also those who have carefully consulted the documentation of the WO and the India Office of the following decades for other broader purposes¹⁴⁸. We can add, as an example, on our part, how the expression e.g. does not appear in the memorandum of the Intelligence Department of the WO for the CID of 10 March 1903 on “The Defence of India”¹⁴⁹, nor in the analysis of the Simla war game of 5 May 1904¹⁵⁰.

Even more symptomatically, the formula never appears to have been used in debates in Parliament as reported by Hansard¹⁵¹. In the newspapers it never appears – at least in this sense, but it often occurs in completely different ones.

As we have seen, two ideal actors of the great game, Curzon and Durand, don’t use the expression, with the only marginal exception mentioned and which in reality is not even such. And this also applies to other only slightly less significant authors.

Charles MacGregor does not use it, nor significantly Rawlinson in his 1875 book on Russia and England in Asia¹⁵², which reproduces five articles published between 1849 and 1866, where we would otherwise expect it to be in full evidence. Nor does an otherwise typical Great Gamer like Sir Percy Sykes¹⁵³. Rawlinson’s silence is doubly significant, not only in the sense that Conolly’s letter had apparently not made an impression on him, but above all that Kaye’s books

147 Cf. Yapp, *Legend*, 181.

148 Cf. Hevia, *State*, 10.

149 NA CAB 38/2/12.

150 NA CAB 6/1/50.

151 In particular, between 1840 and 1925 the expression appears 24 times, each in different contexts and at most with reference to international politics.

152 See Henry C. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East. A Series of Papers on the Political and Geographical Condition of Central Asia*, John Murray, London 1875; cf. also already Becker, *Game*, 66 with another case.

153 Cf. Becker, *Game*, 73.

must not have made an impression on him either. Certainly for the officer there is no formulation of great game and even less a link between it and his unfortunate colleague.

The major imperial publicists, Seeley, Froude and Dilke – who can hardly have failed to read at least some of Kaye’s books – in turn are unaware of the expression in their widely read geohistorical books. Returning to the literary field, another writer in whom one would ideally expect the formula to occur is John Buchan. Buchan was not simply a great spy-novelist, above all he was during the Great War, from 1917, the Director of the Department of Information¹⁵⁴. In 1900, immediately before *Kim*, John Buchan published a spy novel, *The Half-Hearted* (London 1900) which contains a typical great game scenario. But the expression is not used there. It is equally absent in the fictional-political novel, also having as its subject the Russian threat to India, by Hilda Caroline Gregg (alias Sydney C. Grier) of 1907¹⁵⁵ – a pladoyer for the reform of the British Army.

And *par excellence* it is not used in his *Greenmantle* in which the protagonist, the famous Richard Hannay, agent of the Secret Service, is called to foil the German conspiracy in the Middle East to start a Jihad – note, Buchan does not invent the scenario which is historical. On one occasion in the novel indeed it is not this assignment – quite a typical intelligence mission – that is called great game, as one might well expect, but exactly its opposite, the “normal war” on the Western front, “It is a great game” the senior civil servant of the FO who summoned him grants him¹⁵⁶.

XI

If Flashman plays the great game already in 1975 (probably MacDonald Fraser has just read Morgan’s article, rather than Fleming’s book, or both), in the years 1926-1960 the expression is not used in historiography, or elsewhere¹⁵⁷.

154 E. g. Kate Macdonald, *John Buchan*, McFarland & Company, Jefferson, NC and London 2015, 25-6; differently from her, we suppose he also had close contacts with the SIS.

155 Sydney C. Grier, *The Power of the Keys*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London 1907.

156 John Buchan, *Greenmantle*, Oxford, OUP, 1984, 8; 10. Only partly different in understanding the meaning as “Soldiering as contrasted with espionage” Yapp, *Legend*, 187; Yapp does not take into consideration the other novel we have referred to, but further recalls a typical Buchan character to whom the expression could have been referred.

157 Yapp also does not identify previous occurrences. Flashman novel does not deal with Central Asia but with the Mutiny, though there are Russian agents at work inside India.

With one exception, that of the historical-political analysis of Afghanistan by Fraser-Tytler, most recently British Minister at Kabul, of 1950. Fraser-Tytler does not define what he means by the formula which he uses as the title of three chapters of the book, the first relating to the years up to ca. 1820 ("The 'Great Game' in Central Asia – the Opening Gambit"), the second to the years 1842–1875 ("The 'Great Game' Continued – the Struggle for the Hindukush"), the third up to 1907 ("The 'Great Game' Concluded – from the Second Afghan War to the Convention of St. Petersburg"). But from the context it emerges that it is about the perception of the Russian threat in the direction of India¹⁵⁸. Moreover it should not be underestimated that Fraser-Tytler also uses the term "game" to define "the difficult delicate game of international negotiation"¹⁵⁹.

A turning point in the spread of the expression was, in 1961, due to the personality of its author and therefore the great diffusion of the book, the first history of the Anglo-Indian expedition to Tibet, with the suggestive title of *Bayonets to Lhasa*. The author is Peter Fleming. It is no coincidence that a few years later the expression entered journalism, in an article in *Life* relating to the Pamir and Sinkiang¹⁶⁰.

Fleming eponymously titles "The Great Game" the first chapter devoted to a historical analysis of the "Drang nach Osten" – as he calls it – of Russia in the 19th century and the threat that this posed to Great Britain¹⁶¹; and he adopts the Connolly-Kaye genealogy of the formula, repeating it explicitly from H. W. C. Davis' 1926 lecture, which we will come to shortly, thereby confirming the absence of significant intermediate uses.

However, it should be stressed that in the following years and at least up until Morgan's article its use remained extremely rare¹⁶². On the other hand, we will shortly come to the major – although long isolated – first genetic moment of the formula, going back to 1926.

158 William K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan. A Study in Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia*, London, OUP 1950, 75 ff.; 120 ff.; 150 ff.

159 Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan*, 161.

160 The Angry Frontier, *LIFE* 21 Mar 1969, 34.

161 Peter Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa: The First Full Account of the British Invasion of Tibet in 1904*, R. Hart-Davis, London, 1961, 19; 21; 30; 30 nt.

162 Except for a few isolated cases. For example, cursorily in the sense of Anglo-Russian conflict Alastair Lamb, *The McMahon Line. Morley, Minto and Noninterference in Tibet. II, Hardinge, McMahon and the Simla Conference*, Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1966, 5. It is symptomatic that, for example, it is not used by Beryl J. Williams, "The Strategic Background to the Anglo-Russian Entente of August 1907", *The Historical Journal*, 9, 1966, 360–373.

XII

Game is a polysemic word and one with many nuances at that.

Chess or rugby? Hopkirk asks himself the question of what Conolly could analogically have had in mind between the two¹⁶³— and the same question is of course for the other usages. Game is clearly in the sense of physical exertion not of intellectual trial. And of one-sided experience, not of match. The game in Conolly's letter is not only great but noble. Yapp perceives in the term "associations of risk taking"¹⁶⁴. In relation to the complex of uses, we propose *adventure* as a synonym¹⁶⁵. And it remains that way in most of the usage cases we have seen.

This, in turn, further confirms the non-formalization as an indicator of Anglo-Russian rivalry, which would rather be traced back to the dimension of a chess game; as indeed is in some of the cases we have seen, with respect to which it should also be remembered that the application of the chess metaphor to international politics and interstate rivalries is widespread¹⁶⁶.

Rugby then – or rather golf? We will see it soon,

But what is a game which is great?

It's a game that happens to be great, as we have already mentioned in a few cases. It is a simple combination of a noun and an adjective, which occurs in most cases simply occasionally and almost never with a formalization behind it – as in the case of Kaye or Kipling.

And that is just what Kim himself says when he discovers what he has in front of him, "Well is the Game called great!"; reasoning not by chance, as Kipling points out, in Hindustani¹⁶⁷. Not only that, but the game is called great because it is different from his usual one, as he himself perceives¹⁶⁸.

163 Cf. Hopkirk, *Quest*, 6-7. The explanation of the use of the term game is lost in an illogical formulation in Sergeev, *Game*, 3-4.

164 Yapp, *Legend*, 183.

165 Arendt, *Origins*, 217 does not use the term but significantly connects Kim's mentality with that of the "adventurer".

166 For example, recall the employment of Rosebery, *Lord Rosebery's Speeches*, London, N. Beeman 1896, I, 205; George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Longmans, Green And Co, London 1892, 3-4 and in Sir George Clarke's (the CID Secretary) analysis of the Simla war game, quoted in Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan. Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905*, Princeton U. P., Princeton 2011², 262.

167 Kipling, *Kim*, 224.

168 Kipling, *Kim*, 3; 47.

This is further confirmed by the frequency with which the simple metaphor of game is adopted in almost all the authors we have considered¹⁶⁹. Mahbub's retrospective comment on the concluded affair of the Northern States conspiracy is "the game is well played"¹⁷⁰.

We have already recalled the formula used by Bismarck – which would suggest some usage circulating in the diplomatic language of the time. Let us add, for example, "War is only a great game" for Walter Scott¹⁷¹. And for a historian of 1860 the great game was, of all, Austerlitz¹⁷².

If there is a genealogy it's therefore as a metaphor for war, we recall the use of Maud Diver and John Buchan.

The simple use of the word "game," alone or with the adjective "great," "grand", "big", "bold", and so on, is so common in political and military contexts that its simple use cannot demonstrate the existence of a precise concept unless it's at least *expressly* referred to. This is only the case with Kaye, Kipling, and, as we will say, Davis.

Yapp¹⁷³ curiously misses the point considering the "term" consolidated and old although with different meanings. Instead, it is only the occasional associative phenomenon of an adjective and a noun both of general use. The almost endless semantic variety confirms this. There is no "great game", with any meaning, there is a *game* that is qualified as *great*.

There is therefore no reason to be surprised and to look, as Becker does¹⁷⁴, for objective and content-related reasons for the failure to use the expression. In this he simply fails to grasp that the expression, and even less the formula, has no ideological consolidation, that is, it remains an occasional use, and therefore it is completely natural and automatic that it is used more than rarely, simply casually.

In conclusion, the reality boils down to the fact that there is a noun of wide-

169 Let us also add the examples of Becker, *Game*, 70, relating to Charles MacGregor and Charles Dilke.

170 Kipling, *Kim*, 134.

171 Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon*, in *The Complete Works*, Conner and Cooke, New York 1833 VII, 691.

172 William F. Collier, *The Great Events of History*, T. Nelson and Sons, London 1860, 301; see also Samuel Maunder, *The History of the World. Comprising a General History*, Henry Bill, New York 1856, II, 170, "great game of war".

173 Yapp, *Legend*, 183; 186.

174 Becker, *Game*, 69;73.

spread metaphorical use in political and military discourse – and not only¹⁷⁵ – and that there is an adjective of absolutely general use.

The combination of the two is a natural and automatic semantic phenomenon in the most diverse contexts. This combination has given rise to the retrospective construction – especially historiographical, but also of political theory – of formulas and even theorizations almost all not even remotely related in reality to the intention of those who use the combination: game and great.

XIII

If Colonel Morgan can be traced back to the origins of the until today current genealogy, he was not the one who firstly established it – at least in part. Firstly, the use is expressly proposed in his 1926 Raleigh Lecture at the British Academy by H. W. C. Davis; a small masterpiece of imperial historiography, which Gillard rightly qualifies as “famous”¹⁷⁶. Curiously underestimated by Yapp – but not by Ingram. Davis, Regius Professor at Oxford and during the war vice-chairman of the War Trade Intelligence Department, claims the introduction of the formula as his own original, albeit with use borrowed from Kaye, whose retrieval in Conolly’s papers is also recalled by him¹⁷⁷.

Secondly, it’s Davis who first establishes this genealogy – which matters little here, substantially erroneous, as we have seen –, “(...) what I have called [*scil.* in the title of his Lecture] the Great Game. The phrase I borrow from Kaye (...) Kaye, I think, found the phrase in the papers of Arthur Conolly”¹⁷⁸. It is no coincidence that Fleming is the first to propose it again in his *Bayonets to Lhasa*¹⁷⁹.

Thirdly, he was the first to define its object in the terms that are more or less current today: it “was a bid for political ascendancy in Western Asia (...) a grandiose policy”¹⁸⁰. It’s important to emphasize, both with respect to Kipling’s use

175 Only somebody who is not an Englishman probably realizes how English is the expression “Playing the game”, see the excellent novel by Ian Buruma, *Playing the Game*, Jonathan Cape, London 1991.

176 Gillard, *Struggle*, 189.

177 See also Yapp, Legend 180-1 in the same sense.

178 Davis, Game, 227; reproduced in *Henry William Carless Davis, 1874–1928; a memoir*, London, Constable and Co., 1933 (with Austin Lane Poole).

179 Fleming, *Bayonets*, 30 nt.

180 Davis, Game, 228; Yapp, Legend, 190; 198 errs in focusing Davis’ position on “(...) the role of junior officer (...)”, the latter instead expressly has a vision referring to the centres of political decision-making.

and that of some more recent historians, that Davis, though particularly attentive to the intelligence dimension, doesn't identify his great game with it but on the contrary considers it as a separate entity, albeit within the game¹⁸¹.

Historiographically this means two things. We can say with good confidence that the great game was invented at Oxford by his Regius of Modern History. Not only the formula but, and moreover, the lines in which more or less all modern historiography has dealt with it. And his declaration of originality confirms once again that the formula was not widespread but that it was used for the first time. If one can call an "invention" what is not to be used for at least the following twenty-five years (Fraser-Tytler)¹⁸². As there is nothing looking behind Davis so nothing there is looking forward. It is evident that Morgan in turn derives directly from Davis, who he refers to extensively in his article¹⁸³. But between the two, Davis and Morgan, there is almost nothing – Morgan built the bridge and that his one of the two contributions of him. As much as there is nothing before Davis.

Morgan's second contribution – is *Kim*. Davis does not mention it. Morgan inserted it as the first¹⁸⁴, coming to that probably by a fortuitous chance, which explains the substantial abuse of it. That is watching a *Kim* series at the BBC just when working on his article, as he expressly says at its opening. That the paternity is Morgan's is also confirmed *ex negativo* by the significant fact that not even Fleming – who, as mentioned, expressly depends on Davis – recalls *Kim*, despite his own great game being centered on the espionage dimension.

XIV

Rugby then? Edward Ingram knows better: in Conolly's phrase, it was the British who had a great game to play, nobody else. And thinks rather of golf.

Morgan, on his side, did not really like the formula¹⁸⁵. Neither it really did

181 Davis, *Game*, 234, important 237-8; 239.

182 Both Fraser-Tytler and Fleming evidently depend on Davis for the formula, whom they expressly refer to. Contrary to what Yapp, *Legend*, 180 nt 4 believes – but the reference is not clear – the expression is not used by John L. Morison, "From Alexander Burnes to Frederick Roberts. A Survey of Imperial Frontier Policy", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22, 1936, 177-206. Similarly also in our sense Becker, *Game*, 73.

183 Morgan, *Myth*, 64-5; Id., *Rivalry*, 139-41 not significantly however for what is at issue here but in relation to the existence or otherwise of an intelligence.

184 This paternity is not detected by Yapp, *Legend*, 184.

185 Morgan, *Rivalry*, 16.

one of the *doyens* of Imperial history who asked himself how one is permitted to employ it, “What it be permitted to mean? It may not be used (...) to describe the history of Anglo-Russian rivalry throughout Asia, nor to describe Russo-Chinese antagonism or anything to do with the United States. In Conolly’s phrase, it was the British who had a great game to play, nobody else. Perhaps golf offers a better metaphor: one has an opponent, one can tell by the score whether one is beating him, but one does not play against him directly”¹⁸⁶. As such, it is played out – as is also the case for Davis and Yapp – in the centres of political decision-making – individual Central Asian adventures are ironically relegated, if ever, to the margins¹⁸⁷.

Ingram represents the legitimate side of the illegitimate “call it as you like it” argument that we shall see shortly. His answer is “The struggle for control of Central Asia (...) That is not how the subject should be treated. The Great Game was an aspect of British history rather than of international relations: the phrase describes what the British were doing, not the actions of Russians or Chinese”¹⁸⁸. Accordingly not only is it not played against Russia but *with* Russia¹⁸⁹. It’s a double parallel game, “if they competed at all, did not compete against one another directly”¹⁹⁰. Ingram, who depends on Davis in his chronological *positioning* of the beginning of the great game at the end of December 1829¹⁹¹, but above all knows his Kaye, is the one who uses the expression most correctly epistemologically already in his book of the first half of the 1970s – published in 1979. Just like his predecessor in the sense of “attempt to increase the security and stability of British India, known since the 1830s as the Great Game in Asia”, it “was not only a plan for action beyond the North-West Frontier, it also

186 Ingram, *Approaches*, 456; Id., *The British Empire as a World Power*, Frank Cass, London 2001, 54. His position is at the antipodes of that of Gillard, *Struggle*, 2-6; 44; 92-7; 112; 156; 161 who extends his notion of great game, in the historical-international dimension, to the “Russo-British Rivalry” in its entirety.

187 Very incisively Ingram, *Empire*, ix, “It was not played in Central Asia, or by travelers, spies and Kim. It was a board game, to be played in comfort in an armchair or over dinner (...)”.

188 Edward Ingram, *In Defence of British India. Great Britain in the Middle East, 1774–1842*, Frank Cass, London 1984, 7-8. On the Russian side the symmetry is manifest, see lately the thorough analysis of Morrison, *Conquest, passim*, who rightly confirms, from the Russian point of view, that there was no Anglo-Russian contest for Central Asia, e. g. 429; 474; 513.

189 Edward Ingram, *Britain’s Persian Connection, 1798–1828: Prelude to the Great Game in Asia*, OUP, Oxford 1992, 314; 319.

190 Ingram, *Empire*, 54.

191 Ingram, *Beginning*, 54; Id., *Defence*, 7, 11.

depended upon a decision as to where the frontier should be"¹⁹²; it's known how a key point of all Ingram's works is the downplaying of any real fear, let alone role of Russia. In this, however, he's not alone¹⁹³. In other cases, though, Ingram refers, it seems in a univocal sense, to the entire conception of the system of confrontation with the great power potentially adversary of the day. It's in this sense that in his best book he speaks of "Prophecies of the Great Game"¹⁹⁴.

Even as a "reality", meaning the Anglo-Russian contest or rather the Russian side of British international politics, it was never played in Central Asia – in any form. It was, if ever it was, which is here not the question, played in London and some other centres of British power. In reality, nothing that was called the great game was ever played at all – neither in the centres nor on the ground. It remains an open question – which evidently cannot be addressed here – whether there existed a historical reality specifically attributable at the level of concepts to what Ingram *means* in these other cases .

XV

There was no Department at Whitehall with a board "The Great Game" on the door. The great game did not exist in political official or semi-official representations, the so-called official mind, or, in the German way, "Bewußtseinsgeschichte"¹⁹⁵. Not really elsewhere.

It existed only in a couple of books, those of Kaye, Diver and, in a way, Kipling – and, even more interesting, their readers, and there were many officials among them, did not take it over in their technical language. Consolidated formulas exist in the official mind; significantly, in our case, for example that of "Defence of India" which is the heading of more than one official document and the title of semi-official books.

Accordingly, what is historically important to stress is how there is no formalization as such, in reference to it, of the relations, and even less of the An-

192 Ingram, *Beginning*, 5; 333; 339; see x; Id., *Defence*, 8, "The British began to play the Great Game in Asia...less to prevent the invasion of India than bankruptcy and rebellion"; 54.

193 Cf. Davis, *Game*, 238 and also already Yapp, *Strategies*, 1; 20 and Morgan himself, *Rivalry*, xiii, and derives from Davis. Sneh Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914. The Role of India*, Routledge, London 2002, follows Ingram's notion.

194 Edward Ingram, *Commitment to Empire. Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-1800*, Oxford, OUP, 1981, 2-3; 17 and *passim* .

195 Heinz Gollwitzer, *Geschichte der Weltpolitischen Denkens*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1982, II, 13.

glo-Russian geopolitical conflict in the official mind nor more generally in the overall geostrategic and English foreign policy discourse.

Formulas generate, or at least can generate, behaviour, decisions, actions. Identifying their existence or not is therefore not without consequences at the reconstructive level. Whether a specific formalization of Anglo-Russian rivalry as such existed or not in the official mind is quite another question. Certainly what we have seen is not an argument in favour of it.

XVI

The question is that of the name and the thing and remembering Buffon helps¹⁹⁶, rather than Mill¹⁹⁷. The great game certainly takes on an objective existence when historians call it that¹⁹⁸. Conversely, the fact that contemporaries did not use the expression, and even less did they formalize it, then shoot back at the historians. The main objection against the non-existence of the formula is that the object, in any case, existed¹⁹⁹. This is a non-argument which is equivalent to saying that one calls one's object what one wants. Of course, you can call it as you like, Alice in the Wonderland, Armageddon²⁰⁰, "Griff nach der Weltmacht", but you have to remark that the reality behind in any case was there – it is your opinion – and that then it is a fact that the formula was not used at the time.

To those who object that there was in any case the substance of an Anglo-Russian rivalry, it must in turn be answered that the most Russophobic, Central Asian and continental-thinking of English politicians, Curzon, never uses the expression, with that exception that we have seen and which in reality is not such but rather confirms *e contrario* his non-use at least, more probably his ignorance of the expression. Put differently, the problem is the existence of an epistemological confusion generated by the use of the expression, the false

196 G.-L. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, Paris 1749, I, 26.

197 John S. Mill, *Collected Works*, London, V, 750.

198 It is also useful to recall the considerations of Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M. 1979, 107-29.

199 In this sense, "substantialist" e.g. Johnson, Tale, 185 and *passim*. Similarly Ter Minassian, *Sur l'échiquier*, 17-8; 32 ff.; 121 ff. But implicitly this is also the case, for instance of Gillard and Ingram himself, when the expression is used in a sort of historiographical *vacuum*. In another one Hevia, *Security*, 9 ff. in so far he puts the question of the relationship between metaphor and its historical object. And Morrison himself could be defined a "negative" substantialist, as he uses the expression to (rightly) negate the existence of the object, that is an Anglo-Russian rivalry for Central Asia.

200 Rosebery to Elgin, "Waterloo Day", Rosebery Papers, National Library of Scotland, 10.130.

impression given by the use of a false expression, which could appear to be original and which is not and, worst of all, is a product of a series of errors.

It is Anglo-Russian rivalry – then call it simply so (as for instance Morgan or Davis tend to do). Discussing it as if it had its own objective historical existence in relation to the formula, that is as if this one were part of the contemporary historical context, is not the same as discussing what is essentially meant by the formula. And this one is, not only, not part of the historical context, but is entirely occasional and also genetically the product of errors.

Of course there have been *imperialism*, *strategy*, *balance of power* and there have been consciously for many centuries before the terms ever appeared. Only they were not called so and accordingly the historian dealing with them cannot do as they were called so – because that already has a significance in itself.

We can say that there was and reconstruct Pitt the Elder's strategy with Winston Churchill and Jeremy Black, but we cannot say that it was called so just only because a quite obscure military writer in France used at the same time that word. And it is right, even if the wordly argument has been authoritatively put forward against, for instance by Richard Middleton and Hew Strachan. The question is not simply that of the history of an idea and its formal expression but of the significance that this history has with respect to the representations of foreign and military policy of contemporaries²⁰¹.

XVII

The great game which was – golf. Not only in the sense of Ingram. More simply – the formula does have one really old, consolidated meaning, the only one quite attested: golf²⁰². British statesmen don't habitually think their foreign policy according to major plans²⁰³ – and even less in what today is called a geopolitically way. Geostrategical conceptions of a Curzon or a Dundas – even maybe a Chatham or a Palmerston – are the exception – and a partial one at that. Or as Ingram once wrote, "The British have always had a healthy respect for ignorance"²⁰⁴.

201 See also, in addition to ours, the observations of Yapp, Legend, 179; 187, although it is excessive to bother Kedourie, even in a Memorial Lecture dedicated to him.

202 OED², s. v. *great*, 798.

203 Cf. Helmut Reifeld, *Zwischen Empire und Parlament. Zur Gedankenbildung und Politik Lord Roseberys (1880-1905)*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1987, 15 nt 22. That is a continental perception of what an Englishman could not even conceive.

204 Ingram, *Defence*, 155, the context is different but the meaning remains.

Sometime geographers do it indeed²⁰⁵; but, characteristically, neither Thomas Holdich nor poor Mackinder ever spoke of a great game²⁰⁶, all the more significantly as the latter had read *Kim*²⁰⁷. Some moderns make him do it instead, significantly with a generalized significance of the expression to the point of meaning e.g. “(...) the military stand-off between the British and the Russian Empires in Asia” or the conflict between the continental and the naval power²⁰⁸. Of course Central Asia is Mackinder’s Heartland but this is quite another fact²⁰⁹. The geographer reflected on it not on a so-called great game, a formula he had quite probably never heard of, though he had read *Kim*, where of course the formula had nothing to do with his geographical ideas.

Historians tend not to like philosophers of history – geopoliticians tend to do that. And that is what makes the problem when historians tend to play the game of geopolitics. So much for the “great game“ being a geopolitical notion. And yes, *a latere*, Tsarist Russia did invade India, in Summer 1903. At least – if not in reality – in a major war game played by the General Staff of the Indian Army at Simla that year. Russia lost, but not in India – the war becoming a general one.

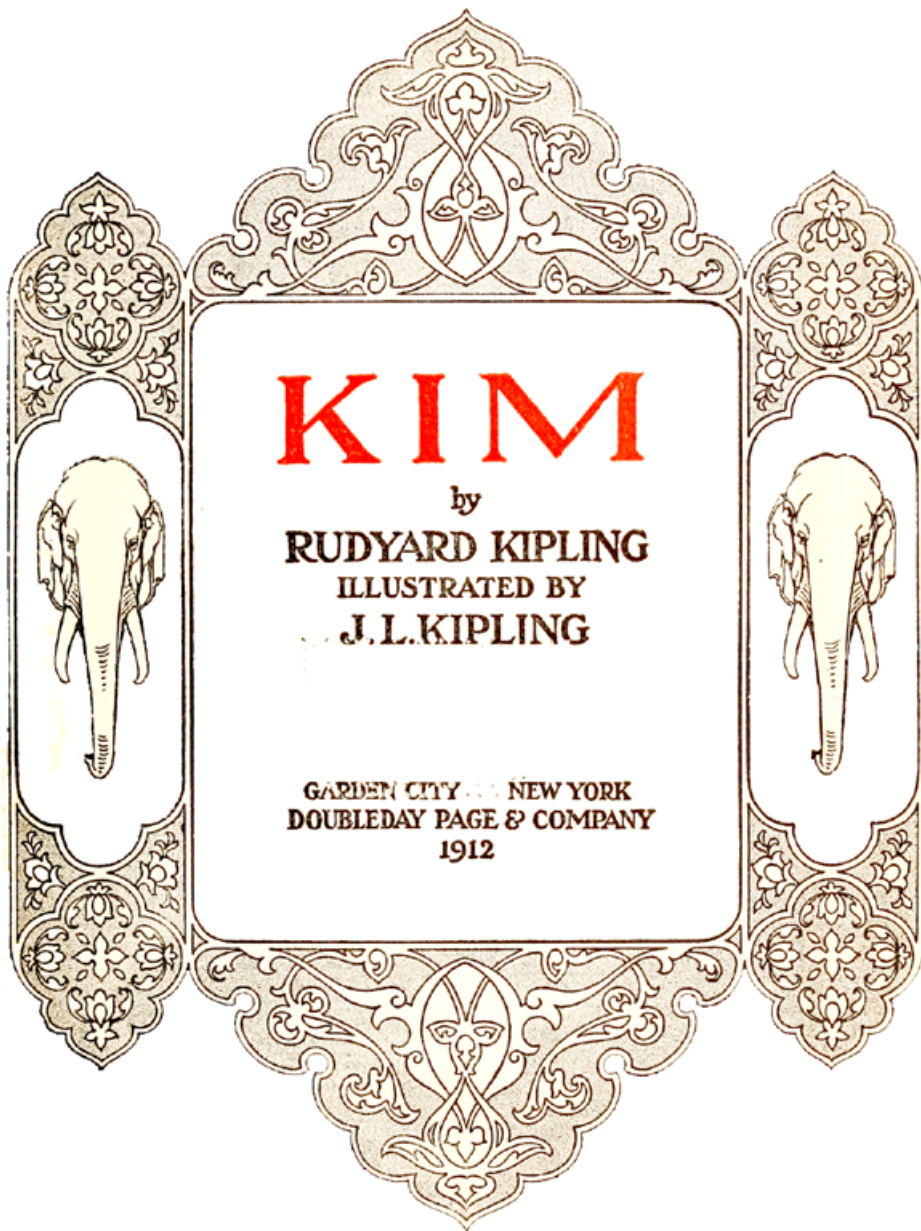
205 That happens when they deal with foreign policy questions – which is not their task – and call it geopolitics instead of “politische Geographie”.

206 Or at least not in Halford J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, Heineman, London 1902; Id., “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *The Geographical Journal*, 23, 1904, 421–37; Id., *Eight Lectures on India*, Waterlow, London 1910; Id., *Democratic Ideals and Reality. A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Constable and Co., London 1919. Nor in Id., “The Teaching of Geography”, *Nature* 36, 1887, 506–507 (with a so much significant use of the expression, as meaning quite other things). Cf. also Becker, *Game*, 72–3, but not for the reason he indicates, instead precisely because it is not relevant in Kipling’s own sense, and because the formula is not otherwise known to him.

207 Cf. Becker, *Game*, 72–3.

208 E.g. Sergeev, *Game*, 7 in reference to *Eight Lectures*; Francis Sempa, *Geopolitics. From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick NJ and London 2002, 29; Peter J. Taylor, *Britain and the Cold War. 1945 as Geopolitical Transition*, Bloomsbury, London-New York 2016, 127 hence the quote. Edwards, *Game*, 96 does not say so but establish an indirect connection as do Meyer – Brysac, *Tournament*,

209 As Ingram, *Defence*, 1 reminds us.



Title page. Image from the book *Kim*, by Rudyard Kipling, illustrated by J. L. Kipling.

Mahan, geopolitics, grand strategy and Anglo-American sea-control

BY ANDREW LAMBERT

This essay argues that the strategic and geopolitical thinking of Alfred Thayer Mahan was shaped by his experience of British global power, key British texts and debates, and the analytical methodology of German historian Theodore Mommsen. These inputs equipped him to address America's emergence as a global power, while the advice he proffered stressed the benefits that would accrue from working alongside the only contemporary global power, on economic, legal and strategic issues. Throughout the process his admiration for the Royal Navy, as the basis of global maritime security, and its long history of successful strategy and operations, remained central.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, (1840-1914) was an unusual American. Having travelled the world as a naval officer he discounted the standard nationalist narrative, endlessly repeated by politicians, novelists, historians, and his own father, that Britain was, and remained, America's greatest enemy. Central to that false narrative was the idea that the War of 1812 was caused by Britain and won by America.¹ Mahan had the intellectual acuity and honesty to penetrate that tattered shroud, stressing the critical role of British heritage in contemporary America, and British partnership in shaping a world safe for American commercial expansion. Despite his Irish heritage he was never a hyphenated American, he supported the British argument in the Irish Home Rule debate and condemned the Asquith Government of 1906-14 for even entertaining the idea. It was no accident that his 'Sea Power' series concluded with *The Influence of Sea Power upon the War of 1812* of 1905, which demonstrated that America started and lost the war – largely because of the economic pressure of an effective naval blockade. Not that such intellectual honesty won him many friends in America, or much interest in Britain. Sales were disappointing.²

1 Andrew Lambert, 'Creating Cultural Difference: The Military, Political and Cultural Legacy of the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815' in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagerman and Michael Rowe, eds. *War, Demobilisation and Memory: The Legacy of War in the Era of Atlantic Revolutions*. Palgrave London 2016, pp.303-19.

2 Nicholas A Lambert, *The Neptune Factor: Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Concept of Sea Power*. United States Naval Institute Press, Annapolis MD 2023 henceforth Lambert *Neptune*, pp.266-7.

After the Civil War Mahan served on the China Station, which began in 1867 with a world-girdling voyage, stopping at Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Madagascar, Aden, Muscat, India, Thailand and Hong Kong.³ Along the way he encountered a global commercial system shaped and sustained by British merchants, coal, naval power, and small but significant red-coated garrisons, ranging from the near ubiquitous British commercial shipping and influence in Rio to full blown imperial control at Cape Town, Aden, India and Hong Kong. British presence in China and Japan impacted his tour of duty, introducing him to British officers -with whom he soon identified. In 1869 Mahan's decrepit ship was sold and he returned home along a British route, aboard the brand-new British steamship *Glenartney*, via British harbours at Singapore and Calcutta, then overland across India to Bombay, stopping to coal at Aden, a British fortress, through the Red Sea and across the Isthmus of Suez. A few years later key elements of this journey would be repeated by British maritime strategist Julian Corbett (1854-1922).⁴ Mahan took six months leave in Europe. By the time he returned to the United States in 1870 he recognised the ubiquity and economic value of Britain's geo-strategic chain of naval bases and coaling stations which, along with small garrisons and widely dispersed warships, were the critical enablers of global trade. It was his personal experience of the all-red route to Asia, rather than domestic American influences, that shaped Mahan's appreciation of global maritime strategy, informed his sea power thesis, and shaped his geopolitical thinking. Little wonder the British claimed him.⁵

In his last sea command Mahan formed a lasting friendship with British Commander, later Admiral Sir Bouverie Clark, who shared his time on the Pacific Coast of South America. Mahan's work on *The Problem of Asia* and *The Story of the War in South Africa*, both published in 1900, was assisted by Clark, perhaps his closest friendship with another naval officer.⁶ Extensive reading of naval professional literature between 1870 and 1890 necessarily exposed Mahan to British ideas, an engagement that would be reinforced by his mentor at Newport

3 Alfred T Mahan, *From Sail to Steam*. Harper Brothers. New York 1907 pp.198-9.

4 Corbett travelled to India in 1877-78: see Andrew Lambert, *The British Way of War: Julian Corbett and the Battle for a National Strategy*, Yale UP London 2021 pp.21-5 for the impact of this journey on his thinking. Both men visited Aden and the Indian Rising battlefield at Lucknow, Corbett also visited Cawnpore.

5 Charles Carlisle Taylor, *The Life of Admiral Mahan: Naval Philosopher*. John Murray, London 1920 pp.4-5 & 13. Taylor's book was bound in homage to the original Little Brown and Sampson Low editions, dark blue binding with an embossed sailing warship design on the front cover.

6 Taylor at pp. ix-x, 23, 124, pp.178-89 offers persuasive evidence.

Admiral Stephen B. Luce, another anglophile reformer who urged his own service to match the standards and consequence of the British service. The two Americans were inspired by Professor Sir John Knox Laughton (1830-1915), who had developed history as a base line for new approaches to professional education in the Royal Navy, as part of a wider reform movement based on fresh thinking and new processes.⁷ Furthermore, the Royal Navy remained the *beau ideal* of a modern Navy long into the 20th century.

Even Mahan's taste in sea fiction favoured British naval officer Frederick Marryat over former American midshipman James Fenimore Cooper, who he thought caricatured naval life, lacking Marryat's sustained war service under Lord Cochrane.⁸ Finally Mahan encountered the critical concept of strategic cause and effect in Sir William Napier's brilliant account of the British *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France*, where it had an effect 'like the sun breaking through a cloud to a navigator doubtful of his position'.⁹ Napier's lively accounts of battles and eviscerating judgments engaged the young naval officer rather more than the programmatic methods and pedestrian prose of his father's old friend Jomini. He may have been deterred by Jomini's overt distaste for matters maritime and naval.¹⁰ While one literary critic noted a stylistic link, he complained that Mahan lacked Napier's grasp of the poetry of war. In truth most readers were convinced by Mahan's argument, rather than swayed by his style.¹¹

Alongside the attractions of a dynamic English literature of the sea and war Mahan followed contemporary British imperial thinking, much of it generated at the interface between history, prophecy, politics and economics, with limited attention to naval and strategic issues. The central strand was a persistent debate about the future of the British Empire, dating back to 1870, led by Conservative historian James Anthony Froude (1818-1894), Liberal, later Liberal imperialist, historian John Robert Seeley, (1834 -1895) and Liberal politician Sir Charles Dilke (1843- 1911).¹² All three favoured a closer union with the colonies of

7 Andrew Lambert, *The Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession*. Chatham Press, London 1998.

8 Taylor p.12

9 Taylor p.23 citing *From Sail to Steam* at p.273 and again at pp.65-6.

10 Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism, civilian and military*. Meridian Books, New York 1959. p.331.

11 Taylor pp.254-5. Mahan did not rate his critic, David Hannay, as a historian

12 John E Tyler, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity; 1868-1895*. London 1938. Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Use of History*. Cambridge UP 1980. Roy Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy*. London 1958 esp. pp.42-52 & 368-9. Ciaran Bradley, *James Anthony*

settlement as the only option to sustain Britain's great power status. Seeley argued that if Imperial Britain did not remake itself the future would belong to the truly continental powers, Russia and the United States. In his *The Expansion of England* of 1883 Seeley contrasted Britain, a global seapower empire, with Russia and America, 'enormous political aggregations', created by: 'modern inventions which diminish the difficulties created by time and space'.¹³ They were continuous land powers, but:

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.

Only a 'Greater Britain', closer imperial union, could compete with the emerging 'superpowers'. Furthermore any significant military commitment to Europe would be catastrophic: 'sooner or later we must lose India because sooner or later some war in Europe will force us to withdraw our English troops'.¹⁴ *Expansion* sold 80,000 copies in two years, inspiring politicians, journalists and empire builders from Lord Roseberry and Joseph Chamberlain to W T Stead, Alfred Milner, Cecil Rhodes, Halford Mackinder, Julian Corbett and, critically Alfred T. Mahan.¹⁵ Seeley's multi-disciplinary problem-solving methodology foreshadowed modern approaches. He used the seapower concept sparingly, subtly and with powerful effect. Many of the British readers who applauded *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* in 1890 had been predisposed to the message by reading Seeley. Seeley's influence was evident in the Russo-phobic tone of *The Problem of Asia*, reflecting British opinion. Such views were uncommon in contemporary America.

Froude and Seeley were active in the Imperial Federation League. They used history as, in Seeley's famous phrase 'an aid to statecraft'. Their political differences were less important than their agreement that the real value of the past lay in the service of the present. The original inspiration for these ideas came from Dilke's pioneering study *Greater Britain* of 1868, an Imperial travelogue advocating closer

Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet. Oxford UP 2013. pp. 244-53, 297, 313, 460.

13 He meant steamships, railways and the electric telegraph

14 John Seeley *The Expansion of England* London, Macmillan, 1883 pp. 288, 291-2, 300-1. For the link with John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* of 1851 see Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States*. Yale UP London 2018 pp. 1-3, 297-8

15 Wormell pp. 129, 154-6, 179-80. Robert Seager II, *Alfred Thayer Mahan, the Man and his Letters*. United States Naval Institute Press, Annapolis 1977. Seeley's influence is stressed at pp. 68, 180, 205, 430, 642,

Imperial union as the key to remaining the greatest power on earth. It was a view Dilke sustained through a long, often troubled career. He returned to the subject in 1890 with *Problems of Greater Britain*, which combined imperial expertise with a defence policy based on military power. Dilke agreed with Seeley that America and Russia were the Empire's only serious rivals. Much contemporary British writing on Imperial defence focussed on the 'Great Game' in Central Asia, where Britain and Russia struggled for influence in Afghanistan, Persia and the inland Khanates. At stake was British control of India, the great Asian outpost of sea power.¹⁶ In 1891 Dilke and defence analyst Spenser Wilkinson produced *Imperial Defence*, after travelling on the North-West frontier, where they fell under the spell of the Commander in Chief, General Sir Frederick Roberts and the Russian threat to India. They did not mention the singular fact that the 'Russian Bear' had been removed from Afghanistan and contained by a purely naval mobilisation at Spithead as recently as 1885.¹⁷ In the second edition of 1897 Wilkinson confessed 'the defence of the Empire rests chiefly upon the Navy', having been persuaded by Mahan's sea power thesis, which stressed the importance of securing command of the sea.¹⁸ Wilkinson would link Halford Mackinder to a strand of imperialist thought that generated a steady stream of alarmist literature. The tremendous increase of interest in navies between the late 1880s and the turn of the century, which Mahan helped to generate, was an integral element of the new Imperialism, providing the background for Mahan and Mackinder's work. It was no accident that Wilkinson was present at Mackinder's famous 'Geographical Pivot' lecture in 1904, or that he was tasked with responding to the paper.¹⁹

If British practice shaped Mahan's geostrategic thinking, stressing sea-control and economic warfare over mass conscript armies and Napoleonic 'decisive' battles, solutions that aligned with the limited human resources and global interests of a small insular seapower state, Mahan found a suitable analytical method in a German study of Roman history, in Lima's English Club. Many authors have noted Mahan's use of an example provided by Theodore Mommsen (1817-1903) to explain the origins of his sea power thesis. Few

16 Charles Dilke, *The British Empire*. London, Macmillan 1898 p.5

17 Andrew Lambert, '"This Is All We Want": Great Britain and the Baltic Approaches 1815-1914.' In Joren Sevaldsen, ed. *Britain and Denmark: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Copenhagen 2003. pp.147-169. Mahan was impressed by Roberts in 1893. Seager p.283

18 Charles Dilke & Spenser Wilkinson. *Imperial Defence*. London Macmillan 1897 p.133.

19 Halford Mackinder 1904 'The Geographical Pivot of History' *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904) pp.421-37pp.314-5.

have interrogated Mommsen's text. First published in the 1850s, in English in the 1860s, and often updated, it remained the standard account of the Roman Republic for decades.²⁰ The claim that Mahan 'stumbled onto the great historical insight' in Mommsen's work is simplistic and undervalues his prior experience and long-term engagement with contemporary British naval and geopolitical thought, notably that of Seeley. The critical insight Mommsen provided was methodological rather than strategic, the need to situate his subject in a broad analytical narrative. Mahan's books, like Mommsen's, were successful because they contextualised specific aspects of the past, to render them accessible to contemporary audiences. Mahan adopted Mommsen's approach, situating wars and battles in their politico-strategic context, engaging a wider audience with little interest in the finer details of naval operations. As E H Carr observed, Mommsen was a great historian because his 'vision of the past (was) illuminated by insights into the problems of the present'.²¹ The same might be said of Mahan, who located naval warfare in the same broad political and strategic contexts that Mommsen had deployed in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*. Both men addressed rising nations, not the academic community, recovering a broad sweep of history for the present, inviting contemporary audiences to see themselves through experience.

The central section of Mommsen's second volume dealt with the Hannibalic or Second Punic war, and the subsequent Roman conquest of Greece and Asia Minor, displaying his mastery of the wider agendas that shaped the conflict, Hannibal's political and strategic choices, and his military genius. Mommsen's account emphasised the Carthaginian leader's attempt to shape a great power coalition to restrain Rome within the existing multi-polar state system. He highlighted the decisive use of sea power; the Roman fleet prevented the Macedonian Army from reaching Italy – to reinforce Hannibal.

Ironically Mahan's central take away from the Mommsen, that Roman naval power 'forced' Hannibal to invade Italy overland was misleading. Hannibal necessarily began the campaign from his military base Spain and needed to recruit additional manpower enroute. Suitable warriors were only available in Gaul and northern Italy. Mahan continued to reference Mommsen's work and his ideas to the end, despite his visceral Anglo and Americaphobic attitudes.²² Both men

20 *From Sail to Steam* p.277: *Influence of Sea Power* 1890 pp. 13-22.

21 Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* London, Macmillan 1963 pp. 30-1.

22 For Mommsen links: Robert Seager *Mahan the Man and his Letters*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis 1977 (henceforth *Seager Mahan*) pp.145-6, 148, 352, 430, 434, 438.

wrote for a literate public, rather than the academic community.

Mommsen, like Clausewitz, placed wars and battles in the larger contexts, and this impacted Mahan's work, making the *Influence* series a significant improvement over his first book, *The Gulf and Inland Waters* inviting contemporary Americans to see themselves in through the lens of naval history, while providing professional inspiration to American naval officers. In both cases the target audience was domestic, and ambitious. Germany and the United States were the rising powers of the era, increasing in strength and status by expansion, through industry and war. Both authors emphasised the ability of the losing side, and their commanders. Mommsen's Hannibal was a truly great man, making Rome the more impressive for accomplishing his defeat. Mahan followed Mommsen's source criticism, rejecting myths and legends.

Both men influenced contemporary political debates - German unification and American expansion. Both would be profoundly impacted by their books, Mommsen's eminence recognised by a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1902. Nor was it accidental that Mahan's 'other' geopolitical project was a study of America's continental expansion.²³

* * *

At the end of the nineteenth century British and American decision-makers faced serious, geo-strategic challenges, challenges that tended to emphasise their shared interests over older conflicts. America had just become an imperial power in the Asia Pacific, annexing Hawai'i, before acquiring the Philippines and Guam from Spain as prizes of war in 1898. While Republican party leaders favoured expansion, a polite euphemism for imperialism, they had yet to win the argument at home. Mahan attempted to smooth the path to empire by focussing on economic opportunity and moral duty, but his underlying concern was power – specifically the expansion of American naval power. He believed this would require a geo-political partnership with the British Empire, based on shared traditions, values and 'race', as a force for good in the world. Mahan's world view had been profoundly impacted by the experience of voyaging across a British world, linked by steamships, telegraph cables, trade and profit – protected by a mighty Royal Navy, and sustained by the global presence of noticeably small army garrisons. In an age obsessed with land power, and land wars, he would discern the alternative strategic ideas, assets and methods that had enabled the British seapower empire to defeat or contain compete with far larger land powers, Habsburg Spain, Royal and Imperial France, and Czarist Russia, despite its

²³ It remained a project at his death.

relative weakness in population, territory and troops. If his world view had a core text it was Sir John Seeley's *Expansion of England*.

While the first two instalments of his *Influence of Sea Power* series, published in 1890 and 1892, especially the second, made him famous, pleasingly so in Britain, where Honorary Degrees, public acclaim and high profile dinners greeted him in 1894, Mahan's ability to analyse the contemporary world from a geopolitical perspective would be developed in a series of topical essays that combined national, strategic, geographical and operational elements, sustained by his Sea Power concept, economics, historical analysis, regional geography and political alignments, along with personal experience. Articles and essays became central to Mahan's career after he retired from the Navy in 1896, funding a costly lifestyle, sustaining his public presence and promoting his strategic and geopolitical agendas.

Mahan responded to the emergence of the United States as a Pacific power, albeit with significant assistance from the Royal Navy in Manila Bay and beyond, by anticipating future trouble in the region. He proposed three 10,000-word essays on 'The Problem of Asia' for American audiences, to a preferred New York monthly, *Harper's Magazine*, a pillar of American intellectual life, reflected the energy and economic dynamism of its home city, and the growing ambition of a newly victorious nation. Mahan wanted this important audience to recognise the new responsibilities that America had acquired, alongside new economic, and strategic opportunities on the Asian mainland. This was especially important in the case of China, where Imperial authority had been weakened by defeat by Japan in 1894, and renewed Russian predation. Access to this immense market, long since penetrated by American commerce, would be lost if Russia secured more Chinese territory. Russia would deny other states economic access to any territory that it occupied, legally or otherwise.²⁴

Export trades were important for an expansive, self-confident United States, one that was already building an ocean going battlefleet. Mahan may have been responding to Secretary of State John Hay's 'Open Door Note' - developing a British idea - demanding Chinese market remain open to all nations, issued on September 6th, 1899. Mahan's essays appeared in March, April and May 1900, and Hay's diplomatic text was re-affirmed in July, just before the great powers

24 This was a major British concern across the 19th century. Puryear, V.J. *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East: A Study of British Commercial Diplomacy in the Levant 1834-1853*. Stanford UP 1935 pp.206, 213-4, 222 & 227. Andrew Lambert *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia 1853-1856*. Manchester 1990 2nd edn Ashgate, Farnham 2011 pp.45-58.

agreed to intervene in China against a nationalist rising that threatened their mutual interests. The second iteration of Hay's note and serious fighting in China widened Mahan's approach, including the 'Open Door' argument in a fourth essay, 'The effect of Asiatic Conditions Upon World Politics', appeared in the *North American Review* in November 1900, and was immediately reprinted in book *The Problem of Asia*.²⁵

In 1898-99 Mahan had provided strategic advice to the United States government during the Spanish-American War, boosted his income with war related essays, and attended the First Peace Conference as part to the American Delegation. There he worked closely with Admiral Sir John Fisher RN to prevent any agreement that would render private property at sea immune from capture in time of war. He acted in direct opposition to the instructions issued by his Government, and the other American delegates, because he believed that sea power, essential to American security and prosperity, would be useless without the legal right to impose economic blockades.²⁶ This argument, introduced in the first 'Influence' text of 1890, had been the central theme of the second book in 1892. That Mahan was able to defy his fellow American - who included international lawyers - demonstrated his status and influence. That stature was equally significant in securing well paid magazine work – boosted by the Spanish war, a new empire, and rapid economic expansion. Living in New York membership of leading clubs and libraries connected him with the dynamic culture of the Empire State, and the influence it had on national policy. After 1898 he was headline name, his opinion on contemporary events and issues sold copy.

After republishing his latest essays as *Lessons of the War with Spain* in late 1899 Mahan had planned to complete the final instalment of the 'Influence' trilogy, dealing with the Anglo-American War of 1812. The battle at The Hague had made him realise that he had not won that argument with foreign powers, or the wider American public.²⁷ Consequently he was tempted by his British publisher, Robert Marston, to compile a Sea Power textbook, to reinforce his argument against the immunity of private property.²⁸ When this project was cancelled in 1901 Mahan stressed economic warfare in the *War of 1812* text, which appeared in 1905, and a 1907 essay ahead of the Second Hague Conference. The 1812

25 Seager Mahan pp.462-3 criticised Mahan's lack of expertise, missing the quality of his analysis, or his wider themes, subscribing to the 'Heartland' thesis of Halford Mackinder.

26 Mahan to John M. Brown (Little Brown) 8.9.1899.II p.655 'The Peace Conference and the Moral Aspect of War' was included in the *Lessons of the War with Spain* volume.

27 Lambert *Neptune* p.237

28 Lambert *Neptune* p.236

book undermined deep-rooted American mythologies, and consequently did not sell – while his failure to win that argument left American policy hidebound by old fallacies long after the world had cause to harness the economic weapon against militarised aggression, in Europe and beyond. Some arguments cannot be won by logic or learning.

Lessons of the War with Spain appeared in November 1899, with a preface that looked forward to the *Asia* collection. It stressed how Britain, and Britain alone, had stood beside America in the Spanish War, notably in the Philippines, while

coincident with all this, though also partly preceding it, has been the growing recognition by the western nations, and by Japan, of the imminence of great political issues at stake in the near future of China.... it is evidently a matter of economical - and therefore of political - importance to civilised nations to prevent too preponderant control there of any one of their number, lest the energies of their own citizens be debarred from a fair opportunity to share in these advantages.

This issue provided a focal point for his claim that the Spanish War had affected a ‘revolution’ in American attitudes toward expansion.²⁹ He hoped these would stretch to addressing ‘The quiet, superficially peaceful progress with which Russia was successfully advancing her boundaries in Asia, adding gain to gain, unrestrained and apparently unrestrainable, was suddenly confronted with the appearance of the United States in the Philippines’. This would make America an Asian power, and an obvious regional partner for Britain, something that had been emphasised by British support against Germany at Manila.³⁰ These lines were written after he had signed up for the *Asia* series. *Lessons* proved ‘a very successful commercial venture’, finding a large and positive audience in post-war America, previous collections had sold better in Britain.³¹ Mahan sent his Spanish War essays to his friend British naval historian Professor John Knox Laughton, stressing they were ‘supposed to reach the man in the street’.³² The

29 Alfred T Mahan *Lessons of the War with Spain and other Articles*. 1899 London, Sampson Low 1899, pp. viii-ix.

30 *ibid.*, pp. vii-viii. Riccardo Busetto, ‘Captain Edward Chichester and HMS *Immortalite* in Manila Bay during the Spanish American War (27 April to 11 September 1898)’: *The Mariner’s Mirror* vol.85 no.3. 1999, pp.299-307.

31 Seager Mahan p.372 15.11.1899. Mahan to John M. Brown 8.9.1899: Robert Seager & Doris MacGuire *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis 1975 three vols. vol. II p.655. henceforth S&M.

32 Mahan to Laughton 11.1.1899: Andrew Lambert ed. *Letters and Papers of Professor Sir John Knox Laughton, 1830-1915*. Navy Records Society Aldershot 2002 p.178. see John Hatten-

street he envisaged may have been Wall Street.

The *Asia* essays appeared after the Anglo-Boer war had begun, but in advance of the 'Boxer' crisis. The deepening crisis and conflict in South Africa, along with the strikingly hostile American reaction, along with the looming crisis in China shifted Mahan's focus from strategy to geopolitics.³³ Mahan was engaged in the Transvaal dispute from the outset, following British operations with 'keen interest and a hearty sympathy', alongside strategic insight.³⁴ He challenged current anglophobe American interpretations, which he feared were 'capable of doing much harm', expressing a 'strong desire to see drawn closer our ties with the one power that stood by us 18 months ago'.³⁵

His experience at The Hague had stressed the need for Anglo-American co-operation, on a global scale, because Russia was hostile, with ambitions to expand in Asia, and 'not the slightest intention either of reducing her armaments, or even discouraging the programme for their increase. Neither does she intend to change her forward policy'. He thought Russia, surprised by the Anglo-American rapprochement during the Spanish American War, feared an economically dynamic anglophone Sea Power partnership would block its 'steam-roller' takeover of 'inert Asiatics'. The anglophone powers had a mutual interest in ensuring Russian expansion did not block access to Chinese markets.³⁶ This would be incompatible with the 'Open Door' that both states had urged, a phrase that would assume totemic status in the United States.

Mahan offered a Sea Power solution, convinced that America was ready, both morally and politically, to take up the burden of colonial rule, with contemporary Britain as a model and partner.³⁷ 'The importance of good feeling between G.B. and U.S. is so great, and her services to us two years since so marked, that misdirected abuse by us will be most regrettable and ungrateful', advising his friend James Thursfield, the London *Times* Naval Correspondent, that the tone was shifting in American newspapers, especially those that favoured expansion.³⁸ He considered supporting Britain was a 'matter of national

dorf & Lynn Hattendorf eds. *A Bibliography of the Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan*. Henceforth H&H E.26-40. They were also published the London *Times*, and in revised form in *Lessions of the War with Spain*.

33 Mahan to John M. Brown 15.4.1900: S&M II p.688

34 Mahan to Loughton 23.11. & 19.12.1899: *Loughton Letters* pp.188-9

35 Mahan to Silas McBee 23.9.1899. S&M II pp.656-7

36 Mahan to John M Brown 23.9.1899: S&M II. pp.657-8.

37 Mahan to the Editor of the Churchman? 9.1899 S&M II pp.661-3

38 Mahan to Silas McBee 13.10.1899: Mahan to Thursfield 28.10.1899: S&M II pp.664-5

honor'.³⁹ Thursfield kept him up to date with the latest British opinions, notably those of leading statesmen James Bryce and Arthur Balfour.⁴⁰

A few weeks later, on October 3rd Mahan dined at the White House with President McKinley and Admiral Dewey, hero of the Battle of Manila. This offered an opportunity to debate American policy in Asia, and Mahan's argument to halt Russian expansion in partnership with the British. A month later his thinking shifted to the practical needs of ships and trade, requesting details of the depth of water in Yangtze River. How far inland could vessels drawing 20 or 25 feet of water proceed? The answer would determine the fault line between the dominion of land power and sea power.⁴¹

In January 1900 Mahan had almost finished the three 'Problem of Asia' articles for *Harper's*, alongside a developing analysis of the South African conflict in correspondence with the Editor of the *New York Times*. He strongly opposed any return to the old pro-French policy, making a sophisticated analogy between the claims of the uitlanders of 1899 and American rebels of 1776.⁴² An article stressing the synergy of British and American policy for the 'Transvaal and the Philippine Islands' in the weekly *Independent* of February 1st 1900, was his response to an anti-British meeting in Boston.⁴³ He spoke up because he thought the Administration was 'floundering' on this and other subjects.⁴⁴ A private letter urging an Anglo-American entente was published in the London *Times* on March 24th.⁴⁵

Nearer to home Mahan was also thinking about the strategic impact of Asia on the Americas, a theme he had been working for a decade. He worried a trans-Isthmian Canal would encourage the Germany to act, unless the US Navy was at least equal to the German: 'I regard Panama and its approaches as entirely our concern'.⁴⁶

By April Mahan was planning to republish the three 'Asia' essays, which appeared in March April and May 1900, with his usual publishers, Little, Brown & Co., and Sampson Low & Marston, adding a fourth *Harper's* Essay on Asia,

39 Mahan to the Editor of the *New York Times* 20.1.1900: S&M II p.677

40 Mahan to Thursfield 15.12.1899: S & M II pp.673-4

41 Mahan to Joseph E Craig 30.10.1899: S&M II p.666

42 Mahan to John M Brown 16.1.1900 & Mahan to the Editor *New York Times* 20 & 25.1.1900: S&M II pp.676-9

43 Mahan to James Ford Rhodes 3.1.1900: S&M II pp.679-80

44 Mahan to Seth Low 28.3.1900: S&M II p.685

45 Mahan to William Peterson: *The Times* 24.3.1900: S&M II 686

46 Mahan to Seth Low 15.2.1900: II pp.682-4

which would be available on December 1st –the subject was ‘looming largely, if vaguely, upon the future’, but ‘might become suddenly timely’. The necessary reprint permissions were in hand. Then his plans changed, adding a fifth essay of March 1900, on the war in South Africa. The continental shift revealed his larger purpose. If Asia was the point where Britain and America had common ground in resisting Russian encroachment, which could deny them access to Chinese markets, that co-operation would require America to understand the British position in South Africa.⁴⁷ With Britain alongside America would have no reason to fear for the security of the Panama Canal, or an extended coastline and harbours facing two great oceans. He may have assumed Britain would be more receptive to American co-operation in Asia because it was engaged elsewhere, but he was anxious to ensure British actions in Africa were approved by Americans –condemning the predictable anglophobe rhetoric of the Irish lobby. America needed to be educated to recognise its’ vital interests and take up the task of defending them.

However, there were other audiences anxious to know what Mahan had said. The Royal Navy had taken his arguments and his texts to heart, using the sea power concept to win political and inter-service debates over defence spending and strategy. In June 1900 the original three ‘*Asia*’ essays reached the Naval Intelligence Department, a relatively new addition to the Admiralty, the Royal Navy’s Civil-Military directing structure. Mahan would have been delighted to know his ideas had reached this audience. On June 5th, 1900, Captain Reginald Custance, Director of Naval Intelligence, effectively the head of war planning, sent the essays to the Admiralty Board. Intelligent, historically aware and deeply engaged with senior level education, Custance valued Mahan’s work.⁴⁸

Attention is called to the attached able and interesting papers contributed by Captain Mahan to *Harper’s Magazine*.

The author advocates combined action by the sea powers – Great Britain, Germany, United States, and Japan, against Russia, the land power.

He points out that a Russian advance into Persia, while offering advantages to Russia on land by enabling her to turn the flank of India, would weaken rather than strengthen her at sea. Her advance can only be checked by action on the flanks of the long line

47 Mahan to John M. Brown 9 & 15.4.1900: S&M II p.686-8

48 Custance Memo to Admiralty Board. 5.6.1900: restricted circulation. Signed as read by First Lord, First Sea Lord, and Secretary. ADM 1/7462: TNA UK

of advance extending from Europe to the Pacific.

He agrees with the writer of the articles in the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* that the capital of China should be removed from Peking to the Yangtze.

Two points to which especial attention is invited are:

1. The immense importance of the Mediterranean route (pp.752-756)

2. The necessity for the sea powers to abrogate the Declaration of Paris and reserve the power of capturing enemies' goods under the neutral flag. (p.749)

As relates to (1) he emphasises the view, which I have long held, that it is vital to us to maintain our communications with the East via the Mediterranean, and that we should strengthen our hold on Egypt. The importance of acquiring political control in Asia Minor, and Syria is emphasised.

As to (2) the present war has shown how impotent is a Navy under the present rules.

R Custance 5.6.1900.

Either the civilian First Lord, Lord Goschen, or the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Walter Kerr, added a note: 'An interesting and well thought out paper. The policy suggested by Captain Mahan is sound & there is much to be said in its favour. 11.6.00'.⁴⁹

It is likely the essays had been sent by the Naval Attache in Washington, Captain Charles Ottley, who became Director of Naval Intelligence half a decade later. Ottley's strategic views were Mahanian. He believed economic warfare, fully developed along the lines advocated by Mahan, with no immunity for private property, would ruin any nation – frequently quoting Mahan's line about grass growing in the streets of Amsterdam as a direct result of an English blockade in 1656 from the first *Influence of Sea Power* book.⁵⁰ In 1890 Mahan had re-

49 Custance Memo: Intelligence Dept submission to Board of Admiralty 5.6.21900. The comments dated 11.6.1900 are in another hand, possibly that of Lord Selborne, or Admiral Lord Walter Kerr, the First Lord and First Naval Lord respectively: ADM 1/7462. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Reviews* were the major British quarterly publications dealing with politics, politics, literature, art and history from Conservative and Liberal perspectives. Maha's work was widely reviewed in both.

50 Alfred T Mahan *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1782*. Little, Brown, Boston 1890 p.133. Captain Charles Ottley (DNI) to Admiralty Secretary 2.1907: in Matthew Seligmann, Frank Nagler & Michael Epkenhans eds. *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The An-*

minded the British that economic warfare was their primary strategic weapon, a strategy he would defend against all opponents, on legal, moral and operational grounds, for the rest of his life. His advocacy empowered those who shared his realisation that disarming sea power would unbalance the world order, to the advantage aggressive military powers, with Imperial Russia his primary concern.

Custance marked key passages with marginal pencil lines, and occasional underlining, in black and red ink, variations that appear to have been deliberate. Among them were pages p.540 and 543 of the first article, (pp.17 & 26 of the book version of *Asia*). The first included the portentous phrase ‘we [Americans] can never again see with indifference ... a substantial, and still less a radical change in the balance of power there [Europe]’ and ‘the Russian centre cannot be broken. It is upon, and from, the flanks of this great line that restraint, if needed, must come; the opposition of those who, with no ill will to Russia, no grudging of her prosperity, nevertheless think that undue predominance is an unsound condition in any body politic’. A full list of the marked passages is included in the Appendix. There is no evidence that the Director of Naval Intelligence addressed the other two essays included in the collection.

* * *

It was singularly appropriate that the British Royal United Services Institution awarded Mahan the inaugural Chesney Gold Medal for a work of ‘Naval or Military Science and Literature in 1900.’⁵¹ He was delighted to be told that his works had contributed in some degree to ‘the welfare of the British Empire, the strength of which is so essential to the cause of our English-speaking race, and of mankind in general’.⁵² Two years later the British establishment demonstrated just how highly it valued his work: Prime Minister Arthur Balfour recommended him for the Regius Chair in History at Cambridge, in succession to Lord Acton, advising a dubious King that Mahan was ‘a historian of the British Empire from a military point of view’.⁵³ Balfour may have recalled that the same suggestion

glo-German Naval Race, 1895-1914. Navy Records Society, London 2015 pp.255-6

51 Named for Colonel Sir George Chesney the medal was awarded seven times between 1900 and 1914, with Mahan the only foreign recipient, other recipients included Laughton, Corbett, and strategist General John Maurice. Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army*, Cassell, London 1964 p.215, fn 79.

52 Mahan to the Duke of Cambridge 10.7.1900: S&M II p.691. The award was for a work ‘which has a bearing on the welfare of the British Empire’.

53 Balfour met Mahan in England 1893. Balfour to the King’s Secretary 23.09 & 01.10.1902. Royal Collections: See Lambert *Neptune* p.241 & 387. Lambert ignores Taylor’s text, see

had been widely touted in London in 1894, following the death of Mahan's intellectual exemplar Sir John Seeley. Both the *Daily Graphic* and *St James's Gazette* raised the idea, stressing his statesmanlike work. While Mahan did not favour an Anglo-American alliance, he anticipated events would force the two powers to co-operate against mutual threats.

At home Mahan exploited his experience of Asia in 1860s, advising President McKinley to beware the 'unscrupulous craft' that Russia deployed to recruit the US as a partner in the China question, advising him to rescind the withdrawal of American forces from the international force at Beijing. A British link was the obvious answer.⁵⁴ He was equally clear that punitive measures were necessary to discipline the Chinese regime.⁵⁵

Mahan reinforced the global message of the *Asia* articles with a rapid strategic analysis of the South African war, commissioned by publishers in New York and London: it appeared in December 1900.⁵⁶ His friend Captain Bouverie Clark RN, Admiralty Director of Transports, provided data for a chapter on logistics, 'The Colonies and the Transports', highlighting critical elements of a British 'way of war'.⁵⁷ He did not follow the war through the post-1900 guerilla phase.

Asia preceded *The War in South Africa* into print, in November 1900. A second American edition followed in 1902.⁵⁸ With Roosevelt installed as Vice President Mahan looked forward to an expansionist big Navy Presidential term, one that began sooner than he had expected. He told the Vice President *Asia*, 'ought to be, & I intend it shall be, my swan's song on contemporary politics', an expectation that rapidly changed when financially attractive offers arrived. He feared Britain and the United States were falling behind Russia in the race for control of Northern China, 'naval power always at hand & available in the Yangtze Valley – the heart of China in every sense of the word – is the true counter-check'. The effect would be moral, strengthening China, and erecting a sea power barrier against Russian expansion. This would require liberty of entry into China 'for European *thought*', primarily Christianity, as well as European force, listing prominent Americans who shared his convictions.⁵⁹ Judgements of

Taylor pp.75-6

54 Mahan to McKinley 2.9.1900: S&M II p.693

55 Mahan to Clark 19.12.1900: S&M II pp.699-700

56 Hattendorf & Hattendorf A9.

57 Mahan to Clark 19.12.1900: IS&M I pp.699-700.

58 H&H A8.

59 Mahan to Roosevelt 12.3.1901: S&M II pp.706-8

The Problem of Asia vary, Seager, his biographer and leading critic, stressed their contemporary relevance, concerned to report that, in the short term, events had not followed the pattern Mahan anticipated. With the hindsight of 2024 Mahan's analysis appears sound.⁶⁰

Mahan would continue writing geostrategic and geopolitical essays for the rest of his life, several directly linked to the 'Asia' texts. They constitute a running commentary on world affairs, analysed through the prism of sea power and American strategic engagement, promoting Anglo-American partnership and progressive politics. Post-Boer War discussions of British prestige and Imperial Preference revealed an anxiety to sustain the transient collaborations of 1898 and 1900 into the new century. By 1902 he was exhausted, having compiled 24 essay length articles in three years.⁶¹ The stream of thought ebbed after Russia was defeated by Japan in 1904-05, removing the immediate threat to China, shifting his focus to the wider European world, where fresh crises arose with Germany at their centre, reviving his economic war agenda.

The clubs and libraries of New York remained the centre of his intellectual world, where he met economists, politicians, historians and the American elite. The need to find the time and space to develop major themes, while meeting the economic demands of a life split between homes in New York and Long Island, as well as significant travelling and a son at Law School shaped Mahan's decisions, even as ill-health slowed his pace. If his pen occasionally faltered the encouragement of President Roosevelt kept him focussed with American public education.

The new century had involved a new line in journalism, writing for the English *National Review*. Mahan's celebrity, the Anglo-American *Asia* articles and his sympathy and support in the South African war prompted editor Leopold Maxse, conservative politician, member of the elite Co-Efficients dining club, which also included both Halford Mackinder and Julian Corbett, a supporter of Joseph Chamberlain's Imperial Federation project, who loathed Germany. Both men were followers of John Seeley, Maxse citing *The Expansion on Britain*, on the permanence of Russian hostility with Britain being based on its possession of India.⁶² Seeley thought securing the route to India had created permanent rivalry with Russia, while increasingly hostile to the aims of Imperial Germany.

60 Seager *Mahan* pp.462-6. As with Paul Kennedy's 1976 chapter, Seager's analysis says more about the era in which it was written than a hasty reading would suggest.

61 Mahan to Bouverie Clark 2.8.1902: S&M III pp.8-10) Lambert *Neptune* pp.238-42

62 Mahan to Maxse 22.7.1902: S&M III pp.33-4

Maxse offered a high fee for Mahan's celebrity impact: \$3,000 for a series of six articles which would also be published in the American *International Monthly* including 8000 words on 'Motives for Imperial Federation'. Maxse relied on Mahan's name to generate 'impact' in the British market.

Mahan's 'The Influence of the South African War upon the Prestige of the British Empire' appeared in December 1902 and was well received.

nothing could give me more pleasure than to believe that I have in any way contributed to the cause of Great Britain in this matter, believing as I do that it is in all essentials just, and also in truth the cause of the English-speaking peoples & their common tradition.⁶³

Mahan wrote for Maxse, on Empire, Imperial Federation and much else for a decade, and the essays were reprinted, starting with *Retrospect and Prospect* of 1902.⁶⁴ They enabled Mahan to develop arguments from the *The Problem of Asia* for a British audience. He did have principles: rejecting offers from journals that he thought misrepresented important issues, or those of William Randolph Hearst, who pandered to vulgar audiences, even at a dollar a word.⁶⁵

The Problem of Asia has sustained significant scholarly debate across the years, from the first edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy* via Paul Kennedy's sparkling compare and contrast essay, linking it with Halford 'Heartland' Thesis, followed by more focussed geo-political analysis. Much of this writing adopts assumptions about the strategic significance of sea power that are diametrically opposed to those Mahan advanced, and they tend to reflect contemporary shifts in Russia's relative power and projection of in the international system. In this regard they echo the ebb and flow of Mahan's anxieties. In 1898 he saw Russian expansion, and the concomitant economic exclusion from Asia as a looming threat, after 1905 he focussed on the rising naval power of Germany and Japan, which had surpassed the Czar's fleets in quality and competence, posing a challenge to American security in the Western Hemisphere, or economic expansion in Asia. However, the dramatic resurgence of Russia, a prime cause of the First World War, made him anxious to preserve Germany as a barrier to Slavonic ex-

63 Mahan to Maxse 23.8. & 9.12.1901: S&M II p.732, pp.501-12, the article was reprinted as the lead chapter in *Retrospect and Prospect: Studies in International Relations, Naval and Political Developments*, Little Brown, Boston 1902. H&H D66. For the Co-Efficients see Lambert *British Way* pp.68-9, 84-6 & 189.

64 Mahan to Leopold Maxse 26.12.1901: S&M II pp.742-3

65 Notably on the unpleasant dispute about command at the Battle of Santiago de Cuba, on which Mahan had decided opinions. Mahan to Hamilton Holt 22.12.1901. S&M II pp.739-40. For Hearst see Seager *Mahan* pp.329-30.

pansion, while America must be ready to work with Britain to restrain either of the expansive European great powers.

His main concern remained Russian imperial expansion denying America access to major markets in Asia, stunting economic growth, the basis of national power, and stalling the American 'expansion' that he believed had moral sanction. *Asia* was a carefully crafted proposal for an Anglophone partnership to secure commercial access to China and deter conflict by the threat of economic warfare. Both Mahan and Julian Corbett were engaged in shaping anglophone opinions to preserve a legal regime that enabled maritime economic warfare ahead of the Second Hague Conference of 1907. Mahan republished Corbett's essay alongside his own work, and that of legal expert Henry S Pritchett, in the 1907 collection *Some Neglected Aspects of War*. He did so in anticipation of an Anglo-American partnership, rather than an alliance, based on mutual interests, shared understanding and common values. Having dismissed American isolationism as unworthy of a great nation, and economically illiterate, he could see no alternative. A life-long anglophile, he admired the Royal Navy, using its' long and successful history to educate and advise his own service as it recovered from decades of neglect, corruption and pork-barrel politics. As working historian Mahan relied on the advice of Professor Sir John Knox Laughton, while British naval officers, including Cyprian Bridge and Reginald Custance corresponded on most aspects of the contemporary naval scene.

Mahan's strategic model was British sea control, legally enforced blockades exerted by a dominant fleet. He condemned commerce raiding as a failed strategic model, one that his own country must avoid, despite the popular illusion of past successes. That the British provided his most appreciative audience, and his most acute intellectual sparring partners, only reinforced long established preferences that can be traced back to the experiences and anglophone camaraderie of an oceanic career.

Mahan's first biographer was British. Charles Carlisle Taylor, formerly a British Vice Consul in New York, knew the great city and the oceanic suburb where Mahan lived and worked during his decades of global renown. Researching his subject Taylor corresponded Mahan's friends, stayed in his house, worked at his desk, and communed with his spirit at his favourite Club. Describing him as a 'naval philosopher and 'prophet', Taylor chose *The Problem of Asia* to emphasise Mahan's statesmanlike insight, his 'broad and sagacious views and distinguished ability', negotiating a path through troubled times, and contentious issues, while his 'genius immeasurably contributed to save modern civilisation through the mighty

influence of sea power'.⁶⁶ Today such effusive eulogies may be out of favour, but Mahan's strategic and geopolitical arguments have retained their utility. They were based on an impressive analysis of British practice, observed at first hand, followed in print, and analysed with intellectual tools offered by William Napier, Theodore Mommsen and John Seeley. They may need to be brought up to date, but the main lines of the argument endure. Russia still encroaches, weaponizing economic control, while the People's Republic of China and the United States confront one another across divergent politico-economic models. The legal requirements for enacting a naval blockade are no longer as clear as they were in Mahan's day. He would remind us that without that tool sea power might not be able to *Influence The Problem of Asia* the next time it reaches a flashpoint. If geography changes all-too slowly, the law can be adjusted.

Appendix. Custance's marked up *Asia* Essays. ADM 1/7462 TNA UK

p.543-6 *Asia* pp.27-9 'India, therefore, is to Great Britain not the primary base of operations .. to 'established upon Asian territory'.

Red line 546 *Asia* p.41 there can be little doubt that with China.... thousand miles.

547 *Asia* pp.44-5 'It is therefore the interest of Russia ... entire empire'.

2nd Essay red p.749 *Asia* pp.51-3 'Among the means of ...control of commerce ... wise to do so'.

Red 749 *Asia* p.56 'a study of the map would seem to show that progress through Persia would not only approach the gulf, but if successful would turn – would outflank – the mountains of Afghanistan'.

751 *Asia* p.63 'Hence ensues solidarity of interest between Germany, Great Britain, Japan and the United States, which bid fair to be more than momentary, because the conditions seem to be relatively permanent'.

Red 751 *Asia* p.66 There is, however, one very weak element in the position of the sea powers, and that is the location of the Chinese capital.... to the valley of the Yangtze'.

Red 752 *Asia* p.67 From our summary it seems evident that the four maritime states named can, by their positions on the eastern side of Asia, seriously impede advance from the north'.

66 Taylor spent a week at Marshmere, Mahan's impressive Long Island house, working in his study, and two months as an honorary member of the Century Club, Mahan's favourite New York intellectual rendezvous, and corresponded with Bouverie Clark Taylor pp.207, 273-4 & 282, 307.

Red 752 *Asia* pp.68-9 'Yet while this is so ... Persian Gulf'.

Red 752-3 *Asia* pp.70-2 'Yet While present political tenures ... far excels'

754-6 *Asia* pp.77-82 'Unless Great Britain and Germany are prepared... with those of Great Britain'

Underlined in red is the passage: 'For, after all, nothing, not the sanding up of the canal itself, can change the natural conditions which make Egypt the strategic centre of the chief highway between East and West'. On p.79.

Red 756 *Asia* 85 'This affects the importance of South Africa to Great Britain, in so far as effort there affects the necessary concentration upon the Isthmus of Suez.'

757 *Asia* p.86 'Concentration – exclusiveness of purpose. elsewhere occurring.'

The map was printed at p.759, the end of the second magazine article, but between the contests page and first essay in the book version.

Part III

931 *Asia* p.106 'there is no third racial genius comparable, in political influence, to the two by which the European pressure upon Asia is chiefly constituted, - the Slavonic and the Teutonic'.

932 *Asia* p.108 'In the kind and methods ... the two are different'.

Red 932 *Asia* p.109-10 the paragraph 'In the matter before us, ... potent factor

Red 933 *Asia* p.114 'For the moment Japan ... shape her course'

Red 933-4 *Asia* pp.115-6, paragraph 'There can be little doubt ... admit no rival'.

934-5 *Asia* pp.117-20 Two paragraphs 'For instance, local government'

Red 935 *Asia* pp.121-2 paragraph 'In fact ... social organisation.

Red 936-7 *Asia* pp. 124-5 'Except Russia and Japan ...- of commerce.'

936-7 *Asia* pp.126-7 'But of the sea powers... the past and present'.

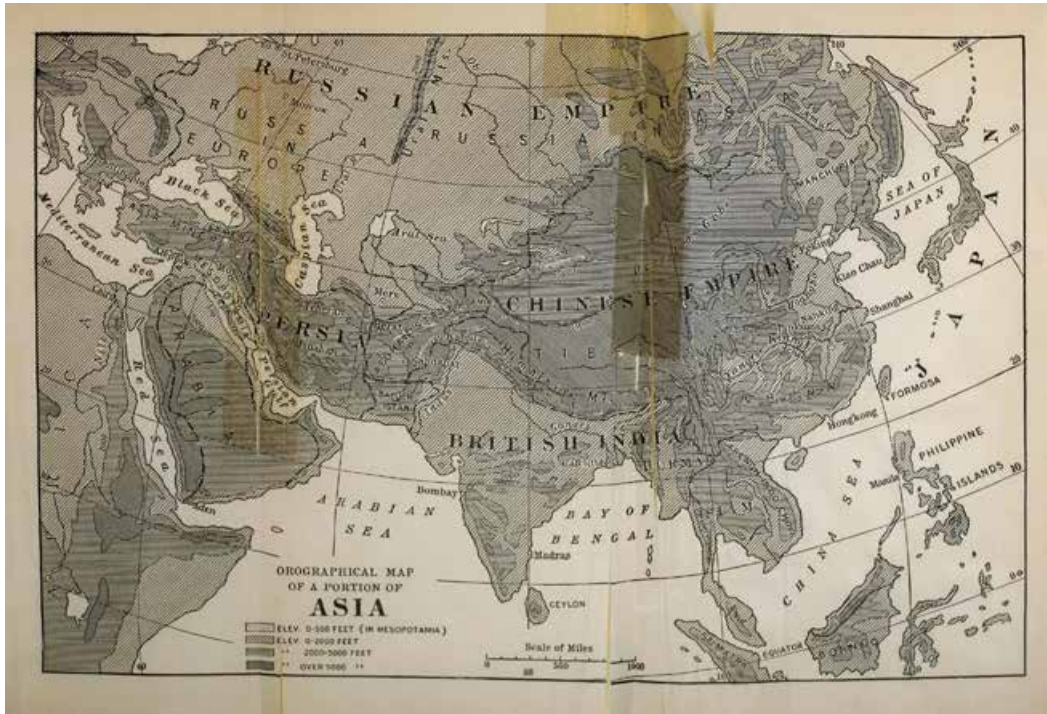
937 *Asia* pp.128-9 'This is the necessary aim ... and our interests'.

939 *Asia* pp.134-5 'For instance.... war with Spain'.

939 *Asia* pp.138 paragraph 'The correlative ... upon the world's policies

939 *Asia* pp.138-9 And, if from either ... necessary force about Suez.'

941 *Asia* pp.145 'In conclusion ... prolonged separation'



Geographical Map of a Portion of Asia, Image 34 in A. T. Mahan,
The Problems of Asia, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1900.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, DS515 .M25

“Garrison of the Heartland”: Mackinder, Russia and the “Pivot of History”

BY T.G. OTTE

[T]he true geographer thinks in shapes. Might we not complete the idea with the statement that the true historian thinks in movements - movements upon the shapes of the geographer? Both of them see with the mind's eye.¹

Halford Mackinder¹

For a man who looked askance at the notion of ‘geopolitics’ and who, in fact, never used the term², Halford Mackinder had a profound influence on, both, scholarly and public geopolitical discourse for over a century. His name and work are near-inescapable, one of the many paradoxes in the career of this polymath and man of action in academia, politics and public administration.³ Another is that, all too often, discussions of his writings have been refracted through the lens of the two world wars. ‘Mackinder’s earliest memory of public affairs went back to a day in September 1870’, observed one distinguished later twentieth-century Oxford geographer, ‘when ... he ... took home the news ... that Napoleon III and his whole army had surrendered to the Prussians at Sedan. Mackinder died two years after Hitler’s final defeat; his life spanned the rise and fall of both the Second and Third Reich.’⁴ So it did, but these biographical bookends are suggestive more of

1 I am grateful to Chai Lieven and more especially Alexander Morrison for their suggestions and above all their criticisms.

Id., *The Development of Geographical Teaching out of Nature Study* (London, 1908), 7.

2 W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford, 1982), 147-8.

3 For an excellent biographical treatment see B.W. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (College Station, TX, repr. 2010); for his directorship of the London School of Economics, R. Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895-1995* (Oxford, 1995), 72-9 and 85-94.

4 E.W. Gilbert, ‘Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947)’, id., *British Pioneers in Geography* (New York, 1972), 141. Admittedly, Mackinder encouraged that view himself, see especially id., ‘The Round World and the Winning of the Peace’, *Foreign Affairs* xxi, 4 (1943), 595.

the concerns of a later generation than of Mackinder's own. The waxing and waning of German power was but one aspect of his geopolitical work, and perhaps not even its most significant one. If anything, it is necessary to brush off that thin veneer of later Haushoferian *Geopolitik* that, like mildew, has settled on perceptions of Mackinder's work.⁵

What follows can be no more than a small contribution to that task. Yet in attempting to reconstruct Mackinder's views of Russia, their evolution and their influence on official policy towards that country it seeks to capture something of the breadth of his historical and strategic vision.

* * *

If the interplay between geographical conditions and historical movements was central to Mackinder's intellectual concerns, then Russia lay at the heart of his understanding of that dynamic. It is in many ways the pivot of his political geography. Since the territory historically occupied by the Russian state, in its various guises, is more or less coterminous with Mackinder's notion of the 'heartland', it may be convenient to begin discussions with his seminal paper read to the Royal Geographical Society on 25 January 1904, a quasi-sacral text 'to which histories of geopolitics invariably point'.⁶

'The Geographical Pivot of History' was not Mackinder's first foray into historical geography or geopolitics. His interest in these matters and the nub of his argument were already foreshadowed in earlier writings. In his very first address to the RGS in 1887, in contrasting Alexander the Great's advance into South East Asia with the eighteenth-century spread of British influence there, he emphasised the dichotomy between terrestrial and maritime power: 'conquerors are of two kinds - land-wolves and sea-wolves.'⁷ For Mackinder, the interaction between

5 Instructive, A.J. Pearce, 'Introduction', H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality, with additional papers* (New York, 1962), ix-xxiv. Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was Mackinder's near-contemporary and self-declared disciple, though it would be fair to describe his work as an amalgam of ideas espoused by his fellow-countryman Friedrich Ratzel, the Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellén and Mackinder. The most authoritative examination remains H.-A. Jacobsen, *Karl Haushofer: Leben und Werk* (2 vols., Boppard, 1979); further D.T. Murphy, *The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933* (Kent, OH, 1997), vii-viii *et passim*, and H.H. Herwig, 'Geopolitik: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum', *Journal of Strategic Studies* xxii, 2-3 (1999), 218-41.

6 G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London, 1996), 25; A. Chaumprade, *Géopolitique: Constantes et changements dans l'histoire* (Paris, 2003), 45-9.

7 H.J. Mackinder, 'The Scope and Methods of Geography', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* ix, 3 (1887), 158. Mackinder's Oxford readership in geography was in large part fi-

these two types of military power, with their different forms of political and economic organisation, was the fundamental spatial structure of great power relations. As he observed on a later occasion, '[e]ach century has its own geographical perspective.'⁸ Mackinder's, with its focus on international competition for power and territory, in its language and in the habits of mind it reflected, was very much of its time, the age of high imperialism.⁹ Even so, his ruminations on geography in its relations to history and military strategy also touched on enduring aspects of international politics. The 1904 lecture was Mackinder's first sustained effort at geopolitical analysis. Boldly conceived and crisply argued, it commenced with the assertion that what he described as the Columbian era, the age of exploration (c. 1500-1900), was drawing to a close, and that the 'post-Columbian age' would present political leaders with markedly different challenges. No new discoveries were to be made; there were no blank spots left to be coloured in on the map; and the world's 'virtually complete political appropriation' was now an indisputable fact. There was, he observed, echoing a phrase popularised by the former Liberal foreign secretary Lord Rosebery, 'scarcely a region left for the pegging out of a claim of ownership.' Therein lay considerable potential for future international conflict:

we shall again have to deal with a closed political system, and ... it will be one of world-wide scope. Every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence.¹⁰

nanced by the Society, see H.R. Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society, 1830-1930* (London, s.a. [1930]), 149.

- 8 Id., *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London, 1919), 39; see also P.J. Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality* (Harlow and New York, 1988), 47-8.
- 9 See the pertinent comments by J. Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, IN, 2016), 126-7; and further B. Semmel, 'Sir Halford Mackinder: Theorist of Imperialism', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* xxiv, 4 (1958), 554-61, and B.W. Blouet, 'The Imperial Vision of Halford Mackinder', *Geographical Journal* clxx, 4 (2004), 322-9. It is worth stressing that Mackinder's outlook was unequivocally democratic, Parker, *Mackinder*, 82-102, and also D. Deudney, 'Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis?: Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells on Britain in the Global Industrial Age', *Review of International Studies* xxvii, 2 (2001), 187-208; for a critical view see K. Dodds and J.D. Sidaway, 'Halford Mackinder and the "Geographic Pivot of History": A Centennial Perspective', *Geographical Journal* clxx, 4 (2004), 292-7.
- 10 H.J. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *Geographical Journal* xxiii, 4 (1904), 421 and 422. In an address to the Royal Colonial Institute on 1 March 1893, Rosebery had stated that

This was not, perhaps, startlingly original. A number of political leaders and commentators of various stripes had stressed the heightened potential for global conflict in recent years. Mackinder's prediction of the 'shattering' of weaker states, for instance, amplified the warnings of another foreign secretary, the late Conservative leader, Lord Salisbury, who, a few years earlier, had suggested that 'you may roughly divide the nations of the world as the living and the dying ... and the weak States are becoming weaker and the strong States are becoming stronger ... the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying, and the seeds of conflict amongst civilised nations will speedily appear.'¹¹

More significant and original, by contrast, was Mackinder's notion of the 'pivot-area' or 'heartland' of 'Euro-Asia', a hydro-strategical concept, based on a seemingly closed system of inland and Arctic drainage:

a continuous land, ice-girt in the north, water-girt elsewhere, measuring 21 million square miles ... whose centre and north, measuring some 9 million square miles, or more than twice the area of Europe, have no available water-ways to the ocean, but, on the other hand, except in the subarctic forest, are very generally favourable to the mobility of horsemen and camelmen.'

This enormous area, moreover, was 'today about to be covered with a vast network of railways.'¹² This was the hinge on which his whole geopolitical analysis turned. The 'pivot' was central to the concept of the 'heartland', which he developed in his later work and which he then came to use instead of the original term. Even so, it is worth noting that the word 'heartland' appears three times in the paper which further underlines the centrality of the concept to his geopolitical prospectus.¹³

Mackinder was no materialist; he did not espouse a crude geographical determinism. He eschewed any such notions and instead conceived of history, as much as of contemporary politics, as a subtle dynamic between geographical setting and human agency. The study of geography, he later elaborated, could not produce law-

'the world ... is not elastic, and we are engaged at the present moment, in the language of the mining camps, in "pegging out our claims for the future"', repr. in anon., *The Foreign Policy of Lord Rosebery: Two Chapters in Recent Politics, 1886 and 1892-5, With Extracts from Lord Rosebery's Speeches* (London, 1901), 88.

11 Salisbury speech at the Albert Hall, 4 May 1898, *The Times*, 5 May 1898.

12 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 431 and 434.

13 Ibid., 430, 431 and 434. If one includes 'heart of Asia' (431) as well, the term appears four times. Mackinder himself mistakenly later declared that the term had been used only once and only as 'a descriptive and not a technical term', id., 'Round World', 596; see also E.W. Gilbert, 'Introduction', id. (ed.), *The Scope of Geography and 'The Geographical Pivot of History' by Sir Halford Mackinder* (London, 1951), 10.

like explanations, 'but knowledge expressed ... in perspective valuation.'¹⁴ Policy choices were not determined by the locational *longue durée* and environmental factors, but these nevertheless established certain parameters within which a range of feasible decisions presented themselves: 'Man and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls. My concern is with the general physical control, rather than the cause of universal history.'¹⁵

None of this was especially original. Mackinder moved within intellectual boundaries established by Victorian scholars such as E.A. Freeman or J.R. Green. The former, in many ways the founder of historical geography, had stressed a quarter of a century earlier the 'great effect' a country's geography had 'upon its political history', and that 'the dispersions and movements of different nations are exactly those parts of history which have most to do with fixing the names and boundaries of different countries at different times.'¹⁶ J.R. Green's treatment of early English history, meanwhile, was based on a number of deductions from geographical conditions, whether reconstructing the boundaries of the Kingdom of Elmet or charting the course of relations between Wessex and the Danes following King Alfred's recovery of the Thames estuary.¹⁷ As for contemporary views of Russian history in the anglophone world, geographical factors were by no means *terra incognita*. J.B. Bury, Acton's successor as Regius professor at Cambridge, in his survey of early Russian history noted that the shift in the centre of political gravity from Kyiv to Moscow 'brought into play geographical influences to which [Russia's] fortune and her misfortune may be imputed. [...] The geographical position of Moscow determined the current of Russian history.'¹⁸

14 H.J. Mackinder, 'Presidential Address to the Geographical Association, 1916', *The Geography Teacher* viii, 5 (1916), 274. Mackinder was above all an educationalist, id., 'The Teaching of Geography and History as a Combined Subject', *ibid.*, vii, 1 (1913), 4-10, and 'Geography as a Pivotal Subject in Education', *Geographical Journal* lvii, 5 (1921), 376-84.

15 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 422; see further G. Sloan, 'Sir Halford Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now', *Journal of Strategic Studies* xxii, 2-3 (1999), 20.

16 E.A. Freeman, *The Historical Geography of Europe*, ed. by J.B. Bury (London, 3rd ed. 1903 [1st 1880]), 2; see further W.M. Aird, '"Seeing Things With Our Own Eyes": E.A. Freeman's Historical Travels', G.A. Bremner and J. Conlin (eds.), *Making History: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian Cultural Politics* (Oxford, 2015), 85-100.

17 See J.R. Green, *The Making of England* (2 vols., London, 4th ed. 1897 [1st 1882]) ii, 4, and *The Conquest of England* (2 vols., London, 3rd ed. 1899 [1st 1883]) i, 170. Green's ability to absorb and then utilise geographical information was much commented upon in his time, see W.G. Addison, *J.R. Green* (London, 1946), 41.

18 J.B. Bury, 'Russia (1462-1682)', A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero and S. Leathes (eds.), *The Cambridge Modern History*, v, *The Age of Louis XIV* (Cambridge, 1908), 478. See also the suggestion by James Bryce of limning Asian or European histories on the basis of geographical contours, id.,

As any late nineteenth-century scholar, Mackinder tended to think of history as, in essence but not exclusively, past politics, and he placed great emphasis on the context of geographical configurations within which policy was made. Location and environmental factors thus gave rise to 'more elemental movements', whose pressure stimulated political and intellectual counterforces. It was, he noted, 'under the pressure of external barbarism that Europe achieved her civilisation.' European history, then, had rightly to be seen 'as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history, for European civilisation is ... the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion.'¹⁹

What appeared as a sharp and much needed break with Eurocentricity²⁰ was, in fact, a well-rehearsed argument, as any educated Victorian would have known from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In dealing with the sack of Rome in 410 Gibbon, for example, laid emphasis on a 'chain of events' that stretched 'from Volga to the Vistula, through the dark interval which separates the extreme limits of the Chinese, and of the Roman geography.' In the face of migratory pressures from the East the inhabitants of those regions themselves vacated their ancestral lands: 'This formidable emigration issued from the same coast of the Baltic, which had poured forth the myriads of the Cymbri and Teutones, to assault Rome and Italy in the vigour of the republic [113-101 BCE].' Yet whatever the destruction they wrought, this dynamic of migration and invasion had a stimulating effect once 'the human species was renewed by the powers of generation, and the vacancy was filled by the influx of new inhabitants.'²¹

If Mackinder moved along a well-trodden path, the historical phenomenon of repeated westward movements by Asiatic people and polities provided him with the logic for his argument about the fundamental importance of Russia's territorial expansion. The most significant aspect of the 'political map of modern Europe is that presented by the vast area of Russia occupying half the Continent and the group of smaller territories tenanted by the Western Powers.'²² Implicit in this, at first glance,

'The Relations of History and Geography', *Contemporary Review* xlix, 1 (1886), 426-43, here esp. 432-4.

19 Ibid., 423.

20 Oswald Spengler followed Mackinder by suggesting that the word 'Europe' ought to be expunged from history, id., i, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (2 vols., Munich, 1920-2) i, 22 n. 1.

21 E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (12 vols., London, 1820) v, 212-3. On Gibbon's deep mistrust of imperial power and his refusal to romanticise the barbarian tribes, see J.G.A. Pocock, 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and the World View of the Late Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies* x, 2 (1977), 287-303.

22 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 423.

assertion of an obvious truth lay, in fact, two productive insights. In the first place, the 'pivot-area' furnished Mackinder with a quasi-structural force, the geographical setting over the *longue durée*. At the same time, it was also the theatre of multiple wars, the outcomes of which, as with any military action, were contingent. In the second place, this geostrategic perspective allowed him to explain, both, Russia's significance in European history since the thirteenth, and increasingly since the seventeenth, century and its likely future role in world politics.

The significance of the 'pivot-area' was not confined to Europe. Ranged around it in inner and outer crescents were 'marginal regions, ... accessible to shipmen', including Western Europe but also the Near East, the Indian subcontinent and East Asia. In these marginal coastlands empires, based on 'agricultural populations' and 'free water-communications', had risen and fallen over time, their decline expedited by 'an unparalleled series of revolutions, some due to Scythian, Turkish, and Mongolian raids from Central Asia.' In geostrategic terms, the isthmus of Suez

divided sea power into Eastern and Western, and the arid wastes of Persia advancing from Central Asia to the Persian gulf gave constant opportunity for nomad-power to strike home to the ocean-edge, dividing India and China, on the one hand, from the Mediterranean world on the other. Whenever the Babylonian, the Syrian, and the Egyptian oases were weakly held, the steppe-peoples could treat the open tablelands of Iran and Asia Minor as forward posts whence to strike through the Punjab into India, through Syria into Egypt, and over the broken bridge of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles into Hungary. Vienna stood in the gateway of Inner Europe, withstanding the nomadic raids, both those which came by direct road through the Russian steppe, and those which came by the loop way south of the Black and Caspian seas.²³

A pattern had been set. The ability to strike in three directions was the result of a combination of geographical configuration and horse- or camel-based mobility across the open steppe. In the face of such pressures the Europeans became 'ship-men' because 'mobility upon the ocean is the natural rival of horse and camel mobility in the heart of the continent.' Once they had acquired command of the sea, the 'ship-men' were able to dominate the fringe of marginal coastlands, 'wrapping [their] influence round the Euro-Asiatic land-power which had hitherto threatened [their] very existence.'²⁴ Again, the implications of this analysis are profound, for the heartland-periphery antithesis was simultaneously also a one between land-power and sea-power, as Mackinder's had suggested somewhat tentatively with his 1887 'land-wolves and sea-wolves' analogy.

²³ Ibid., 430-2.

²⁴ Ibid., 433.

During the nineteenth century the nature of Russian rule over the heartland underwent change, and so did the nature of the land-sea antithesis. In geostrategic terms, mastery of the crescents surrounding the 'pivot area' by maritime powers was the dominant feature the previous Columbian age. In a parallel movement, '[t]he Tudor century, which saw the expansion of Western Europe over the sea, also saw Russian power carried from Moscow through Siberia. The eastward swoop of the horseman across Asia was an event almost as pregnant with political consequence as the rounding of the Cape.' For a long time, the geostrategic effects of these two developments were scarcely perceptible, and yet they were part of the unfolding land-power—sea-power dialectic. There was another, no less profound, aspect to it in that it helped further to entrench the historical East—West religious schism. It was 'one of the most striking coincidences', Mackinder observed - which meant that it was no coincidence at all - that

the seaward and the landward expansion of Europe should ... continue the ancient opposition between Roman and Greek. Few great failures have had more far-reaching consequences than the failure of Rome to Latinize the Greek. The Teuton was civilized and Christianized by the Roman, the Slav in the man by the Greek. It is the Romano-Teuton who in later times embarked upon the ocean; it was the Graeco-Slav who rode over the steppes, conquering the Turanian. Thus the modern land-power differs from the sea-power no less in the source of its ideals than in the material conditions of its mobility.²⁵

The implications of this argument are far-reaching for, properly understood, Mackinder's East—West relations consisted of a triple helix of tightly interwoven antithetical strands. The heartland—periphery opposition was entwined with a contest between land-power and sea-power, which was overlaid with the competition between different religio-ideological orientations.

As seen, for Mackinder contemporary politics were shaped by historical patterns. To this had to be added the rapid technological transformation of the developed world in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The revolution in transport technology would have a transformative effect on Russia and the 'pivot-area':

trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power, and nowhere can they have such an effect as in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia, in vast areas of which neither timber nor accessible stone was available for road-making. Railways work greater wonders in the steppe, because they directly replace horse and camel mobility, the road stage of development having here been omitted.

Railways allowed for military power projection. The presence of a Russian

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 433.

army of occupation in Manchuria since the Chinese turmoil of 1900-1, therefore, was 'as significant evidence of mobile land-power as the British army in South Africa [during the Boer War, 1899-1902] was of sea-power' - the Anglo-Russian maritime-terrestrial antagonism was now a prominent feature of great power politics.

By the turn of the century the Russian railway network had 'a clear run of 6000 miles from Wirballen [now Virbalis] in the west to Vladivostok'; and although it had neither the robustness nor the sophistication of railways in the Western half of the continent, Mackinder was in no doubt that 'the century will not be old before all Asia is covered with railways.' The power political consequences of this transport revolution could scarcely be exaggerated, he prognosticated: 'The spaces within the Russian Empire and Mongolia are so vast, and their potentialities in population, wheat, cotton, fuel, and metals so incalculably great, that is inevitable that a vast economic world ... will there develop inaccessible to oceanic commerce.'²⁶ The full economic development of the Russian-dominated 'heartland' was rich in strategic possibilities, and Mackinder never shied away from pointed conclusions:

Russia replaces the Mongol Empire. Her pressure on Finland, on Scandinavia, on Poland, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China, replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen. In the world at large she occupies the central strategical position held by Germany in Europe. She can strike on all sides and be struck from all sides, save the north. The full development of her modern railway mobility is merely a matter of time. Nor is it likely that any possible social revolution will alter her essential relations to the great geographical limits of her existence.

The traditional balance of power, Mackinder concluded, had been 'overset' in favour of Russia as the 'pivot state'. This would facilitate its 'expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and *the empire of the world would then be in sight*.'²⁷

It was the strength of Mackinder's concept, and the source of its enduring attraction, that it blended together in a coherent manner 'an understanding of the political implications of new technology with the persistence of certain geographical patterns of political history.'²⁸ And yet, that blend also contained a good dose of exaggeration and, his assertions of the contrary notwithstanding, determinism.

²⁶ Ibid., 434.

²⁷ Ibid., 436 (my emphasis).

²⁸ Geoffrey Sloan's pertinent comment, id., 'Mackinder', 21-2.

How else is one to interpret his confident prognosis that the full economic development of the Russian-controlled Euro-Asian 'heartland' and its transformation into a separate economic system were 'inevitable'? His emphasis on technology, understandable perhaps in light of the rapid progress of railways across the world, was a case of forward projection of the Westernisation of Russia under Peter the Great. Although impressive on a large-scale map, Russian railway enterprise in the decade before 1903 was reliant to a significant degree on foreign investment; and in its execution it was more often a 'monument to bungling' than testament to strategic planning.²⁹ The country's economic development during the nearly quarter of a century before Mackinder delivered his paper had made steady, sometimes startling, progress but remained patchy. Sergei Y. Witte's modernising reforms, which relied on Friedrich List's ideas of a protectionist system to allow for the creation of a Russian national industry, aggravated the problems of agriculture in the central provinces. Rapid industrialisation, directed by the central government but fuelled by foreign capital, left Russia increasingly dependent on world economic trends, and the sharp European recession of 1899-1903, exacerbated by the Boer War, threw Witte's economic plans into disarray, with some large railways companies and locomotive works going bankrupt.³⁰ As for Russian expansion into Central Asia, here, too, the underlying reality was more prosaic than the green-shaded areas on contemporary maps or Mackinder's prospectus suggested. Of course, 'in all cases the process of conquest and annexation led seamlessly to the establishment of the structures of colonial rule - the creation of a bureaucracy or a protectorate, the administration of justice, the collection of taxes, the introduction of settlers.' Yet the Russian colonial state in Central Asia was weak, its hold on or penetration of local elites and society partial and potentially fragile. As the revolt of 1916 would show, it was here, far from the Russo-German front, that the compact between local society and the Tsarist state first broke down.³¹ Nor did it

29 See the observations by Stephen G. Marks in his account of the Trans-Siberian railway scheme, id., *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia* (London, 1991), esp. 170-95; for the finances see also A. Michelson, *L'Essor économique de la Russie avant la guerre de 1914* (Paris, 1965), 67-9.

30 For Witte's economic theories, see T.H. von Laue, 'A Secret Memorandum of Sergei Witte on the Industrialization of Imperial Russia', *Journal of Modern History* xxvi, 1 (1954), 60-75; for a discussion of the fluctuations of foreign (here French) capital investment see also R. Girault, *Imprunts russes et investissements français en Russie* (Paris, 1973). Large foreign debt, of course, also had a salutary restraining effect on government policy, see O. Crisp, *Studies in the Russian Economy before 1914* (New York, 1976), 111-58.

31 A. Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814-1914* (Cambridge, 2022 (pb)), 531-2 *et passim*. This work offers an important corrective to other works

yield immediate economic gains. As with other European colonial enterprises, the Central Asian provinces remained a drain on the Imperial exchequer until at least 1909. The cotton boom around 1900, the main driver in the region's economic transformation, was the unintended consequences of a set of taxation measures designed for entirely different purposes.³² Attempts at industrialisation were beset by corruption, incompetence and often by rival usage rights of indigenous peoples, and they often ended in failure.³³ Finally, the '*pénétration pacifique*' of East Asia was mostly about finding markets for Russian textiles, exports of which were modest though they held out the prospect of greater commercial opportunities in the future.³⁴

That Mackinder did not fully grasp the complex realities of Russian rule in Central Asia may, in part, be explained by the scarcity of reliable contemporary statistical data. These were not wholly absent, however, and it is striking that Mackinder ignored many of the known climatic, ecological or seasonal constraints on agricultural production in the 'pivot area'. As a geographer he should have known better. No less striking is his apodictic assertion of the region's resource-richness, without ever offering quantitative evidence, which is eerily reminiscent of some of the later Nazi-era *Geopolitik* fantasies.

These are significant flaws in Mackinder's geopolitical analysis, but they should not be taken as evidence for the general inadmissibility of his wider argument. All too often, after all, contemporary analysis is hampered by the absence of comprehensive data. The growing specialisation of academic studies by the late nineteenth century compounded matters, as Mackinder himself observed: 'Knowledge is, after all, one, but the extreme specialism of the present day seems to hide the fact from a certain class of minds.' That specialisation and more so, he noted a

in the field, e.g. A.J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2014), 395-415; see also D.R. Brower, 'Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Colonial Policy in Turkestan', id. and E.J. Lazzarini (eds.), *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, IN, 1997), 115-33.

32 B. Penati, 'The Cotton Boom and the Land Tax in Russian Turkestan (1880s-1915)', *Kritika* xiv, 3 (2013), 741-74; for Bokhara, H. Carrère d'Encausse, *Reform et révolution chez les musulmans de l'empire russe* (Paris, 1981), 77-79;

33 For an instructive case study see B. Penati, 'Wormwood, Nomads' Rights, and Capitalism: The Birth of a Chemical Industry in Russian Turkestan (1870s-1914)', *Modern Asian Studies* lvii, 4 (2023), 1135-95; for a general assessment see also A. Morrison, 'Colonial Central Asia: Central Asia and the Russian Empire', D.W. Montgomery (ed.), *Central Asia: Contexts for Understanding* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2022), 101-18.

34 For the Asian markets, see W.E. Mosse, *An Economic History of Russia, 1856-1914* (London and New York, 1996), 102-3.

good seventy-odd years before C.P. Snow was to popularize the idea, the division between the sciences and the humanities was 'upsetting the equilibrium of our culture.'³⁵ In his own way Mackinder sought to bridge that widening gap. His conceptualisation of a heartland—periphery dynamic was vast, as vast as its physical object. As with all such intellectual constructs it was a case of synthesis rather than original research. Even so, with his attempt to bring geographical context and historical developments together in a coherent analytical scheme he forged a tool of significant heuristic value for both historical studies and examinations of strategic problems.

* * *

Whatever the future career of Mackinder's 'pivot' idea, it was one of history's finer ironies that, not a fortnight after he had delivered his paper, Japan launched a lightning strike against Russia. To some extent, the origins of the Russo-Japanese War were to be found in that 'unstable equilibrium' in East Asia that Mackinder had identified in his address as one of the sources of tensions between the great powers. Japan, moreover, was part of what he had called 'a ring of outer and inner insular bases for sea-power and commerce, inaccessible to the land-power of Euro-Asia.'³⁶ The conflict between the marginal island power and the expanding land-power, then, was in the logic of Mackinder's thesis. And yet, that war also revealed the brittleness of Russian power. Defeat, however narrow, on the battlefields of Manchuria suggested that on its own manpower - a term coined by Mackinder³⁷ - was not sufficient to prevail. The loss of the navy highlighted the fact that Russia still remained backwards in the technological, logistic and seafaring skills necessary in modern warfare. Post-war financial instability and domestic turmoil as the fighting drew to a close were suggestive of a deeper, structural malaise of Imperial Russia. Clearly, for the tsar and his ministers 'the empire of the world' lay well beyond their field of vision. The events of 1914-15 underlined this, and the extent to which Mackinder had an exaggerated view of Russian power. Mobilisation was effective enough - some 5.1 m were drafted in the second half of 1914 - but raw statistics were only part of the story. Poor logistics, sloppy intelligence work and inadequate generalship meant that the invasion of Germany's eastern provinces was parried at Tannenberg in August, and in the course of the following

35 Mackinder, 'Scope and Methods', 145; see C.P. Snow 1959 Rede lecture *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, 1959).

36 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 433.

37 Id., 'Man-power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength', *National and English Review* xiv, 2 (1905), 136-45.

year Russian power in Eastern Europe all but collapsed.³⁸

There was another, albeit smaller, irony. In the discussion that followed Mackinder's lecture, (Henry) Spenser Wilkinson, the leading (civilian) military commentator of the day and later the first Chichele professor of military history, commented 'with regret on some of the space that is unoccupied here, and I much regret that a portion of it was not occupied by the members of the Cabinet.'³⁹ Ministerial absence might have been noticeable, but in practice British policy acted on very similar insights to those articulated by Mackinder, even if they were not framed in quite the same terminology. About one month prior to the RGS lecture, senior ministers discussed the growing threat of war in East Asia. Some feared the imminent defeat of Britain's new ally Japan, others an escalation of the conflict that would drag Britain into the fighting. Arthur Balfour, the prime minister, brought these discussions to a close by committing British policy to strict non-intervention in any Russo-Japanese war. It was not in Britain's strategic interest to allow its ally to be crushed, but this was an unlikely eventuality. As a land-power Russia might well succeed in establishing military control over Manchuria and the Korean peninsula, but a seaborne invasion or even a naval blockade of Japan lay beyond its capabilities. Victorious on land, Russia would then face the marginal island power, 'an implacable & unsleeping enemy.' Continued tensions between Russia and Japan would also affect British imperial interests. Balfour was confident that Russian 'diplomacy, from the Black Sea to the Oxus, might be weakened into distantly resembling sweet reasonableness.'⁴⁰

Geography was central to Balfour's reasoning, and it was based on an implicit acceptance of a 'heartland--periphery' dichotomy in East Asia, as regarded Japan, but also on a global scale, in so far as Britain was concerned. If, to some degree, Mackinder had merely articulated ideas that were in circulation amongst senior

38 S.N. Prokopovich, *Voina i narodnoe khaziatstvo* (Moscow, 1918), 151; for the 1914 campaign, see I.I. Rostunov, 'Operatsii na vostochnom fronte', id. (ed.), *Istoria pervoi mirovoi voiny, 1914-1918* (2 vols., Moscow, 1975) i, 316-82; for the events of the second half of 1915, and C.J. Smith, *The Russian Struggle for Power: A Study of Russian Foreign Policy during the First World War* (New York, repr. 1969), 273-350.

39 *Verbatim* protocol of discussion appended to Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 437.

40 Quotes from draft Balfour to Edward VII, 26 or 27 Dec. 1903, Balfour MSS, British Library, Add. MSS.49863, and memo. Balfour, 'Situation in the Far East', 29 Dec. 1903, Cabinet Papers, The National Archives (TNA), CAB 37/67/97. Balfour also speculated about the chances of domestic disruption in Russia, a recurring theme in British policy discussions since the 1870s, see T.G. Otte, "'A Very Internecine Policy': Anglo-Russian Cold Wars before the Cold War, 1743-1940", in Christopher Baxter, Michael L. Dockrill and Keith Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics*, vol. i, *From Gladstone to Churchill* (Basingstoke and New York, 2013), 17-49.

politicians and officials, his own arguments also percolated through the different layers of official thinking in Whitehall. The connection with Wilkinson was significant here. Both frequently quoted each other's works⁴¹, and the future Chichele professor was also an important conduit to Eyre Crowe, Wilkinson's cerebral brother-in-law and a future Permanent Under-secretary of the Foreign Office. A voracious reader and an avid student of European history and politics, Crowe was deeply influenced in his thinking by Wilkinson. Like him he accepted geopolitical precepts as foundational. His oft-quoted January 1907 memorandum on the principles of British policy was testimony to this. Britain's foreign policy was determined by 'the immutable conditions of her geographical situation on the ocean flank of Europe as an Island State with vast overseas colonies and dependencies.' To be effective it required 'preponderant sea power'. Although ostensibly based on the writings of A.T. Mahan, with which he was well acquainted, Crowe's argument was not dissimilar to Mackinder's: 'Sea power is more potent than land power, because it is as pervading as the element in which it moves and has its being. Its formidable character makes itself felt the more directly that a maritime State is ... the neighbour of every country accessible by sea. It would, therefore, be but natural that a State supreme at sea should inspire universal jealousy ..., and be ever exposed to the danger of being overthrown by a general combination of the world.'⁴²

Skilful diplomacy, exploiting Russian weakness after 1905, helped to avert such a combination, but the principal motivation behind the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention was the desire to settle existing conflicts of interest with St. Petersburg in the Middle East and Central Asia rather than an attempt to forge a combination against Germany in Europe.⁴³ Skilful diplomacy could avert another European war, however.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, Mackinder, who since January 1910 represented a Glasgow constituency in the House of Commons, threw himself into various campaigns to support the war effort, though he never attained a ministerial position either during the war or after.⁴⁴ The war also served

41 E.g. H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (Oxford, 2nd ed. 1925 [1st 1902]), 314 n.

42 Memo. Crowe, 'Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany', 1 Jan. 1907, G.P. Goch and H.W.V. Temperley (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (11 vols., London, 1927-38) iii, app. A. Crowe was also familiar with H.B. George's *The Relation of Geography and History* (Oxford, 1900), see his entry for 1902 in his 'Lesebuch', Crowe MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Eng. d. 2909.

43 For this see K. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford, 1995) and T.G. Otte, *Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey* (London, 2020).

44 For Mackinder's conversion from a mainstream Liberal to a (Conservative) Tariff Reformer and

as an intellectual stimulant to adjust and refine his geostrategic ideas, including his assessment of the Russian factor in international politics. This process led to the publication, in 1919, of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.

However it would end, the first major war in Europe involving all the great powers since the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, raised a whole host of questions about how to arrive at, and then to secure, a durable post-war settlement. Mackinder took an active part in these discussions from the beginning. At the end of 1914, Lionel Lyde, a geographer at University College London, delivered a paper to the RGS on the subject of post-war frontiers. In the subsequent discussion, Mackinder expressed doubts that one might 'set up a new Europe in accordance with scientific ideals. [...] [T]he old idea of the balance of power will assert itself again in any congress in Europe, and that means you will fix boundaries by the old process of bargaining. ... [T]here is no greater lesson in history than that of [the Congress of Vienna of] 1814.' Even if defeated, Germany, a nation of over sixty million people, would still remain a stronger power 'that I question whether there will be much ideal map making. If you conquer that power, the object will be to clip its wings for the future.' Polish majority areas, for instance, lay 'wholly inland'. A Polish state, then, needed to be given access to the Baltic which, in turn, ran the risk of 'set[ting] up a new Alsace-Lorraine', only this time at the expense of Germany.⁴⁵

Mackinder's scepticism was well-founded, and his warnings were prescient in light of interwar developments. But Lyde's 'scientific' disquisition had sown the seeds of Mackinder's concerns with the smaller nations of Eastern Europe. Once again, he was not unique in this, nor was he the principal advocate of the smaller nations in Britain. That role was seized by the historian and commentator on Eastern Central European affairs R.W. Seton-Watson, whose *New Europe* group Mackinder joined in 1917. Undoubtedly, Mackinder shared the liberal ideals that led so many contemporaries to support the aspirations of the East European nations. But he was also motivated by what he considered to be the necessity of containing

the political part of his career, see B.W. Blouet, 'The Political Career of Sir Halford Mackinder', *Political Geography Quarterly* vi, 4 (1987), 355-67, G. Sloan, 'Haldane's Mackindergarten: A Radical Experiment in British Military Education', *War-in-History* xix, 3 (2012), 322-52, and S. Pelizza, 'Geopolitics, Education, and Empire: The Political Life of Sir Halford Mackinder, 1895-1925' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2013).

45 *Verbatim* protocol of discussion appended to L.W. Lyde, 'Types of Political Frontiers in Europe', *Geographical Journal* xlv, 2 (1915), 142. Lyde had made a name for himself as an economic geographer, see id., *A Short Commercial Geography* (London, 3rd ed. 1910). The idea of 'scientific frontiers' was a prominent feature of Edwardian geopolitical discourse, see Lord Curzon of Kedleston, *Frontiers* (Oxford, 1908) (= *Romanes Lecture*, 1907), also C.B. Fawcett, *Frontiers: A Study in Political Geography* (Oxford, 1918).

the traditional great powers in Eastern Europe. When at the end of October 1918 the Austrian emperor sought an armistice, Mackinder saw 'a new map of Europe' emerge:

upon which there will be a Poland, of some 20 million people, including a piece of Austria, a Great Bohemia of some 8 or 10 million people ..., a Hungary of some 8 or 10 million Magyars and Jews; a Great Ukraine, mainly in Russia, but including the eastern half of Austrian Galicia, a Great Roumania containing not merely the historic principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia but also Transylvania, hitherto part of Hungary, and a Jugo-Slavia of some 8 to 10 millions.⁴⁶

In its rough outlines this was indeed the map that now emerged; in some significant details it was not - an independent Ukrainian state, for instance, did not survive the immediate postwar turbulence. Mackinder's name had been touted as a member of the British delegation to the expected peace congress.⁴⁷ That gathering never took place, the defeated central powers descending into revolution and civil war-like turmoil and the inter-allied preparatory conference thus turning into the real peace conference. Mackinder was not party to the talks in Paris and instead wrote *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.⁴⁸ Unlike the 1904 address, this was not an academic exercise in historical and political geography. It was very much a *pièce d'occasion*, written for the moment and under the impression of the moment, and it was written in some haste. But for all its occasional imprecisions and the odd inconsistency, it crystallised a geopolitical perspective that had steadily evolved since he had presented his 'pivot' paper in 1904. Some of the historical allusions remained, to which were added warnings against the siren song of Wilsonian League enthusiasm - hence the 'ideals'—'reality' distinction in the title.

Mackinder reasserted his notion of a closed international system that contained within it the potential for future conflict: 'The known does not fade any longer through the half-known into the unknown; there is no longer elasticity of political expansion in lands beyond the Pale.' That was why, ultimately, the war of 1914 turned into a four-year struggle on a global scale; and it was why world domination

46 H.J. Mackinder, 'The End of Empire: The Break-up of Austria-Hungary', *Glasgow Herald*, 31 Oct. 1918; see also H. and C. Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981), 171-83 *et passim*.

47 See the papers in TNA, CAB 28/5/IC (80).

48 He completed the manuscript around Christmas 1918, id., *Democratic Ideals*, 205, n. 1. The publishers, Constable, had close connections to Seton-Watson whose weekly magazine, *The New Europe*, it published, Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, 178.

remained a viable political option.⁴⁹ Some themes and concepts in Mackinder's geopolitics had undergone significant change, however, when compared with his original 'pivot' theory. In the first place, he was now more emphatic on the essential superiority of land-power over sea-power: 'So impressive have been the results of British sea-power that there has perhaps been a tendency to neglect the warnings of history and to regard sea-power as inevitably having ... the last word in the rivalry with land-power.' Europe, Asia and Africa, he suggested, were now 'an island ... the World-Island.' Bearing in mind the rapid advance of modern technology, he wondered: 'What if ... the whole World-Island or a large part of it were at some future time to become a single and united base of sea-power? Would not the other insular bases be outbuilt as regards ships and outmanned as regards seamen?'⁵⁰

Further, Mackinder enlarged the geopolitical scope of the 'pivot area', now renamed 'heartland' and surreptitiously including the real grain baskets of the Russian Empire along the lower stretches of the Volga and the southern Ukraine. More,

[t]he Heartland, for the purposes of strategical thinking, includes the Baltic Sea, the navigable Middle and Lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet, and Mongolia. With it, therefore, were Brandenburg-Prussia and Austria-Hungary, as well as Russia - a vast triple base of manpower, which was lacking to the horse-riders of history. The Heartland is the region to which, under modern conditions, sea-power can be refused access.⁵¹

Connected to this was a third point, the strategic transformation of the heartland by modern transport and weapons technology. Transcontinental railways and motorised transport aside, the advent of airpower furnished land-based powers with a powerful new weapon, 'which is of a boomerang nature ... as against sea-power': 'In short, a great military power in possession of the Heartland and of Arabia could take possession of the crossways of the world at Suez.' Mackinder had stressed the historical significance of the Suez defile already in his 1904 lecture. Technological progress made it even more important now: 'We have defeated the danger on this occasion [1914-18], but the facts of geography remain, and offer ever-increasing strategical opportunities to land-power as against sea-power.'⁵² Russia, he reiterated, had been 'the first tenant of the Heartland with a really menacing man-power', but now the combined with technological skills and organising powers and so in-

49 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, 40; see also E.W. Gilbert and W.H. Parker, 'Mackinder's *Democratic Ideals and Reality* after Fifty Years', *Geographical Journal* cxxx, 2 (1969), 228-31.

50 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, 77, 81 and 91.

51 *Ibid.*, 141.

52 *Ibid.*, 142-3.

creasing the geostrategic danger posed by land-power to sea-power.⁵³

Here, as already in 1904, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Mackinder's own protectionist sympathies – he embraced Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform programme after 1903 – coloured his geopolitical outlook, for it was characterised by a marked pessimism about the resilience of maritime free trade economies which he clearly considered to be inferior to a closed Eurasian form of autarky.

The war nevertheless threw up various geopolitical challenges that needed to be addressed. Four years earlier, in December 1914, when discussing Lyde's frontier-making ideas, Mackinder had insisted that it was the role of geography – by which, of course, he meant geographers – 'to give judgment in practical conduct.'⁵⁴ That was precisely what he sought to do with *Democratic Ideals*. There could no durable peace settlement without a proper balance between Germany and the Slavic world: 'You cannot afford to leave such a condition of affairs in East Europe and the Heartland, as would offer scope for ambition in the future, for you have escaped too narrowly from recent danger.' To achieve this the region had to be divided into three separate spheres, a German and Russian one respectively, with 'a tier of independent States' in between. Russia might be the most recent tenant of the heartland but its backwardness placed its tenancy in doubt: 'The Russians are, and for one, if not two, generations must remain, hopelessly incapable of resisting German penetration on any basis but that of a military autocracy, unless they be shielded from direct attack.' From the shores of the Baltic to the fringes of the Mediterranean there were 'seven non-German peoples, each on the scale of a European State of the second rank', whose geostrategic function it was to act as that intermediate tier. To secure this 'complete territorial buffer between Germany and Russia' Mackinder even contemplated large-scale population transfers, effectively swapping land and people between German-populated East Prussia and the majority Polish Posen province.⁵⁵

There were to be no more Alsace-Lorraines. Ironically, Mackinder may well have taken the notion of the strategic necessity of buffer states from a German geographer, the Breslau professor Joseph Partsch, whose *Central Europe* had appeared in Mackinder's *The Regions of the World* series. In it Partsch had stressed the role of Switzerland and the United Netherlands after 1815 'as buffer states' affording protection against French depredations on both flanks of the Western

⁵³ Ibid., 179–80.

⁵⁴ *Verbatim* transcript of discussion, Lyde, 'Political Frontiers', 143.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 194, 205, 206–7 and 208.

frontiers of Central Europe.⁵⁶ Whatever the origins of Mackinder's advocacy of strategic buffer zones, there could be no doubt about their centrality to his heartland idea. Just as triumphant Roman generals were reputed to have had a slave hovering behind them on their chariot to remind them of their mortality, so the peacemakers at Paris ought to have 'an airy cherub' whispering to them:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:

Who rules the World-Island commands the World.⁵⁷

Mackinder was not destined to be that cherub; and it is difficult to establish any clear influence of his ideas on the deliberations at Paris. As with his 'pivot' lecture, so with his 1919 book, some ideas which he advanced here had already gained currency in official circles. Notions of self-determination for the Eastern Central European nations aside, the importance some sort of intermediate tier of independent states in the region was clearly appreciated in Whitehall. Lord Curzon, who sent Mackinder to Southern Russia, had already earlier, in the spring of 1919, confirmed that 'the tendency [of British policy] has been to concentrate on the consolidation of the ex-Russian States from the Baltic Southwards ... as a barrier as against the Bolshevik advance. [...] The Soviet Government is regarded as wholly unrepresentative of Russia and it is not proposed to try to come to terms with them.'⁵⁸ One of Curzon's adviser, J.Y. Simpson, an Edinburgh scientist who had been drafted into government service during the war on account of his Russian connections, elaborated on this. Anti-Bolshevist sentiments were strongest along the fringes of the old empire: 'It would therefore appear advisable to support the Border States in their present desire for independence and their will to resist Bolshevism, as with order established there, a basis is secured from which to commence the operation of giving further economic assistance to Russia proper.' The new states would so form a barrier between Germany and Russia and would also prevent 'embittered reactionary elements' in each of them from collaborating.⁵⁹ Simpson kept pressing

56 J. Partsch, *Central Europe* (London, 1905), 326-7. It is interesting to note that Partsch foreshadowed Paul W. Schroeder's later historical analysis, see id., 'The Lost Intermediaries: The Impact of 1870 on the European System', *International History Review* vi, 1 (1984), here esp. 4-10.

57 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, 194; Blouet, *Mackinder*, 163-8.

58 Tel. Curzon to Eliot (private and personal), 21 Apr. 1919, Curzon MSS, British Library Oriental and India Office Collection, MSS.Eur.F.112/210. For a discussion of the problems of early Anglo-Soviet relations see K. Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 2006), 43-7; G.H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919-1924* (London, 1995), 60-75.

59 Memo. Simpson, 'Russian Policy and the Inter-Relation of Bolshevism and the Question of the

the issue and suggested that London should 'recognise every anti-Bolshevik non-Slav or local government that has given proof of its stability, until such time as order is restored in Great Russia.'⁶⁰

Democratic Ideals nevertheless had an important sequel for Mackinder's career, his appointment, in October 1919, as British high commissioner to Southern Russia to liaise with the White Russian leader, General Anton I. Denikin, in his campaign against Lenin's regime in Moscow. His mission was short-lived.⁶¹ More, it demonstrated the, perhaps inevitable, incompatibility of clear geopolitical vision and practical politics. On arrival at Odessa Mackinder immediately understood that Denikin's forces on their own could not halt the further spread of Bolshevism. The 'method of mere military adventure', he advised the Cabinet, ought to be abandoned. To contain the Bolshevik political and geographical barriers had to be erected as a matter of urgency, ranging from Finland, the Baltic states and Poland in the west to the Caucasus:

it is only by strong immediate measures taken before the thawing of the Volga ice that the advance of Bolshevism, sweeping forward like a prairie fire, can be limited, and kept away from India and Lower Asia It must be remembered, moreover, that the very success of [the] Polish and South Russian advance, on the line extending from the Gulf of Finland to the Sea of Azoff, would tend to drive the Bolsheviks into Asia, and it is essential, therefore, to regard the Caspian and Caucasian barrier as part of a larger policy. But I cannot look upon a Caucasian barrier as more than a temporary expedient of a not very substantial character: the only final remedy is to kill Bolshevism at the source.⁶²

Border States', 19 Mar. 1919, encl. in Simpson to Kerr, 21 Mar. 1919, Lothian MSS, National Archive of Scotland, GD 40/17/838; see also id., *Self-Discovery of Russia* (London, 1916).

60 Memo. Simpson, 'Memorandum on Allied Policy in Russia', n.d., encl. in Simpson to Campbell, 8 Nov. 1919, Curzon MSS, TNA, FO 800/157. For Simpson's Russian expertise, see min. Crowe, 14 June 1919, on Akers-Douglas to Crowe, 13 June 1919, Curzon MSS, TNA, FO 800/151.

61 Curzon to Mackinder and *vice versa*, 23 and 27 Oct. 1919, Curzon MSS, TNA, FO 800/251. This is not the place to re-examine Mackinder's mission. For detailed accounts of this episode see Simone Pelizza's chapter in this collection and B.W. Blouet, 'Sir Halford Mackinder as British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-1920', *Geographical Journal* cxlii, 2 (1976), 228-36; for Curzon's policy see J.N. Fisher, '"On the glacies of India": Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* viii, 1 (1997), 50-82.

62 Memo. Mackinder, 'Report on the Situation in South Russia', 21 Jan. 1920, E.L. Woodward and R. Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st ser. iii, 1919 (London, repr. 1970), no. 656. An excellent account of the military context is offered by E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh, repr. 2005), 161-229.

At the end of January 1920, the cabinet interrogated Mackinder on various aspects of his scheme. He reaffirmed that 'he would range up all the anti-Bolshevist States, from Finland to the Caucasus, giving them a certain amount of support.' This meant re-equipping Denikin 'but on a more modest scale' and for primarily defensive purposes. Britain had to 'hold the Baku-Batum line' and take over Denikin's Caspian flotilla: 'Any policy of support to individual states merely involved waste of money without anything effective being done. It was necessary to adopt the whole policy or to do nothing.'⁶³

That 'whole policy' was the product of Mackinder's heartland theory with its geographical parameters for military and political action. But it offered little of practical value to wary ministers in London, who, perhaps rightly, suspected public opinion of having no appetite for yet more military adventure - and perhaps his rhetorical flourishes grated on their innate pragmatism. Already on 14 January, one week before Mackinder dispatched his lengthy memorandum, the cabinet had been informed of the 'impending defeat of Denikin'. Not a few of its members took the same view as H.A.L. Fisher, whose position as education minister belied his importance in the cabinet and who dismissed 'Mackinder's absurd report' as impractical.⁶⁴

It may well be argued that Mackinder's attempt to give practical meaning to his revived heartland theory ran aground on his government's lack of a sense of strategic opportunity and urgency.⁶⁵ Yet in one respect, he was proved right. The most likely result of a failure to apply his remedy, he predicted, was a form of 'Jacobin czardom': 'The new army, the persistent propaganda, and the beginnings of a centralised industry all point in this direction.'⁶⁶

Although no Communist sympathizer, Mackinder was impressed by what appeared to be the successes of Stalinist industrialisation in the 'new Scythia'. There was a 'dynamic mentality' at work in the Soviet Union, he reflected in 1935, a mentality that, 'with command of a working population of 160 millions, claim[ed] to be re-making the geography, physical as well as human, of one seventh of the land on this globe.'⁶⁷ The Second World War reinforced this view of Soviet power

63 Supplementary cabinet notes, 29 Jan. 1920, Curzon MSS, FO 800/251.

64 Fisher diary, 14 and 29 Jan. 1920, Fisher MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Fisher 14. Fisher nevertheless also noted that the new regimes in Azerbaijan and Georgia were 'anti-Bolshevik and friendly to us', diary, 15 Jan. 1920, *ibid.*

65 A point made by Sloan, 'Mackinder', 31.

66 Memo. Mackinder, 21 Jan. 1920, *DBFP* (1) iii, no. 656.

67 H.J. Mackinder, 'Foreword', N. Mikhaylov, *Soviet Geography: The New Industrial and Economic Distribution of the USSR* (London, 1935), v-vi; for the background see W.H. Parker, *An Histor-*

and so shaped Mackinder's analysis during this, the final phase of his career. Renewed conflict kindled fresh interest in his earlier works particularly in America, where it was frequently cited in debates about geopolitics and grand strategy. The reissuing of *Democratic Ideals* caught the interest of the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, at whose invitation Mackinder wrote one of his last major pieces in 1943. To a large degree this was a gloss on his original 'pivot' essay, combining autobiographical reflections with a vigorous reassertion of the heartland theory. Inevitably, a significant portion of it dealt with strategic aspects of the war effort against Hitler's Germany and its Axis allies. Yet it is striking just how much Mackinder cleaved to the Russian theme of his geopolitics. Not only had Imperial Russia's expansion in East Asia helped to germinate his idea of a geopolitical heartland, Soviet control over the latter was rife with 'vast potentialities ..., to say nothing of the industrial reserves in Lenaland [i.e. Siberia].' All of this led to one 'unavoidable conclusion':

if the Soviet Union emerges from, this war as conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land Power on the globe. Moreover, she will be the Power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth. For the first time in history it is manned by a garrison sufficient in number and quality.

For now, Mackinder stressed the defensive strengths of the Soviet ally. His immediate concern remained with a potential revival of the German menace. If faced with 'two *unshakable* fronts', he argued, future German leaders would never contemplate warlike adventures again. This, in turn, required 'effective and lasting cooperation between America, Britain and France, the first for depth of defense, the second as the moated forward stronghold ... and the third as the defensible bridgehead.' This was latest iteration of Mackinder's notion of a maritime rim, now organised in an alliance and kept together by 'amphibious power.' He called his geopolitical concept 'the Midland Ocean - the North Atlantic - and its dependent seas and river basins.'⁶⁸

Mackinder conceived of this maritime combination as the vital Western bulwark against any future German aggression. But what was vital to containing a threat emanating from the centre of the continent was equally useful to efforts to check a military power in control of the heartland and the eastern half of central Europe. Therein lay the attraction of Mackinder's geopolitical concept for those

ical Geography of Russia (London, 1968), 324-45.

68 Mackinder, 'Round World', 596, 600, 601, and 604. The reception of Mackinder's work in war-time America lies outside the scope of this chapter; for some discussion of this see Blouet, *Mackinder*, 191-5.

who pressed for a containment strategy in the incipient Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union. Mackinder did not live to see this new phase in great power politics. He died on 6 March 1947. But his ideas had taken hold on the geopolitical imagination of British ministers and officials. Almost exactly a year after Mackinder's death, responding to the recent overthrow of the Czechoslovak government by local communists, Ernest Bevin, foreign secretary in the postwar Labour government, warned of the urgent need to organise Western defences - and he used Mackinderite language. There were no limits to Soviet expansionism: 'physical control of the Eurasian land mass and eventual control of the whole world island is what the *Politburo* is aiming at - no less a thing than that. It has really become a matter of the defence of Western civilisation.'⁶⁹ Mackinder's geographical conceptualisation had come into its own.⁷⁰

* * *

As seen, Mackinder's geographical thinking in general, and his heartland theory in particular, reflected the assumptions and concerns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And as discussed, his views of Russian economic, military and organisational power were somewhat exaggerated. Imperial Russia proved nowhere near as strong, internally and externally, in 1904 and 1914, as Mackinder had thought. Nor did 'garrisoning' the heartland enable the twentieth-century Soviet Union to overcome the inherent contradictions of its system under the extreme pressures of the Cold War geopolitical competition. In Central Asia, for instance, enforced agricultural expansion did not result in increased harvest yields; nor did the extraction of raw materials there benefit either the region or European Russia.⁷¹ Not infrequently also, rhetorical flourishes allowed Mackinder to skirt over conceptual or analytical problems. Nevertheless, his power of generalisation was such

69 Memo. Bevin, 'The Threat to Western Civilisation', 3 Mar. 1948, TNA, CAB 129/25/CP(48) 72. The note was drafted by Gladwyn Jebb, later Britain's vociferously anti-Soviet ambassador at the United Nations; for the background see A. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, iii, *Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (Oxford, 1985 (pb)), 525-7. Suspicions of Soviet ambitions had slowly matured during the war years, see G. Ross, 'Introduction', id. (ed.), *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents in Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1941-45* (Cambridge, 1984), 1-68.

70 See for instance D.J. Hooson, 'A New Soviet Heartland?', *Geographical Journal* cxxviii, 1 (1962), 19-29.

71 I.M. Matley, 'Agricultural Development (1864-1963)', E. Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview* (Durham, NC, 3rd ed., 1994), 304-9, though he overstates the importance of cotton for the development of Central Asia; see also S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford, 2001), 10-24.

that his geopolitical arguments both reflected and shaped official policy-making, even if he himself was denied a significant role in Britain's public life. With his emphasis on a broader geographical and historical dynamic he left behind a legacy that makes for fruitful strategic analysis: 'It is as a mental foundation for judgment in action that geography, history and literature have their function.'⁷² In that sense, geopolitical analysis furnished an important 'aid to statecraft.'⁷³

The shifts in global power political patterns at the beginning of the twenty-first century may well call into question aspects of Mackinder's heartland idea. They do not altogether devalue it, however. But history may well have a twist in store, one which Mackinder if not anticipated then at least considered a possibility, albeit couched in the language of his day. The disruptive nature of contemporary Russian policy notwithstanding, the Russian state suffers from significant structural, demographic, economic and technological, weaknesses which may well entrench its continued decline. This may lead to the further opening of the heartland region to Chinese influence under the cover of the current Sino-Russian undeclared alliance for 'comprehensive strategic coordination and practical cooperation', even though, of course, China's rise owed more to Beijing's skilful manipulation of global maritime trade than control over heartland resources.⁷⁴

When developing his 'pivot' idea in 1904, Mackinder made a somewhat speculative suggestion: 'Were the Chinese ... to overthrow the Russian Empire and conquer its territory, they might constitute the yellow peril to the world's freedom just because they would add an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent, an advantage as yet denied to the Russian tenant of the pivot region.'⁷⁵

It would be misguided simply to apply a seemingly Mackinderite template to this or any other contemporary problem, as if it were a scientific law. Any such attempt, as Mackinder himself pointed out in 1915, would be 'doomed to failure. We shall cause both scientific men and the historians to throw stones at geography.' Under twenty-first-century conditions strategic power may no longer rest solely on formal territorial control, but history does not grant permanent tenancy rights of any kind - and therein at least may lie a valuable geostrategic insight.

72 H.J. Mackinder, 'Geography, an Art and a Philosophy', *Geography* xxvii, 4 (1942), 128.

73 F.J. Teggart, 'Geography as an Aid to Statecraft: An Appreciation of Mackinder's "Democratic Ideals and Reality"', *Geographical Review* viii, 4-5 (1919), 227-42.

74 Chinese Foreign Ministry statement on Xi-Putin meeting, 24 Oct. 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202410/t20241025_11516002.html.

75 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', 437.

Delusions of Containment: Sir Halford Mackinder and Soviet Russia, 1919-20

BY SIMONE PELIZZA*

The fate of the former Russian Empire was a big issue at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.¹ Indeed, the victorious Allies had to deal with the requests for support and recognition of newly independent States like Latvia and Georgia and the need to develop a common strategy toward the Bolshevik regime now in power in Moscow. Moreover, Britain, France, and the United States were already involved in the brutal civil war between the Bolsheviks and the various White armies opposing them, providing direct support to the forces of General Denikin in the Kuban and those of Admiral Kolchak in Siberia.² Yet, despite the deep belief that Bolshevism represented a serious threat to international security, the Allied governments struggled to reach a common position on the Russian question. The absence of a united anti-Bolshevik front and the conflicting interests of the new States generated confusion, while the different and uncoordinated initiatives of the individual governments made extremely difficult the adoption of a consistent Allied policy toward Russia and its contested borderlands.

By the end of the conference, the declining military fortunes of the White armies convinced the Allies that the time for direct intervention against Lenin's regime had passed and reconciling the reconstruction of a united Russia with the independence of the post-revolutionary States, maybe in a federal form as suggested by British diplomat James Young Simpson, was unfeasible.³ But dis-

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1 Charlotte Alston, "The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic": Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919', *History*, 91 (2006), pp. 24-44.

2 For a general overview of the subject, see George A. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921: A Study in the Politics and Diplomacy of the Russian Civil War* (Notre Dame, IN, 1966); Clifford Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918-1920* (London, 2006); Anna Reid, *A Nasty Little War: The West's Fight to Reverse the Russian Revolution* (London, 2023).

3 Alston, 'Suggested Basis', pp. 42-4.

engagement proved difficult, especially for Britain which was concerned by the implications of Bolshevism for its imperial security in Asia. This concern was strengthened by the presence at the Foreign Office of Lord Curzon, former Viceroy of India, whose constant advocacy for the protection of the land routes to the Raj had secured in late 1918 a significant political and military commitment in the Caucasus.⁴ Now unwilling to release such commitment, Curzon tried to revive his ambitious plans of a wide regional anti-Bolshevik alliance, composed by Denikin's Volunteer Army and various newly independent States of Eastern Europe. In the summer of 1919, he sent seasoned diplomat Oliver Wardrop to Tbilisi to negotiate a strategic alliance between the Georgian government and Denikin.⁵ Wardrop's first reports from the region were encouraging, but Curzon felt that nothing serious could be done before the Transcaucasian republics confirmed their interest in cooperating with Denikin. This could be done through some form of federation which presented a 'united case' of the anti-Bolshevik forces to the Allies.⁶ To test this possibility, a few months later Curzon obtained from the cabinet the appointment of a High Commissioner to South Russia whose main task was to ascertain the situation in the field and revive relations with Denikin, discussing the creation of a united front against Bolshevism with the neighbouring countries. The man chosen for the job was an old acquaintance of the Foreign Secretary: Halford Mackinder, renowned geographer and former director of the London School of Economics (LSE), recently re-elected as Conservative MP for Camlachie (Glasgow) in the general election of December 1918.

Geography as an Aid to Imperial Defence

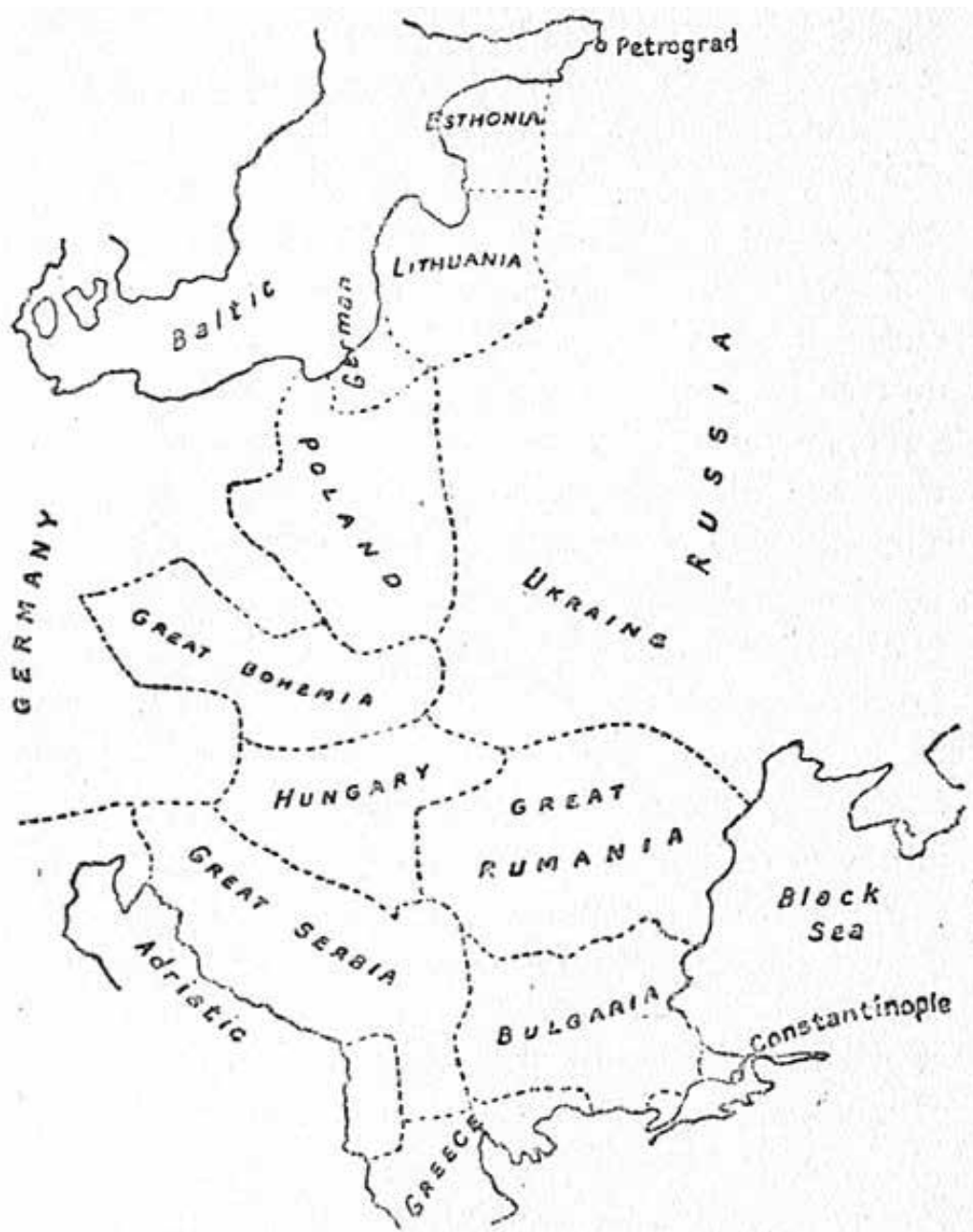
Curzon's choice was not only influenced by personal considerations; he and Mackinder shared similar political beliefs and strategic views. Both men were ardent imperialists and committed anti-Bolsheviks, with Mackinder fighting energetically his 1918 re-election campaign on the fear of communism and the threat it posed to British society.⁷ They also had close ties with the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and had repeatedly tried to use geography as a

4 John Fisher, '“On the Glacis of India”: Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 8 (1997), pp. 50-82; Sean Kelly, 'How far West?: Lord Curzon's Transcaucasian (Mis)Adventure and the Defence of British India, 1918-23', *The International History Review*, 35 (2013), pp. 273-94.

5 Brinkley, *Volunteer Army*, pp. 175-6.

6 Fisher, 'On the Glacis', p. 75.

7 Simone Pelizza, 'Geopolitics, Education, and Empire: The Political Life of Sir Halford Mackinder, 1895-1925' (PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 2013), pp. 174-6.



The Middle Tier of East European States.

Fig 31 from Mackinder's *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919)

potential guide for imperial defence. In the case of Mackinder, this was the product of a long personal and professional reflection on the importance of the subject for public life, started during his time as a university lecturer in the late 1880s. Inspired by the RGS campaign for the reform of geographical teaching, he believed that geography could help the British people to develop 'an accurate appreciation of space-relations in history', providing a solid basis for the preservation of their country's global interests in an age of intense international competition.⁸ Without such spatial awareness Britain was at risk of being eclipsed by new 'military Powers' like Germany or the United States which could use the resources of 'vast territories' to build large fleets and wrestle global sea power from British hands.⁹ The days of old Victorian certainties were over and the country desperately needed a new vision for the 20th century and its relentless technological progress, which was revolutionizing time and distance with disruptive consequences for the future of the British Empire. To illustrate better this point, Mackinder delivered a long lecture at the RGS in early 1904, titled 'The Geographical Pivot of History', where he gave full vent to his geographical expertise and vivid imagination to depict an impressive picture of world history centred on the dynamic interaction between space and human activity.¹⁰

According to Mackinder, European countries had successfully colonised all the main continents of the world thanks to their skilful exploitation of sea power. But now this long era, which started with the epic voyages of Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama, was coming to an end, and land power was quickly reassessing its pre-eminence due to the construction of big transcontinental railways in the heart of Eurasia. These railways worked 'great wonders in the steppe' and created the conditions for the development of a vast and self-sufficient economic system cut off from oceanic trade.¹¹ This evolution represented the rebirth of 'the pivot's region of world history' from which all the great nomadic peoples of the past (Scythians, Mongols, Turks) had come to subjugate the fertile lands of Europe and Asia. And Tsarist Russia was the most favoured country to exploit its advantages, due to its control of the central regions of the Eurasian landmass: 'Russia replaces the Mongol Empire. Her pressure on

8 Halford Mackinder, 'Modern Geography, British and German', *The Geographical Journal*, 6 (1895), p. 379. For a more detailed look at Mackinder's geographical ideas, see Pelizza, 'Geopolitics', pp. 18-47.

9 *The Times*, 22 October 1903, p. 8.

10 Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), pp. 421-37.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 434.

Finland, on Scandinavia, on Poland, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen... The full development of her modern railway mobility is merely a matter of time.¹² It was a formidable threat, especially for Britain's eastern empire, and it needed an adequate strategy to be countered by Western powers. In the final part of the lecture, Mackinder suggested the creation of a great international alliance and the use of peninsulas like India and Korea as natural 'bridge heads' for attacking the 'pivot' area. And he closed his remarks reminding his audience of the crucial importance of geography for understanding 'the actual balance of political power' in the world and its future changes.¹³

Though appreciated by his few spectators, including archaeologist D.G. Hogarth and military writer Spenser Wilkinson, Mackinder's address failed to reach a wider public and remained a marginal contribution to contemporary debates on imperial defence. Yet Mackinder continued to work on his geo-strategic vision and came back frequently on several of its aspects in the following years, refining them and making more practical suggestions on how Britain could contain the threat of the Russian-controlled 'pivot' area. He became, for example, increasingly focused on the Dominions (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa) and their potential contribution to imperial defence; he saw them as 'reservoirs of white man-power' which could be mobilised to defend India from hostile continental powers.¹⁴ During a trip to Canada in 1908 he was impressed by the prosperity of the country and, speaking to the citizens of Winnipeg, he advocated the creation of a great imperial fleet and 'a higher management of imperial defences' which reunited Britain and its self-governing colonies against the 'autocratic' threat posed by Russia, Germany, and 'the blind forces rising in the east of Asia'.¹⁵ He also emphasized the vital importance of the Suez Canal for imperial communications and warned of the increasing threat posed by Turkey's 'fanatical man-power' to its security, something that the Royal Navy could not prevent anymore due to geographical constraints and the expansion of railways in the Middle East.¹⁶ These observations were important for the overall revision of the 'pivot' concept and its strategic implications, but they were still fragmentary and quite disorganized. Mackinder's political career also put the

12 Ibid., p. 436.

13 Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', pp. 436-7.

14 *The Times*, 4 February 1905, p. 7.

15 *Manitoba Free Press*, 11 September 1908, p. 6.

16 Halford Mackinder, 'Man-Power as a measure of national and imperial strength', *National and English Review*, 45 (1905), p. 140.

issue on the shelf; his election as Camlachie MP in 1910 and his subsequent commitments at Westminster absorbed all his attention and did not allow time for further significant intellectual work.¹⁷ It was the outbreak of World War I in 1914 which changed everything, returning the brilliant geographer to the field of imperial defence and the thorny Russian ‘problem’.

Great Kaiserdoms and Small Nations

The war marked a significant turning point in Mackinder’s political and intellectual life. The sudden unravelling of the old order both in Britain and Europe forced him to rethink personal beliefs and offered new opportunities to present his geo-strategic concepts to the establishment and the broader public. The conflict also nurtured a certain idealistic streak in his thought; by 1916, he constantly emphasised the importance of parliamentary democracy against ‘Prussian methods’ and joined the ranks of various groups (New Europe, Serbian Society) who campaigned for a reordering of Central and Eastern Europe upon the principle of nationality.¹⁸ Surveying the condition of the region on the *Glasgow Herald*, Mackinder underlined the arbitrary character of its ‘present political frontiers’ and the artificial nature of Austria-Hungary, which – together with German imperialism – had produced ‘the present great war.’ Against Austro-German hegemonic desires, expressed especially in the *Mitteuropa* project of Friedrich Naumann, the Allies should support the creation of ‘a new federal Great Power’ reuniting all the different nationalities of Central and Eastern Europe into a single bloc capable to defend itself and restore the continental balance of power.¹⁹ This vision was also inspired by the belief that ‘the day of great Kaiserdoms’ had seriously been challenged by the war and ‘minor nationalities’ might play a key role in the future reconstruction of the international system.²⁰ Of course, Mackinder did not lose sight of British strategic interests in this scenario: a federation or alliance of newly independent nations, especially

17 On Mackinder’s experience as an MP, see Pelizza, ‘Geopolitics’, pp. 81–107. For a general overview of his political career, see also Brian Blouet, ‘The political career of Sir Halford Mackinder’, *Political Geography Quarterly*, 6 (1987), pp. 355–67.

18 *Hansard*, 5th series, House of Commons Deb., LXXV, 1915, cols. 1237–9; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Days of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981).

19 *The Glasgow Herald*, 30 January 1915, p. 11. On Friedrich Naumann, see Emmy and Stéphane Jonas, ‘Friedrich Naumann et l’idée germanique de Mitteleuropa’, *Revue des Sciences Sociales*, 37 (2007), pp. 100–7.

20 Ibid.

in the Balkans, represented a powerful defensive bulwark on the road to India and guaranteed Britain's pre-eminent position in the Middle East. In his eyes, European freedom and British imperial security were closely intertwined, contributing to the maintenance of global peace after the war.

The collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917-18 added new elements and a strong sense of urgency to Mackinder's reflection. The risk of German expansion in former Tsarist lands and the rise of Bolshevism, with its ambitions of global revolution, threatened European post-war reconstruction and showed all the dangerous naivety of Woodrow Wilson's utopian internationalism. In response, Mackinder wrote *Democratic Ideals and Reality* where he tried to present an engaging and effective strategy of action for the delegates at the Paris Peace Conference. Full of maps and diagrams, the book aimed to reconcile the liberal impulses generated by the war with the 'lasting realities' of the physical world, making the world 'safe' for young and old democracies.²¹ According to Mackinder, 'generous visions' of liberty and equality were extremely vulnerable in an international reality dominated by material constraints and despotic 'organisers', who were unencumbered by the limits and scruples of democratic states.²² Therefore politicians should learn to think 'strategically' and use geography as a precious guide to protect the new world created by the war.²³ Indeed, 'the outlines of land and water, and the lie of mountains and rivers' had not changed in the previous centuries and still offered indispensable support for the difficult work of the statesmen.²⁴ Recovering and readapting several concepts of the RGS address of 1904, Mackinder depicted then the image of a common continental unit between Europe, Asia, and Africa, called the 'World-Island', centred on the wide plains between Eastern Europe and Central Asia.²⁵ This strategic area was the 'Heartland' of the world, whose control led to global power: 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World.'²⁶ If democracies wanted to survive in the post-war era, they had therefore to avoid the control of the 'Heartland' by a single power, maintaining a careful balance between the various cultures and ethnic groups living in the area. This crucial aim could

21 Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London, 1919), p. 5.

22 Ibid., pp. 6-7.

23 Ibid., p. 33.

24 Ibid., p. 38.

25 Ibid., p. 96.

26 Ibid., p. 194.

be achieved by supporting the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe and transforming them into a powerful strategic barrier against Germany and Russia, the two powers most likely to seek the domination of the 'Heartland' in the future. These nations did not lack 'the will to order and independence' to check their autocratic neighbours and represented worthy allies for the preservation of a free and peaceful Europe.²⁷ A regional alliance, modern railway communications and access to the Atlantic Ocean would allow them to 'effectively balance the Germans of Austria and Prussia', while the League of Nations would cover their back in the Baltic and the Black Seas, using naval power to hinder any Russian resurgence. This scheme accomplished, and 'there would appear to be no impossibility' of achieving the promising democratic ideals emerged from the ruins of the war.²⁸

Democratic Ideals and Reality reflected the evolution of Mackinder's thought during the great geopolitical storm of 1914-18. Influenced by his wartime activity in favour of Central and Eastern European nationalities, he believed they could become solid pillars of the new international system shaped at Versailles, countering both German revanchism and the revolutionary messianism of the Bolshevik regime. Yet this view was quite minoritarian at the time and the book failed to make an impression on the diplomatic community, receiving also negative reviews on the press. *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, dismissed the main arguments of the work as 'a political head and tail that could pretty easily be taken off', while American sociologist Frederick J. Teggart thought that Mackinder's ideas were 'out of harmony' with the leading tendencies of the post-war era.²⁹ Even old friends like Leo Amery paid little attention to the volume, rediscovering its 'visionary' character only during World War II.³⁰ However, Mackinder's great geo-strategic exercise caught the eye of Curzon, who saw it as a reflection of his containment policy against Soviet Russia. As a result, Mackinder was chosen as High Commissioner to South Russia and had finally the possibility to put his ideas to the test in the tumultuous winter of 1919-20.

27 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 206.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

29 *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1919, p. 5; 'Democratic Ideals and Reality' (review by F.J. Teggart). *The American Historical Review*, 25 (1920), p. 259.

30 *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, ed. by John Barnes and David Nicholson (London, 1988), p. 874. In 1904 Amery had attended the RGS address, offering an insightful critique of Mackinder's 'pivot' concept. See Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), pp. 439-41.

Theory vs Reality: The South Russian Mission

Before leaving for his mission, Mackinder was thoroughly briefed by Curzon and received precise instructions: he had to explain 'the attitude' of the British government to Denikin and underline the limited support available for his forces. He also had to persuade the Russian General to respect the 'line of demarcation' between his territory and that of independent Georgia, showing his commitment to the right of self-determination in the lands of the former Tsarist Empire.³¹ Finally, Mackinder should use all his powers as High Commissioner to ascertain the conditions of Jewish communities and protect them from the 'excesses' of the Volunteer Army. The main aim of the mission was to push Denikin toward 'a policy consonant with the trend of Western democratic opinion' and revive the sympathies of Western governments for the anti-Bolshevik cause, setting thus the political ground for a continuation of foreign military aid to White forces and their possible alliance with Eastern European countries.³² For Curzon, this was the last attempt to keep in place his containment strategy in the East; he knew that Western detachment from Russian affairs was constantly growing and that many British politicians saw their country's campaign against Bolshevism as a quixotic and unacceptable 'distraction' from more serious issues at home and in the colonies. Hence Mackinder's mission served to introduce new elements in the diplomatic debate over Russia and earn perhaps more time to the wavering anti-Bolshevik crusade. It was a very complex and delicate task, and one might wonder why Curzon decided to entrust it to a man like Mackinder who had no real experience in international affairs. Perhaps he believed that Mackinder's powerful imagination and solid geographical expertise could seize new opportunities on the ground and succeed where seasoned diplomats and military officers had previously failed. Whatever the reason, his expectations were going to be disappointed.

Unsure about the extent of his powers, Mackinder left Britain in early December 1919 and made his first stop in Paris, where he met with several diplomats and the All-Russia Council, a group of émigrés led by Prince Lvov who championed the cause of anti-Bolshevik Russians in the West.³³ Then he pro-

31 The National Archives [TNA], CAB/24/94/26, 'Draft Instructions for Mr. Mackinder on the Mission to South Russia', November 1919, pp. 1-3.

32 'Draft Instructions', p. 3.

33 Also known as the Russian Political Conference, the group was not formally recognized by the Allies but exercised a certain influence on debates relating to Russia during the Paris Peace Conference. See Alston, 'Suggested Basis', p. 26, 38-9.

ceeded to Poland where he discussed with General Pilsudski the prospects of a military alliance with Denikin and the Baltic States against the Bolsheviks. The Polish leader seemed receptive to the idea, but territorial and political disputes with both his potential partners represented a serious obstacle to its implementation. On this point, Mackinder warned former Prime Minister Paderewski about the need to respect the rights of the Baltic States, even if these could still be 'subject to limitation' for the 'superior interests' of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. And he also emphasised how the proposed regional coalition was 'essential' for Poland's security, keeping the twin danger of Germany and Russia apart.³⁴ Travelling in harsh winter conditions, Mackinder then arrived in Romania, but the uncertain political situation of the country did not allow him to present his diplomatic proposals to local authorities. After meeting the Bulgarian king Boris III in Sofia, he reached Constantinople and crossed the Black Sea aboard the battleship HMS Marlborough, arriving at Novorossiysk on January 1, 1920.³⁵ There he met Oliver Wardrop, the British Chief Commissioner of Transcaucasia, and discussed the regional situation with him. According to Wardrop, Georgia and Azerbaijan were 'reasonably well-established and on good terms with one another', but it was unclear if they could successfully resist a Bolshevik advance in the Caucasus.³⁶ Finally, after several delays due to military reasons and problems on the railway line, Mackinder reached Denikin's headquarters near Ekaterinodar and met personally with the Russian General in the pivotal moment of his diplomatic mission.

During the meeting, Mackinder urged Denikin to establish 'a modern Government' in his territories to gain popular favour and the support of the neighbouring countries. Indeed, the Volunteer Army was unable to defeat the Bolsheviks alone and it desperately needed allies to revert an increasingly difficult military situation. These allies were 'the Finns, the Estonians, the Letts, the Poles, the Georgians, and perhaps the Roumanians' assisted by the 'economic methods and organising brains' of the British and the French.³⁷ Therefore Denikin should renounce his plans of a Tsarist restoration and acknowledge the rights of the newly independent Eastern European States, gaining their political friendship and their military help. It was the only possible way to avoid defeat and save Russia from Bolshevism.

34 TNA, CAB/24/97/17, 'Report on the Situation in South Russia by Sir H. Mackinder, MP', 21 January 1920, p. 15.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

37 'Report', pp. 16-7.



A Polish anti-Soviet Resistance leaflet (1944/45) against the demarcation line between Poland and Belarus forced by Stalin, recalling the proposed Curzon Line “A” as drawn in 1919 by Lewis Bernstein Namier. The leaflet calls the Curzon Line “the line of the 3rd Partition” of Poland (1939).

Initially, Denikin resisted these suggestions, but some days later – facing the quick collapse of his military position in South Russia – he subscribed to all Mackinder’s proposals, including a future settlement of the Polish-Russian border on ‘ethnographical principles’. On his part, the British High Commissioner promised the continuation of Western military aid to the Volunteer Army and the possible intervention of foreign troops – perhaps Serbian and Bulgarian – in support of Denikin’s government.³⁸ He also assured that White officers and their families would soon be evacuated by the Royal Navy, escaping the retaliations of the approaching Bolshevik forces. In the end, this was the only part of the agreement that was effectively implemented: the rest collapsed with the final defeat of the Volunteer Army some weeks later, marking the end of the West’s anti-Bolshevik intervention in Russia. Mackinder had come too late, and even if some of his proposals seemed to find a promising reception, they were too vague and limited to change the situation on the ground. Theory was also no match for reality in London, where Mackinder quickly arrived to try to persuade the Brit-

³⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

ish government to continue its assistance to Denikin and promote a great military coalition in Eastern Europe against Bolshevism. His pleas for 'a system of alliances and of steady organisation' capable of sustaining the Volunteer Army fell on deaf ears and could not prevent the withdrawal of any support from the faltering anti-Bolshevik campaign.³⁹ Even Curzon recognized the untenability of his containment policy and accepted the beginning of a cautious rapprochement with the Bolshevik government, dictated by the need to reopen the Russian grain market to a European continent on the brink of starvation. In a letter to General Keyes, he complained about the complete failure of Denikin and considered it 'idle to hope for any substantial recovery' of the anti-Bolshevik cause in South Russia.⁴⁰ Bitterly disappointed, Mackinder resigned his diplomatic position and vented all his frustration in a letter to Charles Hardinge, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office: 'It was up to me to propose and defend a policy. But events and opinions had marched while I was isolated in Russia. On a larger view...the Cabinet appears to have rejected my plan.'⁴¹ Two years later he lost his seat in Parliament and never had a chance to participate again in the formulation and implementation of his country's foreign policy.⁴²

Anatomy of a Failure

Besides the bad timing of his travel to South Russia, there were various reasons behind the failure of Mackinder's great scheme. First, it underestimated the strength of the Bolshevik regime and overestimated that of Denikin's government, deeply unpopular for its incompetence and its brutal repressive policies.⁴³ Moreover, the military fortunes of the Volunteer Army were on an irreversible decline, with thousands of starved and ill-equipped soldiers relentlessly pressured by the Red Army in the Caucasus by the time Mackinder visited Denikin's headquarters in early 1920. Believing that such a dire situation could be reversed through some great diplomatic alliances still confined to paper and some vague direct military intervention, perhaps performed by ill-trained Balkan troops, was pure wishful thinking and was never taken seriously by the British cabinet, who

39 Ibid., p. 7.

40 Curzon to Keyes, 9 February 1920, in *Documents in British Foreign Policy, 1919-39*, edited by E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, 1st series, Vol. III (London, 1949), p. 814.

41 Mackinder to Hardinge, 4 February 1920, in *Documents*, III, p. 822.

42 On Mackinder's career after his electoral defeat, see Pelizza, 'Geopolitics', pp. 198-225.

43 Viktor G. Bortnevski, 'White Administration and White Terror (The Denikin Period)', *Russian Review*, 52 (1993), pp. 354-66.

worked mainly to disengage from Russia and put an end to its confused anti-Bolshevik campaign. Mackinder never understood the dissonance between his geo-strategic designs and the reality on the ground, insisting on an unrealistic revitalization of Denikin's forces and refusing any possible negotiation with the Bolshevik government. Yet even here he ignored reality: large sectors of British society did not want further military 'adventures' abroad and were willing to try diplomacy to deal with the rising Soviet regime in Moscow. This was shown, for example, by the large agitation of the British labour movement against military aid to Poland during its war with the Soviets in 1920.⁴⁴ Mackinder condemned this attitude, emphasizing the importance of Poland and the other 'border States' to prevent the rise of a new Russian 'Czardom' dangerous for democracies, but his perorations failed to impress the House of Commons.⁴⁵ Influenced by the mood of their constituents, British politicians had little sympathy for the new fragile democracies born at Versailles and sought mainly to focus on national problems, staying away from any serious continental commitment. Mackinder's social conservatism did not allow him to see the war-weariness of the British public and its desire for peace and retrenchment, while his obsession for Bolshevik 'despotism' led him to advocate for diplomatic and military initiatives that were unfeasible. No wonder then that the South Russian mission was such a crushing fiasco.

But there was a deeper flaw in Mackinder's proposals, something even embarrassing considering their claim to be based on a correct appreciation of geographical and historical 'realities'. They downplayed too easily the many territorial conflicts existing between the new Eastern European States and ignored the ethnic and national animosities that bedevilled the region since well before the Great War. In this context, the concept of a large federation or defensive alliance against the Bolsheviks appeared quite fantastic from the beginning, receiving little support from local political leaders. The only exception was Pilsudski in Poland, but his interest in Mackinder's scheme was probably dictated by its similarity with his idea of a Polish-led 'Intermarium' between the Baltic and the Black Sea.⁴⁶ In this sense, federalism was seen by Warsaw as a useful instrument

44 For a short survey of the topic, full of digital primary sources, see "'Form you Councils of Action!': Britain and the Polish-Soviet War", The University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre - https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives_online/digital/russia/poland

45 *Hansard*, 5th series, House of Commons Deb., CXXIX, 1920, cols. 1711-8.

46 P. S. Wandycz, 'Poland's Place in Europe in the Concepts of Pilsudski and Dmowski', *East European Politics and Societies*, 4 (1990), pp. 451-68; Marlene Laruelle and Ellen Rivera, *Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium*, IERES

to foster the secession of various territories from Russia, especially Belarus and Ukraine, and create a strong regional bloc capable of resisting a possible Russo-German alliance. Yet even Pilsudski's project failed to materialize, undermined by the fierce nationalism and geopolitical fears of his neighbours. Thus, Mackinder was not the only one to underestimate the power of ethnic and cultural particularism on Eastern European politics, though his geographical expertise should have made him more sensitive to the issues of contested territories and local identities. To be fair, he sensed the problem but continued to cling to the idea that the various nationalities could rally behind the same flag, perhaps under the 'benevolent' influence of the British government. Ultimately, this paternalist assumption doomed his geo-strategic plan from the start.

The Limits of Containment

Mackinder's geo-strategic views were widely reappraised in the 1940s, thanks also to their embarrassing ties with Karl Haushofer's *Geopolitik*.⁴⁷ After the Second World War, they significantly influenced the United States' containment strategy toward the Soviet Union; British geographers like David Hooson contributed to this with books, articles, and ad hoc courses for Pentagon officers.⁴⁸ Gradually, Mackinder became 'a strategist without a place or context', whose ideas – revised, re-interpreted, re-invented – represented an easy formula to understand the challenging geography of Eurasia, suggesting even promising ways to check the remarkable land power of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ The end of the Cold War did not put an end to such a process of de-historicization of the man and his thought. On the contrary, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rebirth of independent States in Eastern Europe and Central Asia sparked a new interest in the 'heartland' concept and its geopolitical implications, gaining even a certain sense of urgency after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's

Occasional Papers No. 1 (Washington, DC, 2019); Robert Istok, Irina Kozarova, and Anna Polackova, 'The Intermarium as a Polish Geopolitical Concept in History and in the Present', *Geopolitics*, 26 (2021), pp. 314-41.

47 Brian Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (Austin, TX, 1987), pp. 189-97; Holger Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess* (Lanham, MD, 2016).

48 David Hooson, 'A New Soviet Heartland?', *The Geographical Journal*, 128 (1962), pp. 19-29; James D. Sidaway, 'Overwriting Geography: Mackinder's Presences, a Dialogue with David Hooson', *Geopolitics*, 14 (2009), pp. 163-70.

49 Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Putting Mackinder in His Place: Material Transformations and Myth', *Political Geography*, 11 (1992), p. 116.



Caricature on the Polish-Soviet Peace Treaty of Riga (1921).

It shows a Polish soldier in old-style and a skull-faced Red Army soldier, together tearing Belarus into two, while stomping on Ukraine. The text above and below reads:

“Down with the shameful partition of Riga! Long live free, undivided rural/peasant Belarus’!” (Wikimedia Commons)

large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. For many, Mackinder seems vindicated and his vision of a united Central-Eastern European bloc, under the banner of NATO and the guise of regional projects like the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), is the best answer to the threat of Russian expansionism.⁵⁰ A threat as vivid and dangerous as that embodied by the Bolsheviks a century ago.

But is it so? The South Russian fiasco of 1919-20 shows that Mackinder seriously misunderstood the complex reality of Eastern Europe and post-Tsarist Russia, advancing proposals with no true chance of success. His ‘containment’ formula was more abstraction than a proper, careful consideration of geographical and human factors. Moreover, his vision was shaped by railways, heavy

⁵⁰ Michael Hochberg and Leonard Hochberg, “Confining the Enemy”: Halford Mackinder’s Theory of Containment and the Conflict in Ukraine’, *Naval War College Review*, 76 (2023), pp. 87-106; Paolo Pizzolo, ‘The Geopolitical Role of the Three Seas Initiative: Mackinder’s ‘Middle Tier’ Strategy Redux’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 76 (2024), pp. 873-90.

industries, and other early 20th century notions of power, while the current world is much more complex and heavily influenced by diverse factors like global economic connectivity and satellite technology.⁵¹ Far from being a misunderstood ‘prophet’ or a ‘strategist for all seasons’, Mackinder was a man of his time and his ideas were the product of the tumultuous atmosphere created by the Great War and its dramatic disruption of the old international order. Therefore, modern strategists and scholars should take them with a pinch of salt, avoiding excessive and dangerous idealization. Of course, this does not mean that Mackinder’s experience is devoid of lessons for our times. One of them could be, for example, the need for a correct appreciation of reality in the formulation of political and military strategies, especially those ambitious in scope or dimension. Another one might instead be the fragile nature of containment as a geo-strategic instrument – it might be effective on paper but in practice its success depends on various factors (solid alliances, political will, clear diplomacy) that might be absent as in the winter of 1919-20. Moreover, context changes with time and the containment of the past might not be useful in the present. Commenting on America’s Cold War strategy in 2001, John Lewis Gaddis observed that ‘[strategic] principles must be adapted’ and that copying from previous experiences is a bad substitute for thinking.⁵² Nothing is set in stone and there must be a constant reappraisal of factors and conditions to avoid dangerous mistakes.

As in other endeavours, the key factor remains human agency. Geography is important but, to quote the same Mackinder, ‘is not the science of all things.’ We should be conscious of this and not believe in the ‘excessive claims’ of ‘its devotees’.⁵³

51 On this point, see especially James Andrew Lewis, ‘Musk versus Mackinder’, *CSIS | Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 14 June 2022 - <https://www.csis.org/analysis/musk-versus-mackinder>

52 John Lewis Gaddis, ‘Strategies of Containment, Past and Future’, *Hoover Digest*, 30 April 2001 - <https://www.hoover.org/research/strategies-containment-past-and-future>

53 Mackinder, ‘Modern Geography’, p. 379.

Ideas and Practices of Geopolitics: A British Perspective on the Mediterranean¹

BY JEREMY BLACK

Geopolitics takes on value as an approach when it is seen as a tool for thinking and not a starkly, deterministic, ‘geography as destiny’ assertion; the last the approach that is all-too-frequently adopted, and notably in the public domain. As a tool for thinking, geopolitics offers the prospect of numerous viewpoints, and, while not all are of equal value, it is useful to note this range. This is very much enhanced if geopolitics is further seen, at least in part, as a discourse, rhetoric, or product and means, of perception.

On the one hand, there is the clear objectivity of physical geography of the type of ‘here-be iron’ or ‘this is the distance from a to b’. Yet, there are also the subjectivities bound up in perception and, indeed, in the response to physical geography. In part, we have an aspect of the interactions of physical and human geography, and, in part, of the diverse strands bound up in the circumstances and dynamics of human geography. Indeed, geopolitics belongs to human geography, but with an understanding of the perception, experience and debates inherent to the latter.

And so with our particular angle, a British perspective, and please note not the British perspective, for the latter would imply that there was only one, which is definitely not the case, either for the Mediterranean or for a more general British approach to geopolitics, strategy and policy, even at any one particular period. The latter caveat is true for both ‘the’ British analysis and ‘the’ implementation. To argue, instead, that there was only one perspective is to downplay the politicised character of geopolitics, and its interaction with strategy.²

¹ An earlier version appeared in NAM, 19, but it has been extensively revised for this collection.

² J. Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, Ind., 2015), *Geographies of an Imperial Power: The British World, 1688-1815* (Bloomington, 2017), *Rethinking Geopolitics* (Bloomington, 2024), and ‘Geopolitics Since the Cold War,’ *RUSI Journal*, 168, no. 6 (2003).

Geopolitics as subject is made more problematic not only because the term has not been in use until comparatively recently, but also due to the extent to which the subsequent literature was on the whole schematic, deterministic and assertive, rather than offering nuance. In searching, nevertheless, for a common theme as far as the Mediterranean is concerned, it would be that British consideration was fundamentally of the sea as naval campaigning stage and maritime thoroughfare. This meant that the Mediterranean was not considered in contrast primarily as a littoral area which encompassed much of Europe's expertise, skill and resource, as well as an important quotient of both from North Africa and the Middle East. Instead, it was most significant as a littoral area during the Crusades when both Richard I and Edward I campaigned there, the former very much focusing England's military effort during the early years of his reign, and then again in the two world wars.

A maritime, more particularly naval, priority ensured that the Mediterranean was generally seen by the British in terms of deployment and bases, more particularly real or potential British ones that were necessary to support such deployment. As such, it was largely a Mediterranean of islands, including Gibraltar as an, in effect, island base; although Alexandria, from 1882, was not such a base. Island bases were far easier to protect as any attempt on them required an amphibious assault, and that was time-consuming as well as particularly uncertain if mounted in the face of the leading naval power, which helped protect Malta from Italian and German attack in 1940-2, and also accounted for the shock caused by the fall of Minorca to the French in 1756 and the alarm arising from that of Crete to the Germans in 1941. By then, the geopolitics of island bases were very different due to air power, both based on them and used in attack. Thus, in World War Two, new runway capacity was built at Gibraltar, helping the RAF to operate.

There was also the need for Britain to assess hostile bases, particularly, prior to the entente of 1904, those of France, more specifically Toulon. In 1940-2, when Vichy France was aligned with Germany, France's North African naval bases, especially Mers-el-Kebir, also came to receive particular attention. The Spanish fleet, with its major bases of Cadiz and Ferrol, was seen rather as an Atlantic challenge than a Mediterranean one; although in 1718 and 1744 the latter capability caused problems for British interests. However, in the Nine Years' War, Spain and Britain were allies, while in the Seven Years' War, Spain did not join France until the last stage in the war.

Italy did not pose a naval challenge to Britain until the runup to World War One when Italy was allied to Germany. This, however, like the Austro-German

alliance, did not pose a crucial problem for Britain, as the combination of alliance with France and Britain's Mediterranean naval strength made the rivalry less serious. Furthermore, Italy remained neutral in 1914 and joined the Allies in 1915; while, in World War One, Germany did not establish itself in France and Greece as it was to do in World War Two. During the latter, in contrast, Italian naval bases, strength and intentions were key issues for British naval planners.

In the case of the long confrontation with France from 1689 to 1819, the need by the British navy to mask Toulon helped ensure a concern for the Western Mediterranean that was far greater than that with the Eastern. This was an aspect of perspective and policy driving geopolitics, rather than of some contrary situation in which there was a supposedly inherent geographical importance. In naval terms, the islands of the western basin of the Mediterranean, including the Tyrrhenian Sea but also the Balearics, were more consequential than those further east. This was a situation that did not really change until the Russian challenge became more prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century, or, rather, was presented as more prominent. Masking Toulon helped make Minorca and Corsica of great significance for Britain, with Gibraltar and Malta as backups, as was Sicily. At the same time, the whole of the western Mediterranean was pertinent, not least due to the need to supply British bases, including with food from North Africa.

The focus on naval bases brought a particular geopolitics, one that changed with developments in technology, notably the shift from sail to steam, subsequent improvements to steam power, and, later, the development of air power. There was also the major geopolitical shift caused by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Begun in 1859, this helped increase the geopolitical significance of Egypt, notably the ports of Alexandria and Suez, and, conversely, affected alternative earlier British (and other) plans for a geopolitical axis via Syria and Iraq to the Persian Gulf, plans revived with the German Berlin to Baghdad and Basra rail plans.

The Suez Canal was a prime instance of the Mediterranean as route plus exit, rather than route to destination. Indeed, the geopolitics of routes to Mediterranean littoral destinations overlapped with, but could also contrast with, that of routes to destinations outside the Mediterranean, via maritime exits or by means of overland routes. Some of the latter were a matter of valleys or mountain passes, as in British plans to move from Italy into the Balkans in 1944, including Churchill's idea of advancing through the Ljubljana Gap from Trieste via Slovenia toward Vienna, in part to persuade Hungary to change sides. In practice, the logistics were highly problematic, the opportunities for the defence good, and

the terrain very difficult for vehicles.³ There were also broader exits that were less fixed in this fashion notably into the Middle East.

The British presence in Tangier in 1661-84, and the naval overwintering or basing in Cadiz on various occasions from 1693, can both be seen as other instances of the process by which 'the Mediterranean' extended further in terms of British interests, not least because Cadiz, like also Lisbon, could serve as a base for power-projection into the Mediterranean. So, from 1704, with Gibraltar at once both Mediterranean and Atlantic, a situation that was very much to the fore in World War Two, and notably for warships based there.

It is also possible to extend this spatial 'plasticity' of the Mediterranean to include British interests and presences via the Aegean into the Black Sea. This was seen in naval attempts to influence developments in Turkey, from the Napoleonic Wars, notably in 1807, to the unsuccessful Aegean campaign in 1943, with the Crimean War of 1854-6 a highpoint. A second highpoint came with the occupation of the Straits after World War One until 1923, a period in which initially there was also major British participation in the Russian Civil War, including the presence of forces in southern Russia and at Batumi. Halford Mackinder was a keen supporter of this forward-projection. He saw places, such as Batumi, both as the bases for intervention and as opportunities denied opponents. This approach was to play a role in the Cold War discussion of geopolitics and notably so with the idea of containment.

There are aspects of geopolitics in which physical geography was to the fore, accepting, at the same time, that geography has many definitions. There was, in contrast, the geopolitics of politics located in (geographical) space, but with the politics more to the fore. Here, the crucial variable was power-politics and, more particularly, the alignment of specific areas with states or polities, as in a consideration of the impact of say the Angevin or the Aragonese or the Habsburg empires.

A standard British approach is to emphasise this level of control, not least by thinking in terms of modern states, as in French or Spanish or Austrian or Turkish, Mediterranean policies. The interaction of these with, in addition, the interplay with outside powers such as Britain, then becomes the subject of geopolitics. This is seen further with modern historical atlases which use undifferentiated blocs of colour in order to provide a clear sense that the geopolitical

3 *German tank map of central Dalmatia identifying problem zones for 'tracked vehicles,'* 1944, BL. Add. Maps X.5433.

actors were modern states of that type.⁴

That, however, is not a very helpful approach, for it ignores the politics of geography, not least in the shape of the compromises and alignments within states, and, indeed, the complexity of the nature of the state. Here we are thinking not so much of modern states where power is contested, as in Libya, Syria, and, within the last four decades, Yugoslavia and Algeria, and, possibly, in the future, increasingly other countries; but, rather, pre-modern polities in which there was a limitation of power and compromise of government accordingly with ideologies that are different to those of today. Moreover, those who are descendants of the population of territories under the control of such states are better able to understand the nature of past power. Possibly the British, particularly the English, who have had relative political cohesion for over a millennium, are not so well-placed to appreciate this situation. There is also the problem posed, as in this piece, by terms such as France or Austria or Spain as summaries for a more complex reality.

To approach British attitudes, we will take several episodes, because a narrative of the full coverage would require many volumes. These attitudes do not include the long period in which British power was not part of the equation (in reality or speculation) and thus discussion, because consideration then is in large part a matter of historiography. Nevertheless, geopolitics as applied or mediated or understood through historiography is indeed a subject of great interest.

To begin in the age of sail is to take note of the impact of sailing conditions on warships. The pattern of Mediterranean currents is at once simple, yet also complex. The former is explained by the major current moving in a counter-clockwise direction eastwards along the coast of North Africa, then from south to north past Israel and Lebanon, before moving back westwards along the northern shore of the Mediterranean to the Strait of Gibraltar. Yet, complex because of differences in surface, intermediate and deep-water masses, and because the Mediterranean is in part a product of subsidiary seas – from east to west, the Aegean, Adriatic and Tyrrhenian – and there is significant disruption to currents and weather produced by islands, notably, but not only, Cyprus, Sicily, Crete, Sardinia and Corsica.⁵

4 For a more sophisticated approach, F. Somaini, *Geografie Politiche Italiane. Tra Medio Evo e Rinascimento* (Milan, 2012). See also J. Black, *Maps and History: Constructing Images of the Past* (New Haven, Conn., 1997).

5 T.M. El-Geziry and I.G. Bryden, 'The circulation pattern in the Mediterranean Seas: issues for modeller consideration,' *Journal of Operational Oceanography*, 3,2 (2010), pp. 39-46.

Alongside currents came the pattern of the winds, which changed very greatly by season and in response to weather systems. Thus, summer winds in the eastern Mediterranean tend to come from the north-west. Winds, such as the mistral, a strong southerly that blows onto the coast of Provence, wrecking ships, made being able to take shelter in harbours very important. The operational impact of the weather was greater in the technology of the past. Galleys had a low freeboard and therefore were vulnerable to high waters in poor weather. Two English kings, Richard I and Edward I, went on the Crusade in the eastern Mediterranean, and their options were affected by sailing conditions as well as power politics.⁶ These geopolitics had to be learned.

Currents, winds, and shipping helped direct practical geopolitics in the Age of Sail. Timing was also an element, for it took time to send a significant fleet from British waters and this effort as well as timing could be affected by the prioritisation involved in the overall problematic character of prioritisation in the face of different strategic uncertainties and priorities. Such a situation has continued to the present, so that the American deployment of warships in support of Israel in 2023-4 was part of a wider concern about naval resources in a situation made uncertain by other commitments, notably against China in the western Pacific. In the world wars, the availability of warships similarly was affected by other commitments which, for Britain, were dramatically expanded, after Italy's entry into the conflict in 1940, first when France settled with Germany in 1940 and, secondly, in 1941 when Japan entered the war.

Moreover, reverting to the Age of Sail, there was the geopolitics of naval bases: Gibraltar could not shelter or support a large squadron, and there was no secure base further east, as Minorca proved vulnerable, while Malta was not captured by the British until 1800. In 1718, the Spanish threat to attack Sicily led the government to threaten the dispatch of a fleet, the British envoy in Paris writing to a Secretary of State: 'I think we should never let it be called in question that our fleet will go into the Mediterranean.'⁷ This did not deter the Spaniards from an invasion, with a successful landing at Palermo on 3 July, but on 11 August the British heavily defeated the Spanish fleet off Cape Passaro.

Yet, as the Spanish force had already landed, the crisis revealed that intervention would be too late unless there was a well-informed and ably-directed

6 J. Pryor, *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571* (Cambridge, 1988).

7 John, 2nd Earl of Stair, to James, Earl Stanhope, 6 Mar. 1718, Maidstone, Kent Archives, U1590 0145/24.

fleet present. This point was underlined when the French successfully invaded Minorca in 1756 and Egypt in 1798, and were able to sail from Toulon, evading blockade as in 1759 (although eventually successfully pursued to Portugal), or in 1778, when the Toulon fleet reached North America. As such, Mediterranean geopolitics again reached to the Atlantic and indeed to its distant shores.

The standard crude measure of power, in this case the number of warships, was inappropriate unless it could be linked to an ability to use this power to full effectiveness. That included the use of bases, such as Messina during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Looked at differently, the measure of both power and effectiveness depended heavily on the particular time-scale in question, and the range of the area covered.

There was no doubt in the British official mind that the geopolitics of the Mediterranean was linked to the wider geopolitics of the European world. The Royal Speech, written by James, Earl Stanhope, and delivered at the start of the Parliamentary session in November 1718, provided a defence of British policy as a response to Spanish aggression:

‘the [Austro-Turkish] war in Hungary, which by our mediation is since happily ended [by the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718], having tempted the court of Spain unjustly to attack the Emperor, and the hopes they have since conceived of raising disturbances in Britain, France, and elsewhere, having encouraged them to believe, that we should not be able to act in pursuance of our treaties ... they have not only persisted in such a notorious violation of the public peace and tranquillity, but have rejected all our amicable proposals and have broke through their most solemn engagements for the security of our commerce.

To vindicate therefore the faith of our former treaties, as well as to maintain those which we have lately made, and to protect and defend the trade of my subjects ... it became necessary for our naval forces to check their progress.’

Yet, to underline the extent to which geopolitics is inherently political, the Parliamentary debate over the Royal Speech saw Robert Walpole, the leader of the opposition Whigs, pejoratively call Stanhope a knight-errant of the Emperor, Charles VI, the ruler of Austria. Walpole was urging caution about interventionist politics, a stance that, once he became Prime Minister in 1721, helped ensure that the British did not oppose the highly-successful Franco-Spanish intervention against Austria in Italy during the War of the Polish Succession (1733-5). As a reminder of the dominance of the political context, Britain did nothing when Spanish forces then conquered Naples and Sicily, whereas they acted in both the War of the Quadruple Alliance and the French Revolutionary and Na-

poleonic Wars, against Spain and France respectively.

Domestic pressure was again mentioned in February 1720, when James Craggs, a Secretary of State, explained that Britain could not yield Gibraltar as the price of peace, as earlier hinted, and as sought by Spain and by Britain's then ally, France:

‘His Majesty’s servants and people ... agree that the cession of that place would not only be a ridicule upon our successes in this war, but that the possession of it will be a great security to our trade in the Mediterranean. And therefore His Majesty were he ever so much disposed to part with it; it may well be doubted whether he would have it in his power to do so.’⁸

Aside from naval planning, it is therefore pertinent to look at the public debate over policy, which increasingly focused on the Mediterranean from the early eighteenth century. In 1718, the engraver and impressive mathematician Reeve Williams wrote a pamphlet in defence of British intervention in Mediterranean power-politics. The inclusion of a map added to the interest of his *Letter from a Merchant to a Member of Parliament, Relating to the Danger Great Britain is in of Losing her Trade, by the Great Increase of the Naval Power of Spain with a Chart of the Mediterranean Sea Annexed*. The Lord Chancellor, Thomas, 1st Earl of Macclesfield, who had a strong personal interest in mathematics, allegedly ordered the printing of 7,000 copies and Williams a further 2,000.⁹ This pamphlet was designed to explain the commercial rationale for British geopolitics, and notably a defence of a major act of power-projection.

On a frequent pattern, the impact of the pamphlet was increased by press coverage, the *Worcester Post-Man* of 21 November 1718 reporting:

‘Last Saturday a notable book was delivered to the Members of Parliament, with a chart annexed of the Mediterranean Sea, whereby it demonstrately appears of what importance it is to the trade of Great Britain, that Sicily and Sardinia should be in the hands of a faithful ally, and if possible not one formidable by sea. That these two islands lie like two nets spread to intercept not only the Italian but Turkey and Levant trade.... That should the naval power of Spain increase in the manner it has lately done, that kingdom may assume to herself that trade of the Mediterranean Sea, and impose what she pleases as the King of Denmark does at Elsinore [at the entrance to the Baltic].’

8 Craggs to Stair, 18 Feb. 1720, London, National Archives, State Papers, 104/31 (hereafter NA. SP.).

9 Cambridge, University Library, *Cholmondeley Houghton papers*, Mss 73/4/1.

Reporting in other newspapers, such as *Whitehall Evening Post* of 2 December 1718, reflected the arguments of the pamphlet.

The Baltic remained, as in this item, a point of reference, one made far more relevant by Russian expansion, but British geopolitical interest was by the 1710s increasingly focused on the Mediterranean as well and, indeed, to a degree, in place of the Baltic. In part, this was due to the regular deployment of the Royal Navy into the Mediterranean and in part a result of the salience of Mediterranean power politics focused in particular on Italy, and the impact of this power politics on the potential of British geopolitics which became far more interventionist after the accession of William III in 1689, apparently requiring alliance with Austria. Alliance with Russia from 1734 decreased British concern over the Baltic, an aspect of the significance of wider geopolitics for regional geopolitics and notably for British concern with the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean had come to the fore again for Britain in 1725 when an unexpected alliance between Philip V of Spain and the Emperor Charles VI led to anxiety about their intentions, including against George I and Anglo-Hanoverian interests. The government focused on naval action as a key response, notably, but not only, in the Mediterranean. Charles, 2nd Viscount Townshend, the senior Secretary of State, that for the Northern Department, told Count Broglie, the French ambassador, that it would be easy to seize Sicily,¹⁰ but this was bravado as well as part of the rhetoric of geopolitics. The possibility of a British attack on Austrian-ruled Naples was mentioned by the Austrian Chancellor, Count Sinzendorf, though scornfully, and was again to be considered by the British in 1730.¹¹

The threat of naval attack on Naples and Sicily was seen by the ministry as a way to deter Austrian action elsewhere,¹² notably against vulnerable Hanover, but that threat downplayed the need for naval support for British positions in Atlantic, Baltic and Caribbean waters, the issue of alternative commitments that was repeatedly to affect the British naval position in the Mediterranean as in the 1790s, 1800s and early 1940s. Louis de St Saphorin, the British envoy in Vienna, claimed in 1726 that the presence of a British fleet in the Mediterranean, and the possibility of its taking action would prevent Austria withdrawing troops

10 Broglie to Count Morville, French Foreign Minister, 3 Aug. 1725, Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique, Angleterre 352 f. 17.

11 Sir John Graeme, Jacobite envoy in Vienna, to John Hay, Earl of Inverness, Jacobite Secretary of State, 31 Aug. 1736, Windsor Castle Royal Archives, Stuart Papers (hereafter RA) 96/128.

12 Townshend to Charles Du Bourgay, British envoy in Berlin, 7 June 1726, NA. SP. 90/20.

from Italy.¹³ However, Walpole's diplomat brother, Horatio, was much more sceptical, pressing Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, accordingly, in what was a bold critique of the optimistic geopolitics of activity:

'... nor can I see the great use of Sir John Jennings appearing off Naples. It will make a noise, but when he comes home again without doing anything, I do not think the laugh will be on our side ... the sending a fleet into the Mediterranean to prevent an encampment in Silesia will appear ridiculous, if that fleet shall do nothing there... St Saphorin is a good judge of the Court of Vienna, but not of the House of Commons.'¹⁴

An Austrian encampment in Silesia was a way to get Prussia to abandon its alliance with Britain and turn to Austria, which indeed happened in 1726. The role of Parliament in geopolitics, and vice versa, was further captured that November when the Jacobite Secretary of State proposed that Philip V and Charles VI publicly demand Gibraltar and Minorca in order to show the British public that government policy was failing.¹⁵ In 1726-7 and 1730-1, there are few signs that the threat of British naval action against Austrian Italy affected Austrian policy, no more than the dispatch of warships to the Mediterranean affected that of Revolutionary France in 1792-3.

Agreements in 1748-52 involving Austria, France and Spain had reduced tension over Italy, while in the same period concern over Germany continued strong as geopolitical speculation adjusted from the accession of Frederick the Great in 1740 to Prussian assertiveness. As a result, British interest in the Mediterranean was more episodic from 1748 until it revived in 1797-8 as the future of Italy became a matter of greater weight after sweeping French victories in northern Italy in 1795-6.

Northern Italy was of far less consequence to Britain than Southern with its more conspicuous Mediterranean role, notably harbours; but control over Northern Italy opened the way for French military pressure further south. The added issue of the future of the Ottoman Empire drove on this concern. Spain's alliance with France from 1796 was a problem, while France's entry into the Eastern Question led to a series of British responses including the capture and

13 St Saphorin to Count Törring, Bavarian Foreign Minister, 25 July 1726, Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kasten Schwarz, 17433.

14 Horatio Walpole to Newcastle, 26 June 1726, London, British Library (hereafter BL.), Department of Manuscripts, Additional Manuscripts, 32746 f. 296-7.

15 John Hay, Earl of Inverness, Jacobite Secretary of State, to Sir John Graeme, Jacobite envoy in Vienna, 12 Oct. 1726, RA, 98/7.

retention of Malta, the occupation of Alexandria in 1801 and 1807, the unsuccessful attempt to intimidate the Turks by naval action in 1807, campaigning in the Adriatic against the French, and the postwar British retention of the Ionian Islands.

One aspect of the British geopolitical presence was that of surveying. As a frigate captain, Francis Beaufort was active in 1810-12 in Turkish waters, seeking to suppress pirates and to survey the coast, only to be badly wounded in a clash. He subsequently produced charts based on his survey and, alongside William Smyth's hydrographic surveys, his *Karamania* (1817) was an aspect of the process by which the British controlled the Mediterranean through naming it. Smyth published the *Hydrography of Sicily, Malta and the Adjacent Islands* (1823) and also surveyed the Adriatic and the North African coast. He rose to be a Rear-Admiral, and to be President of the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Astronomical Society. In 1829, Beaufort became Hydrographer to the Navy, a post he held until 1855.

Maps had to be used with care and they could make the Mediterranean appear part of a misplaced anxiety. In 1877, in the aftermath of the Crimean War of 1854-6, a legacy that had to be defended, as British anxieties about Russian expansion reached a new height, Robert, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India, declared in Parliament:

‘I cannot help thinking that in discussions of this kind, a great deal of misapprehension arises from the popular use of maps on a small scale. As with such maps you are able to put a thumb on India and a finger on Russia, some persons at once think that the political situation is alarming and that India must be looked to. If the noble Lord would use a larger map – say one on the scale of the Ordnance Map of England – he would find that the distance between Russia and British India is not to be measured by the finger and thumb, but by a rule.’¹⁶

No such map was available, but Salisbury, in urging caution about Russian expansionism, was stressing that maps had to be understood if they were to be used effectively.

This was germane because of the way in which ‘The Eastern Question’ and ‘The Great Game’ between Britain and Russia were in part contested with geopolitical speculations in which there was no sensible understanding of the constraints posed by geography itself. The latter related to human geography in the shape of the opposition that was to be expected, and, as the British repeatedly

¹⁶ House of Lords, 11 June 1877, *Hansard, Third Series*, vol. 234, col. 1565.

discovered, the Afghans were scarcely inconsequential. Moreover, distance, terrain and climate were all factors.

To ignore this element was to mistake the rhetoric of geopolitics for its reality; but that, indeed, was a factor among those who pressed for bold schemes of interventionism often in response to alarmist prospectuses of threat. Transcontinental railways encapsulated this process and it was one in which Mackinder's famous 1904 geopolitical paper can be located. The discussion of geopolitics could make such rail lines appear necessary and inevitable, which downplayed the elements of choice. Rail both seemed to fix new acquisitions and interests, and to serve as a base for additional ones, but Russia would have found it easier to expand its rail system near its European frontiers than in Siberia and Central Asia; and such a choice might have been advisable. To a degree, it was as if the transcontinental railways in North America encouraged a psychological geopolitics that drove forward emulation by Russia but without a sufficient awareness of the problems that would be faced.

British concern about Russia helped enhance Britain's interest in the Eastern Mediterranean in the international crisis of 1877-8, with a fleet dispatched to protect Constantinople (Istanbul), the occupation of Cyprus and, soon after, that of Egypt. There had been no comparable naval attempt to prevent French intervention in Spain in 1823 or Italy in 1849 and 1859, or the changes within Italy in 1859-60. This contrast shows the extent to which military tasking was dependent on geopolitical choice as mediated through strategic decisions.

From the late nineteenth century, Britain became the main maritime power in the Eastern Mediterranean, and a concerned observer of the schemes of others. The geopolitics of the Mediterranean were very much affected by changeable international relations, rather than being fixed by geography. In 1898, in the context of a Franco-Russian alliance, the Fashoda Crisis over Sudan exposed Britain's Mediterranean axis to the combination of a French threat from Toulon and a Russian one from the Black Sea.

In turn, the swift rise of British concern about Germany instead moved anxiety to rail plans, notably in the Turkish empire, and works such as *The Short Cut to India: the record of a journey along the route of the Baghdad Railway* (1909) by David Fraser, a journalist for the Times, fed these worries. The routing of railways certainly reflected strategic and operational considerations. Thus, to avoid the possibility of British naval action in the Gulf of Iskenderun/Alexandretta, the Turkish line was routed inland even though that involved expensive signalling.

In 1912, Rear-Admiral Ernest Troubridge, the Chief of the War Staff of the

British Admiralty, in a memorandum on the Italian occupation of certain of the Dodecanese, Turkish islands in the Aegean Sea, particularly Rhodes, noted of British policy

‘A cardinal factor has naturally been that no strong naval power should be in effective permanent occupation of any territory or harbour east of Malta, if such harbour be capable of transformation into a fortified naval base. None can foresee the developments of material in warfare, and the occupation of the apparently most useless island should be resisted equally with the occupation of the best. The geographical situation of these islands enable the sovereign power, if enjoying the possession of a navy, to exercise a control over the Levant and Black Sea trade and to threaten our position in Egypt.’¹⁷

A reminder of the variety of forums for geopolitics and of the diversity of assumptions and language could be seen the previous year in the preface to the *New School Atlas of Modern History* (1911) by Ramsay Muir, Professor of Modern History at Liverpool University. For the map of Europe in 1815 readers were instructed to:

‘Note especially the features of the settlement, which by disregarding national sentiment produced the principal troubles of the 19th century ... the restoration of the old disunion in Italy, and the controlling power exercised by Austria there in the possession of Lombardy and Venetia; the one favourable feature being the expansion of the Kingdom of Sardinia by the addition of Liguria and other lands.’

World War One altered the British presence in the Mediterranean. The battles for Gaza were tough and cost hard. It proved a difficult target with the defenders well-dug in. It took three battles spread out over much of the year before Gaza fell. 2023-4? No, 1917, with the attackers the British advancing not from the direction of modern Israel, but from Egypt. At present, Britain is blamed by Palestinian activists for the background to the present situation, notably as a consequence of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and the British rule from 1918 to 1948 was indeed eventually a period of grave difficulty. Ironically, however, the impression now created is seriously mistaken, for the rule of what was called Palestine, under a League of Nations mandate, was not the British priority in the Middle East. Instead, that was Egypt, and British forces advanced into Palestine in World War One as a consequence of the protection of Egypt from Turkish attack, rather than in pursuit of some master plan for expansion.

17 C. Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War, 1911-1912* (Ticehurst, 2014), pp. 182-3.

Egypt was crucial because of the geostrategic location of the Middle East. For Britain, this was a matter of the route to India. That had become more important as the British presence there dramatically increased from the late 1750s, with Bengal under effective control from 1765, Mysore conquered in 1799, and the Marathas heavily defeated in 1803. The route to India was of central interest prior to the opening of the Suez Canal (built in 1859-69), with Britain's first major position in the Arab world being Aden, occupied in 1839. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, an invasion explicitly launched as part of a plan to advance French interests toward Egypt, fired British concern, leading to a successful British invasion in 1801, with British forces advancing from the Mediterranean (primarily) and the Red Sea (secondarily), and the defeat of the French. A less successful intervention was launched in 1807, but in 1882 after Alexandria was subjugated, British forces moved inland. At Tell El Kebir, Garnet Wolseley inflicted a heavy defeat on the Egyptians. This began a period of British control that lasted until the Egyptian nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956, a step that led to the unsuccessful invasion of the Canal Zone by Britain and France later that year.

Compared to Egypt, Palestine was of minor consequence for Britain. It was primarily a forward buffer. There was none of the emotional investment that had led Richard I and Edward I to campaign there during the Crusades. Moreover, there was a separate and more significant sphere of British activity, that from India, which had led to a presence in the Gulf and, during World War One, resulted in intervention in Mesopotamia and the eventual establishment of a mandate for Iraq. Again, strategic interests linked to the protection of India were to the fore, interests accentuated prior to the war by concern about German rail plans to the Gulf, and separately and subsequently pushed to the fore by the availability of oil. There was no comparable oil in Egypt or Palestine. Again, Iraq was an area of British commitment until the coup that overthrew the monarchy in 1958, with air bases from which the Soviet Union could be attacked, in addition to oil.

Britain indeed was the major Middle Eastern power until the 1950s, a position owing much to its eventual military success in World War One, in which the British had also conquered Syria and Lebanon, even though France became the mandate power in both. So also with World War Two, in which the British (including imperial forces) successfully defended Egypt from Italian and German invaders, overran Libya, and conquered Lebanon and Syria from Vichy France and Iraq from a pro-German local government, as well as jointly conquering Iran with the Soviet Union. Thereafter, there was a lessening of British power, although the French withdrawal from Syria and Lebanon in 1946 made Britain

even more clearly the major European power in the Middle East. British forces intervened in Jordan in 1958 and Kuwait in 1961, in order to maintain friendly governments in power and resist the pressures of Pan-Arabism and both Egyptian and Iraqi expansionism, which were of far greater concern for Britain than developments in and concerning newly-independent Israel.

To present such an account and not therefore discuss the pressures arising in the late 1930s from Jewish immigration and from the large-scale Arab Rising in Palestine in 1936-9 might appear surprising, but it is important to put the situation there in perspective. Both were extremely important as far as the situation there was concerned, and the British deployed a considerable force; but in terms of Britain's wider strategic concerns in the late 1930s, this was of relatively minor significance. This was not least because of the extent to which the states opposed to Britain did not successfully exploit the Arab Rising, even though Italy under Benito Mussolini followed a general policy of trying to foment Arab nationalism and harm British interests.

The situation might have been very different had the Italian conquests of Ethiopia in 1935-6 led to war, for example by oil sanctions against Italy and the closure of the Suez Canal. There was planning for war then, and subsequently, with Britain moving aircraft to Malta, Egypt and British Somaliland, and planning the bombing of Milan and Turin, while the Italian presence in the Red Sea and the threat to Egypt from Italian-ruled Libya were both to the fore. International politics trumped the situation. Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, told the Cabinet on 6 April 1936 that he was opposed to war with Italy 'in the present state of Europe,' a reference to the Anglo-French-Italian Stresa Front against Germany. Moreover, France and America were sympathetic to Italian goals. In turn, the Munich Crisis of 1938 did not lead to war.

The Peel Commission, which had been established to tackle the linked issues of Jewish immigration and the violently hostile Arab response, recommended the partition of Palestine between Arab and Jewish states. The report was rejected by the Arabs, and led to the rising which, initially, posed a serious problem for the British, not least as, in response to sniping and sabotage, and shortage of information about the rebels, they were unable to maintain control of much of the countryside. The opposition, however, lacked overall leadership and was divided, in particular, between clans. Faced with a firm opposition from about 3,000 guerrillas, the British used collective punishments to weaken Palestinian support for the guerrillas, adopted active patrolling, sent significant reinforcements and reoccupied rebel strongholds. In addition, partition as a policy was abandoned in 1938, and, in 1939, a White Paper outlined a new policy: inde-

pendence in ten years and Jewish immigration limited in the meantime. For the British, the Arab Uprising has to be put alongside the contemporary uprising on the North-West Frontier of India; but both were shadowed by growing concern about Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Halford Mackinder's presentation of geopolitics in 1904 in terms of the Eurasian 'heartland,' and the Russian threat¹⁸ had made the Mediterranean very much part of a wider peripheral offsetting of this threat, one that focused on Britain, British India, and Japan. As shown by Mackinder, the issues summarised as the route to India could therefore be reconceptualised, alongside the apparent geopolitical developments and challenges posed by the Russian advances across Central Asia (however conceptualised) and into Manchuria, so as also to encompass the Mediterranean.

The irony of events saw control over this 'heartland' sought instead by Germany in both world wars, although in 1918 and, even more, 1939-41 in alignment with Soviet Communism. From the perspective of a German threat, and notably to Western France, the Mediterranean could appear peripheral to British, and, more particularly, Allied, concerns. This was a response taken by critics of Anglo-French intervention at Gallipoli and Salonica, and in Greece in 1941, the Italian campaign in 1943-5 and that in the Dodecanese in 1943.

American policymakers were opposed to what they saw and decried as the Mediterranean obsession of British policy and, in 1943, were reluctant to support British plans for an Allied invasion, first, of Sicily and, subsequently, of mainland Italy. The Americans feared that such an invasion would detract resources from the invasion of France (the army's prime concern) and from the war with Japan (the navy's), and also be a strategic irrelevance that did not contribute greatly to the defeat of Germany. Instead, the Americans pressed for an attack on the German army in France, an attack seen as the best way to use Anglo-American forces to defeat the Germans, and to assist the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Aside from the justified view that an invasion of France could not be successfully mounted in 1943, British strategic concerns in the Mediterranean, however, were a product not simply of imperial concerns and related geopolitical interests, but also of the legacy, since 1940, of conflict with the Axis in the Mediterranean where the Germans, moreover, could be engaged as they could

18 H. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History,' *Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), pp. 421-44.

19 M.A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2000).

not then be in Western Europe. The British had significant military resources, land, sea and air, in the region, as well as territorial and strategic commitments to protect, notably the Suez Canal; and, not least due to serious pressures on shipping, these resources could not be readily reallocated.²⁰ Strategic speculation and political commentary are apt to overlook this point. Resources are not easily fungible.

The employment of imperial military resources was particularly notable in this respect. The sensitivity, notably in 1941-2, about the deployment of Australian and New Zealand forces in the Middle East while the two countries were threatened by Japan, had underlined the need for political care in the use of imperial units, and a focus of efforts on northern France could not be permitted to weaken Britain in the Mediterranean. Britain's position in the Mediterranean was, in part, seen as a forward-defence for the Indian Ocean, as were the occupations of Iraq and Syria in 1941, and that forward-defence was important to the politics of imperial commitment. At the same time, the conquest of Lebanon and Syria in 1941, like the attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in 1940, was part of an Anglo-Vichy war that was far from restricted to the Mediterranean, stretching indeed to include the conquest of Madagascar in 1942, but that focused there.

The role of wider strategic concerns was amply shown by Mediterranean geopolitics. British concern that the German capture of Crete would be followed by an invasion of Cyprus were lessened by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 as well as by the losses of the Crete operation. Italian options were affected by limited fuel availability for an impressive navy but small air force, as well as by aggressive and successful British naval operations. The large numbers of Axis troops in the Balkans, a number of which the British were well aware due to espionage,²¹ were in place to prevent resistance rather than in order to mount offensive operations against Cyprus and the Middle East, and shipping anyway was lacking for the latter.

The British preference for an indirect approach, weakening the Axis by incremental steps as a deliberate preparation for an invasion of France, was important. The indirect approach was an aspect of longstanding British strategic culture, powerfully fortified by the lessons of World War One, notably the ex-

20 S. Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt, 1935-1940: Conflict and Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean* (London, 2004).

21 'Distribution of Axis Forces in the Balkans,' Dec. 1942, BL. Ministry of Defence (hereafter MOD.) MDR Misc. 2172.

tremely costly struggle on the Western Front, one that the British did not wish to repeat. There were also concerns about the manpower available: with a smaller population than America, the Soviet Union or Germany, and needing also to fight Japan, Britain's potential to field as many divisions was limited, although, until July 1944, Britain and the Empire had more divisions than the Americans in fighting conflict with the enemy. The indirect approach also drew on the benefits of naval power and amphibious capability.

Interest in the indirect approach was not restricted to Britain. In the winter of 1939-40, there was support in France for an expedition to Salonika in order to maintain Allied influence in the Balkans. The British were then opposed to such an expedition, for both military and political reasons, notably the risk of starting a war with Italy.²² In 1940, the fall of France and Italy's entry into the war dramatically took forward the indirect approach. It faced a major failure, however, in April 1941 when forces were sent to Greece in a totally unsuccessful attempt to help resist German invasion. Winston Churchill backed the policy for political reasons, in order to show that Britain was supporting all opposition to the Axis, but he swiftly recognised it as an error. The dispatch of forces there greatly weakened the British in North Africa, making them more vulnerable to German intervention there.

Geography was much to the fore, notably in terms of aircraft range. Specific issues in topography and communications, such as the west-east nature of Crete and its poor north-south communications, were important, as was the mountainous inland to the Croatian coast. So also was the quality of the resistance. In both mainland Greece and on Crete, this proved inadequate in May 1941.

The indirect approach was also a response to the specific military circumstances of 1942-3. The British were concerned that a direct attack across the English Channel would expose untested forces to the battle-hardened Germans. Their experience of fighting the Germans in 1940-1, in Norway, France, Greece, and North Africa, in each of which British forces had been defeated, had made British policymakers wary of such a step until the Germans had been weakened. The bloody failure of the Dieppe Raid on the North French coast on 19 August 1942 underlined the problems and uncertainties of amphibious landings on a defended coastline, as well as the prior need to acquire air superiority. Allied success in amphibious operations in the early stages of the war was limited, with the British invasion of Madagascar in 1942 mounted against a far more vulner-

22 R.M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads. Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940* (Ithaca, New York, 2002), p. 172.

able target than occupied France, and benefiting in particular from surprise and good planning.²³

Later in 1942, the British were successful with the Eighth Army at El Alamein in Egypt, but Bernard Montgomery's victory there over the German-Italian force under Erwin Rommel in the battle fought from 23 October to 4 November was greatly assisted by superior air power, and was characterised by a deliberative, controlled style of attack supported by clear superiority in artillery. This was a variant of Allied offensives in 1918. To replicate this style in an amphibious assault on France would not be easy. As far as the alternative was concerned, the difficulties of campaigning in Italy, however, were not appreciated, neither those posed by the terrain nor by the German defenders.

At the same time, the Allied mapping of Italy highlighted not only particular possibilities for amphibious attackers, but also, through the terrain and rivers, clarified issues of breakout and exploitation.²⁴ At the same time, there was an absence of effective Allied planning and implementation, not least when combined with a resilient German opposition, for example in the Anzio operation in January 1944. If they had read their maps correctly, the commanders would have appreciated that the beaches were surrounded by heights that had to be taken quickly, because otherwise the Germans could occupy the high ground and pummel the troops on the beaches, as at Gallipoli in 1915. The 'geo' dimension required a high-tempo, aggressive leadership that was missing then and, more generally, for the Allies during the Italian war.

At other geomilitary levels, Hitler held on in northern Italy in part because he wanted to limit Allied air attacks on southern Germany, a reality that overcame the past obstacle of the Alps, while the conflict in northern Italy in 1943-5, at once resistance to the Germans and a civil war between Fascists and the very divided anti-Fascists, posed serious issues for geopolitical understanding. This could readily be repeated for other states, such as China, France, Greece and Yugoslavia. An understanding of physical geography was critical to operational and tactical success, but the human geography, for example of areas of Communist or anti-Communist support, was often very different. At the same time, the complex geopolitics of the war was not separate to its operational flows and intensity. There was also the geopolitics of propaganda, with German leaflets

23 T. Benbow, "'Menace' to 'Ironclad': The British Operations against Dakar (1940) and Madagascar (1942)", *Journal of Military History*, 75 (2011), pp. 807-8.

24 'Italy (South) Special Strategic Map,' 1943 (Washington: Army Map Service, 1943); 'Water Supply Overprint' 'River Discharge Overprint,' Oct. 1943, Siena region, BL. MOD GSGS 4230. For Provence, see also 'Panoramic Beach Section,' 1943, BL. Maps MOD. AF. 4463.

and posters making much of the time and casualties involved in the Allied advance in Italy.²⁵

After 1945, the British sought to continue their pre-war Mediterranean stance, with troops in the Suez Canal Zone until 1954, a military presence in Libya, and Gibraltar, Cyprus and Malta all in the Empire. It was a new, post-imperial agenda that came to the fore from the late 1960s, one owing much to the 'Retreat from East of Suez' seen as the British pulled out of the Indian Ocean, notably withdrawing from Aden in 1967. The Aden struggle had seen Britain opposed to Nasser, the Egyptian nationalist dictator, who was also backing the republicans in Yemen against the Saudi-supported royalists. As a result, Egypt's heavy defeat by Israel in the Six Days War of 1967 served British interests, just as they had also been served by the Israeli defeat of Egypt in 1956.

Alongside a distancing from Britain's earlier role in the Middle East, close links between the Labour-dominated Israeli government and Britain's Labour governments were important to an improvement in relations with Israel. So also with the philo-semitism of Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister from 1979 and 1990. As important from the late 1960s was the pronounced move of the most prominent Palestinian organisations, notably the PLO, to the Soviet side in the Cold War and to the means of terrorism. This strongly affected the attitude of successive British governments, not least because of links between the PLO as well as radical Arab governments, notably Libya, and the terrorism by the Provisional IRA. This indicated again the importance to Mediterranean geopolitics of wider power politics. Moreover, the rise of the conservative Likud party in Israeli politics in the 1980s was not unacceptable to Mrs Thatcher.

At the same time, Britain was clearly secondary to America on the Western side in the Middle East, a position eased by a significant distancing of France from Israel. It was America that played the key role in rearming Israel after the Six Days War in 1967, in assuring that Israel was not isolated when it was attacked by Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur/October/Ramadan War of 1973, and in helping Israel achieve peace with Egypt. From the late 1960s, America became Israel's major arms supplier and supporter.

Britain's role in comparison was minor. As America's principal European ally in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, at a time when West Germany was going in a different direction with *Ostpolitik* and France leaving NATO's military structure, Britain followed the trend of America's policy, even if not all the details.

25 'It's a Long Way to Rome,' Ap. 1944, 'Speaking of time-tables,' 1944, Cornell, Ithaca, University library, P.J. Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography.

More significant in the late 1960s and 1970s was a retrenchment of Britain's geopolitical concerns in response to fiscal strain, NATO responsibilities, and the eventually successful drive to join the European Economic Community.

Under Thatcher, there was a degree of broadening out, and a more global international stance, but the Middle East continued to be relatively minor compared to the escalation and then resolution of the Cold War in Europe in the 1980s. Britain's principal military commitment in the Middle East between the withdrawal from Aden in 1967 and the Gulf War in 1991 was the provision of forces to help Oman fight a South Yemeni-backed insurrection in Dhofar. This was a successful commitment, one in line with the policies of America, Saudi Arabia, and the Shah's Iran. At the same time, it was a conflict that attracted very little public attention.

The situation changed in the 1990s, with the Iraq War of 1991 seeing Britain prominently return 'East of Suez,' while in Palestine tensions led to the intifada, which helped encourage both public attention and attempts to reach a negotiated settlement. Britain supported the latter but was not prominent. Instead, in the mid and late 1990s, Balkan crises engaged more attention, and this led to British military pressure on the Serbs, although plans for a land intervention in Kosovo in 1999 were not brought to fruition.

In the 2000s, in contrast, the theme of a 'war of civilisation' appeared brought to fruition with the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks (significantly in America and not Europe) followed by the 'War on Terror,' first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Britain followed the American lead, especially in conflict with Iraq in 2003. This lead also entailed an alignment with Israel that caused Tony Blair, Prime Minister from 1997, serious problems within the Labour movement in 2006 and helped lead to his fall from power in 2007.

The 2010s saw continued tensions in Palestine, albeit overshadowed by the consequences of the 'Arab Spring.' The British were not significantly involved in the crises in Tunisia and Egypt, but, alongside France, played a key role in providing military support to the insurgents in Libya in 2011. In the short term, this contributed to the overthrow of the regime of Colonel Gaddafi, but, in the longer term, led to protracted instability both there and across the *Sahel* belt in Africa, notably in Mali and Niger. The facile optimism shown by David Cameron proved totally misplaced. It was followed in 2012 by Cameron losing control of the House of Commons when he sought to persuade it to back America in a military confrontation with the brutal Assad regime in Syria. Such action was both limited in prospectus and justified, but Cameron lost control when he unnecessarily turned to Parliament, and the British climbdown undermined the

American stance, and thus helped embolden the Russians.

Again, Palestine/Israel was not to the fore in British public discussion of the Middle East, which indeed was the norm other than for particular crises. At the same time, growing criticism of the settlers in the Occupied West Bank affected a swathe of British public debate. Ironically, that was not the case over Gaza, because the Israelis, as part of their drive for peace, evacuated the Gaza Strip and forced the settlers out. That this has not occurred on the West Bank is a fundamental contrast, and underlines the significance of human geography and political contingency. Physical geography in the shape of Gaza being on the coast is not relevant.

And so to the present. Again, the Mediterranean has had inscribed onto it the interaction of local conflicts with wider rivalries and Great Power strategies, as in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and Syria in the 2010s, with Russia playing a crucial role in the latter, not only in supporting the regime but also in sustaining a naval and air presence. The language of geopolitics has been pushed far much to the fore in recent years; but it is the politics rather than the geography that is really at issue, as with the civil war in Libya. So also for example with the current crisis not least with Israel's military and political commitment to retaining some of the land conquered in 1967, a commitment increased by the sense of vulnerability arising from the murderous attack from Gaza by Hamas in 2023.

Geopolitical factors focused on security constituted a prominent Israeli argument against the demand that Israel should return occupied land. For example, the argument used to be that the Golan Heights gained in 1967 (as opposed simply to the positions from which Israel was shelled up to 1967) should be kept because, from Mt Hermon, it was possible to look deep into Syria and Lebanon and keep an eye on Syrian preparations to attack, and also that, with the tank being the backbone of the army, the Golan had to be retained to provide space for concentrating forces and for manoeuvre. These arguments are still made, but they are now less pertinent as it is possible to look into Syria from space, while, with attack helicopters, Israel does not need the land to the same extent for manoeuvring. Moreover, with the Israeli doctrine of warfare becoming more similar to the American concept of Rapid Dominance, and with firepower replacing concentration of forces, land, while still significant, is apparently less clearly important than hitherto in military operations.

The same is the case with the West Bank. Immediately after its conquest and occupation in 1967, the Israelis came up with the Allon Plan (drafted in June 1967) to keep much of the West Bank and to build settlements along the River Jordan in order to stop a potential attack by an Eastern Bloc of Syria, Iraq and

Jordan. However, missiles do not really care much about such buffer zones, and the strategic, operational and tactical arguments for such a zone was challenged by the use of rocket attacks on Israeli cities, a policy that began with Iraqi Scud attacks in 1991.

In turn, the arguments employed were qualified by the Israeli use of an 'Iron Dome' interception system to block most attacks, notably during the Gaza crises of 2014 and 2024. As far as the idea of a buffer is concerned, there were also inconsistencies. One neighbour, Jordan, has peaceful relations with Israel, while hostile Iran lacks a common border with her.

The changing validity of a military strategic rationale for continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights throws attention back onto political debates within Israel. These focus on the need for, and value of, Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and on the nature of peace that might be possible, and the role of Israeli withdrawal in such a peace settlement.

The angry response on the Left to Tony Blair over Israel's bombing of Lebanon was a precursor to current demonstrations against the Israeli policy in Gaza. The scale and frequency might be very different, but the latter were prefigured by those against the 2003 Iraq War. In contrast, there was nothing of comparable substance against the 1991 Iraq War, nor the murderous Syrian policy toward Syrians over the last eleven years, nor indeed that of the Sudanese regime in South Sudan and Darfur. So on for other groups who have suffered, such as Kurds at the hands of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

These and other contrasts invite consideration as another instance of geopolitics, that of perceived concern. In part, there is doubtless a degree of antisemitism that has become more apparent on the Left since elements of it embraced Palestinian terrorism from the late 1960s. In this respect, Hamas is simply another iteration, albeit one that is more 'Islamic' than those earlier movements. Indeed, there is an echo of Cold War attitudes and propaganda, as with many other issues at present. This was very much not the early stage of the Cold War, a stage more closely seen with recent and current Russian support for Syria and alignment with Iran. Instead, the 'Global South' propaganda of Mao Zedong, and the latter stage of the Cold War, were the key background to the situation at present.

The contrast in 2023-4 essentially arises as a consequence of the large number of Muslims who live in Britain and their determination to take an activist stance as seen in the general election of July 2024. This is very different in its scale to previous displays of activism, and brings to the fore a political consequence of the recent mass-migration and its impact on both the politics of

geopolitics and the geopolitics of politics. Instructively, this is different to other instances in which Muslims have been persecuted, from Bosnia to Xinkiang. In part, this contrast is a reflection of the salience of the issue but the linkage with Left-wing mobilisation is also pertinent.

That a discussion of long-term British geopolitical engagement with the Mediterranean should end with the demonstrations in London in 2023-4 may appear presentist as well as problematic, mistaking the demonstrations of the minority for the views or engagement of the majority. Certainly, there is no sign that the issue trumps Britain's strategic interests in the region, interests currently centred on following the American lead and supporting both stability and allies. How these will be advanced in the years to come is unclear, not least because of concerns about the stability of American policy.

These points serve as a reminder that the geopolitics of a particular question has a number of, often clashing, angles. The political nature of the perception of these and other geopolitical issues underline the need for a flexible approach to the subject. In the case of the Mediterranean, it was scarcely surprising that an outside power saw its geopolitics primarily in terms of wider strategic concerns, anxieties and possibilities. That, however, does not lessen the value of that perspective, for there is no one way to assess geopolitical issues. Instead, the British perspective contributes to a whole that is at once greater, and yet also fragmented, as a result of these many perceptions.

What war alliances do to geopolitical thinking

Who really authored Spykman's Rimland concept in the *Geography of the Peace*?¹

BY OLIVIER ZAJEC

Nicholas J. Spykman's *The Geography of the Peace*, published on April 20, 1944, is one of the most cited reference texts in the International Relations field, particularly when it comes to geopolitical approaches². The only document in a position to rival this status is "The Geographical Pivot of History", a 1904 article in which the British geographer Halford J. Mackinder sets out the geo-historical foundations of his concept of the Eurasian *Heartland*, the impregnable seat of terrestrial power³. *The Geography of the Peace* owes its fame almost exclusively to page 43 of its original edition. It contains Spykman's famous geopolitical "rimland theory": "*Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world*"⁴. By synthesizing his geopolitical analysis in this gnomic form, the Yale professor⁵ contradictorily ex-

- 1 An earlier french version of this research work appeared in Olivier Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2016. This is the first english version of this text, adapted and extensively revised for this collection.
- 2 Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, edited by Helen R. Nicholl, Institute of International Studies, Yale University, New York, Harcourt, Brace and company, 1944.
- 3 Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-437. For a contextual analysis, see Pascal Venier, "The Geographical Pivot of History and Early 20th Century Geopolitical Culture", *Geographical Journal*, vol. 170, n°4, December 2004, pp. 330-336.
- 4 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 43.
- 5 Spykman was recruited at Yale in 1925 as an Assistant Professor of Political Science. From 1934, he was *Sterling Professor* of International Relations, creator and director of the first autonomous department of this discipline at Yale, and of the *Yale Institute of International Studies*. He resigned from both positions in 1940, for health reasons. He died in 1943. See *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*, 2016, *op. cit.*

tends Mackinder's 1919 formula in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: "Who controls eastern Europe rules the Heartland; who rules the Heartland rules the World-island; and who rules the World-island commands the World"⁶. Whereas Mackinder focused on the terrestrial power of the Old World, Spykman chose to draw the attention of American policymakers to the coasts of Eurasia, literally the *rim-lands*, in particular Western Europe and the Far East⁷. Even more than the *Heartland*, the considerable human, industrial and agricultural potential of this geographically favored littoral zone seemed to him naturally susceptible to a catalysis of both political and military power⁸. While proposing that "(...) the safety and independence [of the United States] can be preserved only by a foreign policy that will make it impossible for the Eurasian land mass to harbor an overwhelmingly dominant power in Europe and the Far East"⁹, Spykman nuances the grandiose land-sea opposition scheme induced by Mackinder's geo-historical centrality of the *Heartland*. He prefers to emphasize the danger that a unification of the rimlands may represent for the United States: geo-strategically "encircled", Washington would find itself confronted by a Titan combining land and sea power, capable of projecting its power beyond the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. In the long term, Spykman warns, the United States could only lose such a face-off, which could degenerate into conflict. Consequently, the guiding principle of American security policy is self-evident: resolutely prevent any attempt at hegemony in the territories corresponding to what might be termed "useful" Eurasia.

The basis of Spykman's reasoning is political; his method of approach is geostrategic. By balancing relations between the rimlandian power areas, the United States will preserve its freedom of action in international politics. How can this be achieved? Preventively, by getting diplomatically and strategically involved in the ring of lands surrounding the *Heartland*. Or pre-emptively (although Spykman doesn't use the word), by intervening militarily should an aggressive hegemon attempt to subvert and subdue the Eurasian "political constellation". Spykman, a staunch interventionist who advocated a more "realist" League of Nations from 1925 to 1939, constantly pleading for the United States

6 Cf. Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, London, Constable and Company Ltd. 1919, p. 186.

7 In contrast to what some geopolitical historiographers sometimes write, Great Britain and Japan are in no way included in Spykman's *rimland*. Cf. *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 41, 52 and 53.

8 *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 28 ("The Distribution of Power Potentials").

9 *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.

to join it, discerned in the Second World War the final proof that isolationism was no longer a valid policy for the Republic of the New World. According to the Yale professor, who was born in the Netherlands in 1893 and became a naturalized American in 1928, "*The United States must recognize once again and permanently, that the power constellation in Europe and Asia is of everlasting concern to her, both in time of war and in time of peace*".¹⁰

One of the most striking features of *The Geography of the Peace* are the 54 geo-political, geo-strategic or geo-economic diagrams¹¹ that adorn its chapters, offering the American public of 1944 the varied facets of a modern world that had become "(...) *the unified field of an interplay of political forces*"¹². In this respect, the book is a witness to its time: in the 1940s, this type of projection began to be systematically integrated into Americans' vision of their external environment¹³. The public's fascination with the maps of Richard Edes Harrison, the talented illustrator of *Fortune* magazine's geopolitical supplements, is one example of this "popular geopolitics" that took on the trappings of a veritable intellectual fashion in World War II America: "[*The maps in this atlas*]," Harrison hammered in his most famous work, *Look at the World*, "*emphasize that we are not far from the world's centers of power, that we are not affected by the tides of war only because other straits are submerged, but that we are at the center, as threatened by external dangers as any European state*"¹⁴. To the average American citizen of the '40s, this discourse, like Spykman's, may seem new. It is only partly so, as evidenced, among other examples, by the early internationalist pleas made by Theodore Roosevelt at the turn of the century.

In 1944, however, the time seemed ripe for a definitive awakening in this direction - whatever the depth of American isolationism in the interwar period, which we sometimes tend to overestimate. *The Geography of the Peace* is also - and above all - a reflection on the power relations between the future victors of the Second World War. At the end of 1943, the Axis, in difficulty, was

10 *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 60.

11 The table on page viii of *The Geography of the Peace* lists only 51 maps. This count actually corresponds to the number of illustrated figures. Among the latter, some are made up of two cards (no. 51) or even three (no. 20).

12 *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 35.

13 See Timothy Barney. See T. Barney, *(Re)placing America. Cold War Mapping and the Mediation of International Space*, Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, 2011, unpublished.

14 See Richard E. Harrison, *Look at the World, The Fortune Atlas for World Strategy*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1944, p. 23.

losing ground on all fronts. The post-war period was barely sketched out at the end of November 1943 by the Teheran Inter-Allied Conference, which prepared and heralded the “*Grand Bargain*” of Potsdam and Yalta. The book’s military developments are numerous, with particular emphasis on the consequences of Airpower for the future strategy of the world’s states¹⁵. With the conclusion of the conflict in no doubt for him¹⁶, Spykman sets out to describe the future geostrategic conditions of American security, in a world of renewed equilibria.

The fortunes of the “*rimland*” concept will truly be immense. At the end of the Second World War, as Bruno Colson recalls, “(...) *American defense officials, military and civilian, established officially, albeit secretly, that any power or group of powers attempting to dominate Eurasia should be regarded by the United States as potentially hostile*”¹⁷. Supposedly adopted by the Pentagon’s *Post-War Planners* after 1945¹⁸, Spykman’s “*rimlandian*” logic, a decentralized transposition of Mackinder’s macro-geography, is said to have inspired the American policy of *containing* Soviet land power formalized by the 1947 Truman Doctrine. “*This theory [of containment], which became official U.S. policy from 1947 onwards, took up the Heartland and Rimland theses developed by Spykman during the Second World War*”, writes Frédéric Lasserre, among others¹⁹.

It is debatable whether the Cold War *containment* strategy stemmed as directly from Spykman’s *rimland* as has been claimed. If so, it should have gone beyond the Soviet danger alone, for the Amsterdam-born political scientist’s analysis, based on a geopolitical vision of balancing power potentials between the Old and New Worlds, went beyond the case of the sole USSR, and lacked an underlying ideological framework. We won’t deal with this point here, having already proposed a critical reinterpretation of this intellectual filiation between

15 Some passages in the book are a form of response to Alexander P. de Seversky’s *Victory through air power*, published in January 1942, which advocates the absolute future strategic preponderance of air power, in line with the theories of General William “Billy” Mitchell, the apostle of Airpower. Cf. Alexander P. de Seversky, *Victory through air power*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1942.

16 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 34.

17 Bruno Colson, *Les fondements de la stratégie intégrale des États-Unis en Europe*, Paris, Economica, collection “Hautes Études Stratégiques”, p. 94.

18 See Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U. S. Strategy in World War II*, UNC Press Books, 2003 [2000], p. 144. See in particular Chapter 7: “Russia as Ally and Enigma, December 1942- November 1943”.

19 Frédéric Lasserre, Emmanuel Gonon, *Manuel de Géopolitique*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2008, p. 135.

rimland and containment in our 2016 biography of Spykman. Let's just note that other political geographers could possibly have claimed to have inspired such a vision, at least implicitly: this is for example the case of the British James Fairgrieve whose pioneering work *Geography and World Power* proposed as early as 1927 the concept of a "Crush Zone" stretching between the *Heartland* and the territory of the maritime powers²⁰. The same is true of the American Richard Hartshorne and his concept of the "Shatter zone", which he defined in 1944, restricting it to Eastern Europe²¹.

Be that as it may, the American security theories developed and applied during and after the end of the Cold War have in common the relative prevalence of the heuristic categories of geopolitics: Colin Gray and Saul Cohen, who championed the framework of geopolitical thinking in the 1960s, inscribed their geostrategic developments in this logic. In 1991, with the Berlin Wall freshly collapsed, Henry Kissinger judged that "*domination by a single power of one of the two main spheres of Eurasia - Europe or Asia - still constitutes a good definition of the strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War*"²². It would be too tedious to mention here the countless studies that, between 1945 and 2024, will refer to Spykman. Most recently, in 2012, Robert D. Kaplan, in *The Revenge of Geography*, devoted a long chapter - relatively positive in tone - to the author of *The Geography of the Peace*²³. Whether in appreciation or denunciation, the mention of this "Rimlandian geopolitics" ultimately appears inseparable from historical studies of American security strategy since the end of the Second World War. The problem is that all those studies are most often limited to a very schematic evocation of this *Rimland*, without the precise content of *The Geography of the Peace* being really detailed.

It's time to ask: what exactly are we talking about here?

20 James Fairgrieve, *Geography and World Power*, London, University of London Press Ltd, 1914. The book went through numerous editions. The first mention of the *Crush Zone*, accompanied by an extremely telling map, appears in the sixth edition of the book, p. 334.

21 Richard Hartshorne, "United States and the 'Shatter Zone' of Europe", in Hans W. Weigert, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (eds.), *Compass of the World, a symposium on Political geography*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1944, pp. 203-214. Hartshorne had already mentioned this concept in 1941. When Saul Cohen built his 1963 model of the "Shatterbelts", as unstable and contested zones between continental and maritime powers, he adopted part of Fairgrieve's *Crush Zone*, in preference to that of Spykman's *Rimland*. Cf. Saul B. Cohen, *Geography and Politics in a World Divided*, Random House, Inc. 1963, p. 85.

22 Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994, p. 813.

23 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography, What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, Random House, 2012.

Beyond the Rimland: Geography of Peace's actual content

The Geography of the Peace consists of five chapters of very uneven length. The first, "Geography in War and Peace", clearly echoes an earlier work by Nicholas Spykman, with a perfectly explicit programmatic title: *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*²⁴. This substantial essay of over 500 pages, issued in 1942 by the same publisher - Harcourt, Brace & Co. of New York - had caused quite a stir (over 16,000 copies were sold), bringing its author fame, but also the hostility of a significant number of his peers, who reproached him for the aggressiveness and supposed cynicism of his uncompromising view of American foreign policy. Yet the context was far from unfavorable to Spykman's interventionist and realist stance: as early as 1939, the course of the Second World War forced powerful American isolationist pressure groups to refine their analyses, before abandoning them once and for all in December 1941, in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbour²⁵. Establishing a bridge with the argument of *America's Strategy in World Politics*, Nicholas Spykman reaffirms in the first introductory and synthetic chapter of *The Geography of the Peace* his serene conviction that *power politics* should not be dismissed on moral grounds, but rather studied, in order to understand the forces that govern the interaction between state units in international society (pp. 3-7). The military context of 1943-44 gives a certain force to Spykman's remarks: "There is," he insists, "a tendency, particularly among certain liberals and many who call themselves idealists, to believe that the subject of power in the international world should not be spoken of except in terms of moral disapproval. They consider that studies that concern the organization of peace and security should deal only with the ideals of our democratic civilization and visions of a better world order, in which power will play no part. As a matter of fact, political ideals and visions unsupported by force appear to have little survival value. Our Western democracies certainly owe their existence and preservation to the effective use of power, either on their own part, or on the part of an ally"²⁶.

In this same first chapter of *The Geography of the Peace*, Spykman, for

24 Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, Yale Institute of International Studies, New York, Harcourt, Brace and company, 1942.

25 For a critical assessment of what isolationism has really meant in American foreign policy, see Bear F. Braumoeller, "The Myth of American Isolationism", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 6, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 349-371.

26 *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 3.

whom the concept of power is ordered to the concepts of freedom of action and survival²⁷, and not to material elements alone, also takes up a criticism he had already expressed in 1942 in *America's Strategy*: that of the relative ineffectiveness of universal guarantees of sanctions as enacted by the League of Nations. In place of this idealistic universality, which was contradicted by the failures of the collective security policy of the 1930s, he proposed the more realistic concept of "regional security leagues", whereby the most influential states would be mechanically inclined to guarantee inter-state cooperation in their "natural" meso-geographical areas of responsibility, for the sake of their own security and interests.

The first chapter also allows Nicholas Spykman to explain what he means by "geopolitics": not "*a whole philosophy of history*", nor "*a synonym for political geography*", but "*the planning of a country's security policy in terms of geographical factors (...) which answers the question: given a particular geographical situation, what is the best policy to follow to achieve security.*" Finally, insists Spykman, "*the objective of peace and independence for a state and for the world as a whole must inspire the final choice of policy to the exclusion of such aims as expansion and aggrandizement of power*"²⁸.

This introduction, in which the Yale professor of International Relations details his realist principles for the conduct of foreign policy, is complemented by a methodological introduction, which occupies the second, rather technical chapter of the book, entitled "*Mapping the World*" (pp. 8-13). This includes a commentary on the different types of planispheric projections proposed by the cartographic science of his time, and a highly pedagogical explanation of the analytical advantages of the geopolitical approach. All of this expands on the generic definitions of the first chapter, in terms of both the spatial framework studied and the analytical methodology employed.

In the third chapter, "*The position of the Western Hemisphere*" (p.19-33), Spykman delivers his central thesis: he agrees that the geographical position of North America makes the United States a geo-strategically privileged nation; however, given the resources of Eurasia (to which Africa and Australia are added), it appears that if certain forces succeed, even partially, in unifying this whole, America will no longer be in a position to resist the expansion of the "World Island", even if could rely on the resources of South America. To Spykman, Washington must draw the strategic consequences of this macro-spatial

27 *America's Strategy in World Politics*, op. cit. p. 12-14.

28 *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. p. 5-7.

configuration, and practice interventionist diplomacy to balance the Old World's power potential. The double map on page 59 of *The Geography of the Peace*, entitled "The Future of the Western Hemisphere?" sums up the alternative facing the New World in Spykman's view: influence the balance of power on the World Island, or risk the latter interfering directly in the geopolitical balance of the two Americas.

This interventionism is not universal: it must be concentrated on a few areas of major importance. The presentation and analysis of these pivotal zones forms the background to "The Political Map of Eurasia", the title of the fourth and famous chapter of *The Geography of the Peace*, in which the concept of "rimland" is justified geographically and historically, via the decentering of the Mackinderian pivot (pp. 35-43). Was Nicholas Spykman the first to diagnose the need to balance forces on the coasts of Eurasia? Apart from Fairgrieve and Hartshorne, already mentioned, several American political geographers came to a more or less similar conclusion between 1939 and 1945, a period of exponential development of "geopolitics" in the United States. Such is the case of Russell H. Fifield, in *Geopolitics in Principle and Practice*, also published in 1944: "*It is probably true that he who rules the world island rules the world; it is less true to say that he who rules the heartland rules the world. Nevertheless, it may be that the powerful states on the margins of the World Island are dominated by the strong state of the heartland. America's foreign policy must prevent the World Island from falling under the control of a single power*²⁹." Nevertheless, Fifield acknowledges on this point the pioneering role of the recently deceased Spykman: "*The validity of Sir Halford Mackinder's thesis can be questioned. Yale's Nicholas J. Spykman, who was a profound observer of world politics, pointed out that whoever dominates the coastal fringe [of the heartland] dominates the world*³⁰."

The fifth and final chapter of the book, entitled "*The strategy of security*", deals with the new technologies of warfare - in particular Airpower³¹ - the nature of current military operations, and their influence on the conduct of the Second World War (pp. 45-58). The paragraph entitled "*Strategic Pattern of the Second World War*" is a lengthy geostrategic, rather than geopolitical, development. Spykman deduces the contours of a balanced foreign policy for the United States, in a world now dominated by the "Grand Alliance" between Washington,

29 Russell H. Fifield, G. Etzel Percy, *Geopolitics in Principle and Practice*, Boston, Ginn and company, 1944, p. 191.

30 Russell H. Fifield, G. Etzel Percy, *Geopolitics in Principle and Practice*, *op. cit.* p. 14.

31 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 46.

London and Moscow. *The Geography of the Peace* was published in April 1944, at a time when some people in the United States were still holding out hope of a pragmatic cohabitation with the new Russian power: a poll conducted in November 1943 showed that 54% of Americans believed that Russia could be trusted to help reorganize the post-war world³².

In the end, *The Geography of the Peace* stands as one of the major witnesses to the transition of American foreign policy from relative isolationism to assertive internationalism. This dimension, added to its status as a founding text of geopolitical historiography, explains why the main theorists of political geography and international relations have never stopped referring to it, and why Cold War historians cite Spykman and its *Geography* quite regularly in their footnotes - and sometimes in their central developments - to explain some of the intellectual prodromes of the East-West confrontation³³.

A shift in perspective: which author are we talking about?

This article could end here. However, having reached this point in our commentary, we need to move away from canonical comments for a moment, and ask our reader to temporarily disregard everything that has just been said.

What we have put into perspective in the preceding brief presentation, which certainly accords with the general view that textbooks have of Spykman's latest work, is in reality, at best most certainly relative, and at worst relatively uncertain. In translating *The Geography of the Peace* in french some years ago, I observed a series of discrepancies that clearly argue in favor of a critical re-reading of this work, despite its established historiographical status. At the root of this provisional *epochè*³⁴, and the questions that arise from it, lies a very simple observation, to which no one has given much importance: *The Geography of the Peace was published posthumously, one year after its author's death*. The fact, not so uncommon in the history of thought, is dutifully recorded in the foot-

32 Ann Lane, Howard Temperley (eds.), *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance, 1941-45*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1995. Also: Mark A Stoler, "The 'Second Front' and American Fear of Soviet Expansion, 1941-43", *Military Affairs*, vol. 39, Oct. 1975, pp. 136-141.

33 John Lewis Gaddis, "The insecurities of victory: the United States and the perception of the Soviet threat after World War II", in Michael James Lacey (ed.), *The Truman Presidency*, Cambridge University press, 1991, p. 243. William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II*, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 12-13.

34 *Epochè* (ἐποχή), literally "suspension of judgment", is taken here in the Stoic sense. Zeno, a philosopher of the IV^e century, refused to give his approval or assent (*sugkatathesis*) precipitately to every theory, explanation or representation (*phantasia*) proposed to him.

notes of geopolitics textbooks. However, they fail to mention - and have done so without exception for the past 80 years³⁵ - that Spykman took *no* part in the composition of this “testament”. This fundamental detail opens up a major interpretive problem, all the more so as the *rimland* formula, central to Spykman’s reputation and posterity, appears only once in his work: in *The Geography of the Peace* precisely.

This raises three essential questions. What can a careful study of manuscript and printed sources tell us with *certainty* about the significance of this key work in geopolitical historiography? How can we situate it in the career of the only major “founder” of geopolitical thought never to have been the subject of a *single* biography in English, unlike Mahan, Ratzel, Mackinder or Haushofer? What can we deduce from this preliminary examination of the correspondence between Nicholas John Spykman’s *actual* thought and this latest record of his intellectual activity?

*The Geography of the Peace: untimely questions
about a multi-handed content*

In formal terms, when one holds it in hands and conscientiously leaf through the original 1944 edition, *The Geography of the Peace*, the “*large [and] slim book*” described in 1952 by Edgar S. Furniss³⁶, one of Spykman’s students at Yale, is more akin to a kind of synthetic, didactic and prescriptive think-tank booklet, than to an academic and theoretical work. This is in stark contrast to the 500 pages of *America’s Strategy in World Politics*³⁷. If we remove the 54 maps that accompany it, the volume of *Geography* is even almost smaller than that of Spykman’s two major geopolitical articles, “Geography and Foreign Policy” and “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy”, both published in the *American Political Science Review* in 1938 and 1939³⁸. Such formal brevity, in the case of

35 Nicholas Spykman died on June 26, 1943, in New Haven, Connecticut.

36 Edgar S. Furniss, “The Contribution of Nicholas John Spykman to the Study of International Politics”, *World Politics*, vol. 4, no. 3, April 1952, pp. 382-401.

37 In a *Time* review dated May 15, 1944, *The Geography of the Peace* is significantly presented by the reviewer as a mere “61-page footnote to *America’s Strategy in World Politics*, by the same author”. Cf. “Books: U.S. Encircled”, review of Nicholas Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, in *Time*, Monday, May 15, 1944.

38 Nicholas John Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy I”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (February 1938), pp. 28-50; “Geography and Foreign Policy II”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1938), pp. 213-236. Nicholas John Spykman, Abbie A. Rollins, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy I”, *The American Po-*

a universally quoted work, would be no more than an incidental cause for astonishment, were it not for the fact that it raises questions about the very identity of its author.

Our questioning on this point is simply based on the problematic orientation of the preface to *The Geography of the Peace*. The temptation is sometimes great to skip prefaces to books, as a certain number of readers feel no need for any filter between the author's thought and their own capacity for understanding. In this case, however, nothing could be more dangerous, and we would do well to heed the advice Eugène Fromentin gave to over-hasty readers in 1876: "*To anyone tempted to skip the preface in order to get to the book, I would say that he is wrong, that he is opening the book too early and will read it badly*"³⁹.

From the outset, every preface poses a twofold hermeneutical problem⁴⁰. The first is its spatial positioning: whether it takes on the guise of an amiable command dithyramb or a merciless critical pointillism, the preface *is not* the text it introduces; it therefore necessarily places itself *at a distance* from the latter. The second problem is temporal, as Leroy notes: "*As we all know, every preface is in truth an afterword, always written after the fact*"⁴¹; in this sense, the foreword is an *afterthought*: in addition to the spatial shift, there is a chronological shift, which further increases the thickness of the veil drawn between the work and the reader. In fact, a third gap can be added to those highlighted here by Leroy: it concerns the very identity of the preface writer. Here, two options are possible. Either the author has taken on the task himself, and the preface is said to be "autograph". Or the work is presented allographically. This is precisely the case with *The Geography of the Peace*: the book's *Introductory Statement* is not by Spykman, but by Professor Frederick S. Dunn, his successor since 1940 at the head of the Yale Institute of International Studies (YIIS). This research organization had been founded by Spykman at Yale in 1935, in order to reinforce the International Relations Department he had created the same year,

litical Science Review, Vol. 33, No. 3 (June 1939), pp. 391-410; "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy II", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (August 1939), pp. 591-614.

39 Fromentin was using a metaphor here to dissuade his readers from visiting Belgium without starting with its capital, Brussels. Cf. Eugène Fromentin, *Rubens et Rembrandt, les Maîtres d'autrefois*, Bruxelles, Complexe, ("Le regard littéraire"), 1991 [1875], p. 16.

40 Maxime Leroy, *La préface de roman comme système communicationnel: autour de Walter Scott, Henry James et Joseph Conrad*, PhD thesis in foreign languages and literatures, defended at the University of Angers on December 6, 2003.

41 Maxime Leroy, *op. cit.* p. 9.

with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation. In this abundant “introductory statement”, written in November 1943, Dunn devoutly salutes the memory of his colleague and friend, who died on June 26 of the same year⁴². Naturally, he does not omit to summarize and put into perspective the contents of the book. Most interesting of all, however, is Dunn’s account of the *genesis* of the posthumous work that the YIIS undertook after the death of its founder and former director. It is here, precisely, that the triple shift phenomenon we have just described produces a remarkably destabilizing effect. We hope the reader will forgive us if we quote the incipit at some length now, for it is essential to understand the judgment we are to make of *The Geography of the Peace*. Let’s listen to Frederick Dunn:

“It was Professor Spykman’s intention to write another book [as a follow-up to *America’s Strategy*] in which he would develop further his views on the subject of power in international relations and on the place of geopolitical analysis in the formulation of a security policy. As a initial statement of his position, he delivered a lecture in the autumn of 1942 on the specific subject of the security position of the United States in the present world. This lecture was extensively illustrated with slides of maps which he had made to show the significance of geographical location in the problem of security. A stenographic record was kept of this lecture, and it was his intention to use the record and maps as the basis for his new book. However, he became ill shortly afterward and died on June 26, 1943, without having had any opportunity to carry out his intention.

We in the Institute who were familiar with the work well he had done were very anxious that the fruits of his labors on the American security problem should not be lost. It was accordingly decided to try to carry out his plan, so far as possible, and to publish a book based on his lectures and maps, together with certain other notes and correspondence which further elucidated his views. The work was entrusted to Miss Helen R. Nicholl of the Institute staff, who had worked for two years with Professor Spykman as his research assistant and was thoroughly familiar with his views and methods of analysis.

The result is the present volume. Miss Nicholl has carried out her difficult assignment with great skill and imagination, as well as with real fidelity to Professor Spykman’s own plan and intentions. Although a good proportion of the writing is new, she has managed to keep closely to his

42 Frederick Dunn, “An Introductory Statement”, in Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, edited by Helen R. Nicholl, New York, Harcourt, Brace and company, New York, 1944, x.

thoughts, and even to his phraseology and style.⁴³ “

This text is perplexing, to say the least. According to Dunn, Spykman’s book consists of “*his lecture and maps [from autumn 1942], together with certain other notes and correspondence*”⁴⁴. Not everything comes from the same *Urtext*. *The Geography of the Peace* is made up of a lecture, supplementary “notes”, and letters whose period and subjects are not specified. In any case, the very order of paragraphs and developments is *not* attributable to Spykman. What else? Dunn tells us that “a good proportion” of the text was written by Helen R. Nicholl, the YIIS research assistant who edited *The Geography of the Peace*. In a short acknowledgement at the beginning of the book, Nicholl also points out that her work was reviewed not only by Dunn, but also by three research fellows from the same *Yale Institute of International Studies*⁴⁵: Arnold Wolfers, Howard A. Meyerhoff and William T. R. Fox.

We are in the presence of dispersed writings that have been the subject of a posthumous and collective didactic re-articulation, without the author to whom the book is attributed having been able to indicate in what sense this editing work was to be accomplished⁴⁶. The exegetical problems posed by *The Geography of the Peace* do not end there; my systematic research in the archives of the *Yale Institute of International Studies* shows that the selection made by Nicholl and Dunn left out many other unpublished texts, perhaps just as important as those selected. In a 1943-44 executive report to the YIIS’s financial backer, the Rockefeller Foundation, Frederick S. Dunn concludes the paragraph on Spykman’s recent death: “[After *The Geography of Peace*] Miss Nicholl is now working on a much more extensive series of lecture notes, which had been developed by Professor Spykman for his teaching of international politics at Yale for over ten years. It is to be hoped that this material can be published as a book”⁴⁷. The notes in question were never actually published, for Helen Nicholl left the

43 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, x.

44 Frederick Dunn, “Introductory Statement”, in Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* ix-xii.

45 Cf. Helen R. Nicholl, “Acknowledgment”, in *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* v. On the dust jacket of the original edition, as well as on the spine, Helen Nicholl’s name is given a font size equal to that used for the name of the author himself, Nicholas Spykman.

46 Otherwise, it seems reasonable to assume that Dunn wouldn’t have failed to mention it in this introduction. Not to mention that “[Spykman] (...) died on June 26, 1943, without having had any opportunity to complete his project”. Cf. *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* x.

47 Yale University Library, Yale Archives, Yale Institute of International Studies Records 1935-55, RU482, YRG37, S1, B7.

YIIS in the meantime to begin a career as a diplomat at the State Department⁴⁸. And we don't know exactly what became of this "*much more extensive series of lecture notes*".

It has to be admitted, even on the sole basis of Frederick Dunn's preface, that the supposed "classic" suddenly takes on the more contrasting face of a work of *at least* uncertain status, composed at the end of a posthumous selection process that could be considered as obscure, to say the least. How exactly did Helen Nicholl and Frederick Dunn distinguish between the lost "series of notes" and the texts they selected for *The Geography of the Peace*? It seems to us necessary to draw all the consequences from this intriguing preface: in this book, the YIIS *has* Spykman *speak*, much as in a posthumous radio portrait where the mixing team would have put together end-to-end "sounds" of interviews from different eras, without specifying to the listener the date of the latter, or the reasons for the cut chosen. Using Gérard Genette's critical categorizations, we can see that the peritext of *The Geography of the Peace* is entirely due to the YIIS, but that the epitext⁴⁹ is partly confused with the text itself, in the sense that the entire work is an assemblage of peripheral material, i.e. a *digest* of other writings: books, articles, reviews and mixed lectures. The boundary between the text and the paratext of this book is therefore blurred. All the more so in that the YIIS has chosen not to include any footnotes explaining where the various pieces of the puzzle come from. Similarly, there is no bibliography. Seen from this angle, the real nature of *The Geography of the Peace* contrasts more than sharply with its undisputed celebrity in the geopolitical field, but also in both Cold War history and International Relations theory. This is why, in the final part of this chapter, it can be our interest to delve deeper into the genesis of the work, in order to reassess its exact scope.

Paleography of a geopolitical palimpsest

Which of Spykman's works did the YIIS team responsible for editing the book draw on to create *The Geography of the Peace*?

48 About Helen Nicholl, see the last part of this chapter.

49 According to Gérard Genette, the peritext of a work contains: the title, subtitle, preface, afterword, *prière d'insérer*, warning, epigraph, dedication, notes and back cover. The epitext contains reviews of the book, interviews with the author, correspondence, diaries and more. Together, the peritext (what "surrounds" the text as closely as possible) and the epitext (what surrounds it externally, contextualizing it) make up the paratext. Cf. Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, coll. "Poétique", 1987.

In the YIIS executive report for 1940-41, we can trace an unpublished general study by the Yale Institute of International Studies, entitled "*The Geographical Basis of Foreign Policy*"⁵⁰. The exact plan of this "Study XIV" is specified in a second report, dated January 14, 1941⁵¹. In the Institute's Executive Report 1941-42, Study XIV becomes Study II-B, without changing its title⁵². The whole process of "making" *The Geography of the Peace* can be traced back to this source, as we shall demonstrate. Spykman had conceived the principle of this study as early as 1934⁵³, but his health problems, which worsened from 1936-37 onwards, left him no time to transform it into a real publication. Between 1934 and 1944, this mother text, marked by permanent incompleteness, was to evolve considerably, eventually serving as a "reserve" for more targeted contributions. For Spykman himself, who drew on it for articles in the *American Political Science Review* in 1938 and 1939. But also for the YIIS, which eventually drew on it to "produce" *The Geography of the Peace* in 1943-44. Some of these intertextual transfers can be seen by comparing the outlines of the unpublished *The Geographical Basis of Foreign Policy* (1934) with those of "Geography and Foreign Policy" (APSR, 1938), "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy" (APSR, co-written with Abigail Rollins in 1939), and finally with the final form taken by *The Geography of the Peace* (1944).

By comparing the table of contents of these four productions "by" Nicholas Spykman, only three of which having been published, it seems admissible to us to consider that certain parts of the *Geography of Peace* are indeed by him, at least those which take up the nomenclature of the YIIS study begun in 1934, or that of the two APSR articles. From this point of view, the origin of Chapters 2, 4 and 5 is not obvious, but Chapters 1 and 3 are partly "traceable", at least according to the titles of their sub-sections. The penultimate paragraph of the third part of "The Geographical Basis of Foreign Policy", entitled "Sea Power and Land Power", is thus reused in "Geography and Foreign Policy", the 1938 APSR arti-

50 RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4957, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1940-1941, p. 80.

51 "Yale Institute of International Studies, Program for the second Five-Years Period, July 1, 1941 - June 30, 1946", page 2; Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscripts and Archives Service, YRG 4-A, Series III, Box 326, Folder 640.

52 RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4958, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1941-1942, p. 55.

53 As shown in the YIIS executive report for the year 1935-1936. Cf. RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4952, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1935-1936, p. 24.

cle, before Nicholl inserts it six years later in the third chapter of *The Geography of the Peace*, entitled “The position of the Western Hemisphere”. The paragraph in *The Geography of the Peace* entitled “Location and World Power”⁵⁴ “is a further example of this sequential transmigration of the 1934-1938-1944 type to this same third chapter of *The Geography of the Peace*, which also includes scattered repeats of the 1942 framework of *America’s Strategy*, as well as extracts and transposed developments from the other APSR article, “Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy”, published in 1939.

The *Urtext* of 1934 was not enough, however. Sources of a different kind can be found in *The Geography of the Peace*, as Dunn and Nicholl drew on the archives of their deceased colleague for a wider range of material than just the lecture notes or reprints of articles and books they mention. On pages 6 and 7, we can establish that the text is a copy of a book review given by Spykman in 1942 to *Political Science Quarterly*, and devoted to two works dealing with geopolitics, one by Robert Strausz-Hupé, the other by Johannes Mattern⁵⁵. Another example: the book’s conclusion (“A Foreign Policy for the United States”, pages 58-61) is based in part on the text of an unpublished lecture given by Spykman in July 1942 - different from the one alluded to in Dunn’s introduction, which took place in the autumn of the same year⁵⁶. It should be noted that the origin of these “transfers” is not indicated at any point in *The Geography of the Peace*.

The presence of extracts of this kind, and the fact that the unpublished 1934 study seems to form part of the foundation of the 1938-39 articles and *The Geography of the Peace*, is evidence of an effective link between material of controlled origin - albeit from different periods - and a relatively coherent final assembly. But can it be said that all the chapters in the book come from Spykman’s own pen? Not in the strictest sense, in fact, and this point, which we will now develop, will prove crucial in terms of the book’s *scope*.

54 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 22.

55 Nicholas Spykman, review of Robert Strausz-Hupé, *The Struggle for Space and Power* and Johannes Mattern, *Geopolitik: Doctrine of National Self-Sufficiency and Empire*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 4, December 1942, pp. 598-601. In it, Spykman proposes a fairly modern vision of geopolitics: “*The method of geopolitical analysis can be compared to what precedes the formulation and execution of a global policy, in any field of action involving a choice of positioning and an apprehension of spatial relations. We think in geopolitical terms when we cross a street, choose the location of a store or factory, select a hill or tree to serve as an observation post, or determine the site of an airport. Geographic thinking of this kind is an essential part of all urban and regional planning (...)*”.

56 We tracked down the complete stenotyped text of this unpublished lecture in 2012, in the private archives of the Spykman family.

The Geography of the Peace: traces on a simmelian shore

We must now return to the curious *Introductory Statement* to *The Geography*. Dunn, commenting on Nicholl's work, is quick to point out that "*much of his writing [is] new*". So, not only has there been selection and rearrangement – we've just outlined a few of these – but also *the addition of exogenous material*, which opens up a whole new critical dimension. What exactly happened between June 26, 1943 (Spykman's death) and November 1st of the same year (the day Dunn completed the preface to *The Geography of the Peace*), during a process of rapid synthesis that saw no fewer than four advisors – Dunn, Fox, Wolfers and Meyerhoff – pore over Helen Nicholl's intertextual embroidery? Can we totally rule out the hypothesis that this collective work of *rearrangement* was the occasion for a more or less implicit *reinterpretation* of certain aspects of Spykman's thought? There are several reasons for this hypothesis.

First of all, the 1944 book cites certain historical events that took place *after* Spykman's death (in particular, the Moscow conference of October 1943)⁵⁷. Similarly, in the concluding chapter of *The Geography of Peace*, on page 54, the author refers to "*our North African and Italian campaigns*", alluding to Operation *Torch*, which began in November 1942, and the Sicilian landings of 1943. It is unlikely that Spykman, forced to give up many of his teachings and regularly bedridden since 1939, who wrote nothing after the end of 1942, and who died in June of the following year, could have studied and analyzed these campaigns in such a way as to include them in a course or have them used for notes of any kind.

The second discrepancy is more fundamental. Nicholas Spykman had given "The Geographical Basis of Foreign Policy", his 1934 *Urtext*, an explicitly *sociological* orientation. *The Geographical Basis of Foreign Policy*, he explained, was to be "(...) *an analysis of the influence of the geographical factor in international relations*". "States," he pointed out in his draft project, "*are, in a very special sense, territorialized organizations, and in this they differ from many other social structures. To what degree does this characteristic influence the foreign policy of states, and give it a character distinct from that of other social groups?*" Spykman put this "analysis" into perspective in an extremely original way for a "geopolitician": "*It is hoped to illustrate in this project a sociological approach to the study of international relations (...) The general pattern for this type of study would be found in a sociological inquiry into the nature of*

57 *The Geography of The Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 60.

*external policy of groups in different environments. Our group is a particular type of group, 'the state', operating in a particular type of environment, the international society*⁵⁸." Our research into Spykman's biography has established that this type of socio-centric vocabulary owes nothing to chance. The Dutchman from Yale was still influenced by his 1923 doctoral thesis, entitled "The Social Theory of Georg Simmel". This passage is an obvious transposition of that thesis, in which Spykman, author of the first monograph on Simmel's work ever published in English, stressed the importance of the spatial dimension in the Berlin thinker's sociology: "*Many social forms,*" he wrote in translating Simmel, "*express their essential characters through specific spatial configurations, and indicate the value of a study of these spatial conditions as a means of understanding the process of association they underlie*"⁵⁹. This influence of sociology on Spykman's work, which constitutes the central hypothesis of the scientific biography we published in 2016, had never been taken into account to explain the vision of international relations of the author of *The Geography of the Peace* and *America's Strategy in World Politics*⁶⁰. The truth is that the influence of this sociological matrix is immense: it profoundly shapes the worldview of the founder of Yale University's first Department of International Relations. In Spykman's work, "geopolitics" - a term largely unknown in the United States prior to 1939⁶¹ - is used not as a "magical" revealer of global power issues, but as an auxiliary method of approach, serving to better understand the inertia affecting international relations, which he saw as fully justifiable of a social science analysis. In this sense, it would be interesting to ask why this socio-centric orientation, so dear to Spykman's heart, remains entirely absent from the version of *The Geography of the Peace* that his YIIS colleagues eventually composed.

There is one final reason for challenging a too univocal attribution of the content and, above all, the orientation and *tone* of *The Geography of the Peace* to Spykman alone, and for inferring the existence of a possible reinterpretation

58 Yale Institute of International Studies, Program for the second Five-Years Period, July 1, 1941 - June 30, 1946, page 2; Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscripts and Archives Service, YRG 4-A, Series III, Box 326, Folder 640.

59 Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Social Theory of Georg Simmel*, Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1925, p. 162.

60 See Olivier Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, the invention of American geopolitics*, op. cit.

61 As Russell H. Fifield, author of a geopolitics textbook published the same year as Spykman's book, points out: "Geopolitics is a new term for the average American, as much as for the academic". Cf. Russell H. Fifield, G. Etzel Pearcy, *Geopolitics in Principle and Practice*, Boston, Ginn and company, 1944, p. 4.

of his thought. Let's take a look at the paragraph in the fourth chapter entitled "The dynamic pattern of Eurasian politics": "*The most recent expression of the heartland concept by Mackinder has recognized the predominant importance of the rimland and the necessity of British-Russian-United States collaboration to prevent the growth of German power in this area*"⁶². The wording tends to suggest that the *Heartland* scheme of 1904-1919 converges with the rimland theory of 1944. What's awkward is that this "most recent expression" of Halford Mackinder's thought, supposedly converging with Spykman's, was formalized by the British geographer in an article – "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace" – published in July 1943 in *Foreign Affairs*⁶³. A month, therefore, *after* the death of Spykman, who was *a priori* unable to read it, *and who is therefore probably not the author of these lines*.

This passage reconciling the two approaches, that of the American political scientist and that of the British geographer, who is said to have recognized "the importance of the predominance of the rimlands", is not without consequences: even today, Spykman and Mackinder are effectively compared, even confused, by the historiographical tradition of the geopolitical discipline, with the American taking on the role of a penetrating but subordinate commentator, dependent on the primary framework of the British master, whom he criticizes in detail, the better to reconcile with him on the essentials. Nevertheless, Spykman was far more critical of Mackinder than it is generally acknowledged, as Michael Gerace noted in 1991 in a remarkable analysis of the differences between the two major theorists of Anglo-Saxon geopolitics⁶⁴. Gerace's analysis could be extended by demonstrating that Spykman's vision of international relations is *radically* opposed to that of the great British geographer, not only geopolitically, but also historically and philosophically. It should also be noted that Spykman did not wait until 1944 to criticize Mackinder: the Briton is relatively scorned by the American in 1938 in the first article given to the APSR⁶⁵. In 1942, *America's*

62 *The Geography of The Peace*, *op. cit.* p. 44.

63 Halford J. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 21, n°4, July 1943, p. 595-605.

64 Michael P. Gerace, "Between Mackinder and Spykman: Geopolitics, Containment and After", *Comparative Strategy*, vol 10, Issue 4, 1991. Gerace's understanding of the scope of Spykman's geopolitics is illuminating.

65 In "Geography and Foreign Policy", Spykman wrote: (...) *both Mr. Hennig and Mr. Mackinder amass industrial quantities of evidence to prove the theory that when a maritime power fights a land power on the sea, it is victorious, and vice versa. This conclusion, apart from not being particularly useful, is not really surprising*". Is that violent enough? Cf. "Geography and Foreign Policy II", *op. cit.* p. 225.

Strategy in World Politics did not once quote the author of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*⁶⁶, and presented an analysis of power relations between the Old and New Worlds that already off-centered Mackinder's vision⁶⁷.

The Geography of the Peace very partly reflects this critical intensity, in some of its paragraphs⁶⁸. In the end, however, the result is paradoxical: so Spykman would question Mackinder's theory of history for years, only to mention that their two visions eventually converge? It is safe to assume that, had he lived, the Yale professor would not have concluded this passage from *The Geography of the Peace* in such a surprisingly conciliatory manner. Dunn himself admits this dimension: "I never knew him to hesitate in following the logic of his thinking, even though it led to conclusions which were personally unpalatable to him or unpopular with his friends⁶⁹". This cluster of discrepancies leads us to hazard a hypothesis: the final paragraph of Chapter IV, which finally softens the criticism of Mackinder, was written by Dunn, with a precise objective. And other paragraphs may be affected by this substitution, in the final chapter in particular.

Let's assume that our heretic reasoning is correct. The next question is the motive. Why did Spykman's text have to be reoriented? On closer examination, the Yale Institute of International Studies had a few reasons for doing so. Which brings us to the relatively fascinating question of the connections between the YIIS weave of intellectual motifs and the embroidery of intertextual motifs in *The Geography*.

66 Mackinder's name appears only in the book's bibliography, among the 11 sources listed in connection with chapter VI of *America's Strategy*, entitled "The United States and the World". Cf. Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World politics. The United States and the Balance of Power*, op. cit. 1942, p. 475.

67 *America's Strategy in World politics. The United States and the Balance of Power*, op. cit. 1942, pp. 179-183. In our opinion, this is the proto-mention of *rimland*, for which Spykman indiscriminately uses the following expressions: "encircling buffer zone" (p. 180), "great concentric buffer zone" (p. 181), "border zone" (p. 181), or "encircling ring of border states".

68 For example, with regard to the "inevitable opposition" between Russian land power and British sea power, Spykman denounces "*the fallacy of this kind of one-sided theory of history*" (p. 43). A far cry from convergence. The origin of Spykman's opposition to Mackinder is partly explained by the nature of Spykman's first contacts with political geography, in the early 1920s. See Olivier Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2016.

69 Frederick Dunn, "An Introductory Statement", *The Geography of the Peace*, op. cit. xii.

A case of conscience: Frederick Sherwood Dunn

In 1944, Sir Halford J. Mackinder enjoyed an extremely favorable critical status in the United States – a “vogue” might even be a more accurate term. This flattering reception stemmed from the American belated success of his 1919 book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Reprinted in 1942 on the other side of the Atlantic⁷⁰, this version was prefaced by one of Spykman’s critics, the influential political scientist and strategist at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Studies, Edward Mead Earle. In his review of *America’s Strategy*, Mead Earle, an admirer of Mackinder’s geopolitics, contrasted the “pragmatism” of the British master with the “cynicism” of the American professor. As he didn’t mince his words about Spykman: “(...) *this kind of speculation is not objective political science,*” he grumbles, “*it is nothing more than an expression of the mental discomfort this erudite gentleman feels with a morality that does not seem to be moving in the direction suggested by his own self-fulfilling prophecies, despite his personal cult of cold-blooded political realism*”⁷¹. Isaiah Bowman, the immovable and powerful president of the American Geographical Association from 1915 to 1935, was the man who opened the pages of *Foreign Affairs* to Mackinder in 1943, commissioning from him the article “The Round World”⁷². The same year, *Life* published a much-acclaimed article on geopolitics, which positively credited Mackinder with “inventing” the discipline - while, with less friendly undertones, calling Professor Spykman a “cold-blooded realist”⁷³. Finally, the year *The Geography of the Peace* was published, Mackinder became the refer-

70 A first edition had been published in the USA in 1919, without any real response. Cf. Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, New York, Henry Holt and co. 1919. The second edition benefits not only from Mead Earle’s introduction, but also from a foreword by G. Fielding Eliot, a popular strategist during the Second World War and author of *Defending America* in 1939. Cf. Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, New York, Henry Holt and co. 1942 (reissued). Foreword by Major George Fielding Eliot and Introduction by Edward Mead Earle.

71 Quoted in Edgar S. Furniss, “The Contribution of Nicholas John Spykman to the Study of International Politics”, *World Politics*, Vol. 4, N°. 3, April 1952, p. 382.

72 It is to Bowman that Mackinder alludes in the very first sentence of *The Round World*: “I was asked to extend some of my earlier writings, in particular to ascertain whether my strategic concept of the *Heartland* had lost any of its relevance under the conditions of modern warfare”. Cf. Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace”, *op. cit.* p. 595.

73 J. Thorndike, “Geopolitics: the lurid career of a scientific system which a Briton invented, the Germans used and the Americans need to study”, *Life*, December 21, 1942.

ence author celebrated by the collective work *Compass of the World*, an apotheosis that gathered around him the bulk of American political geographers⁷⁴, from Richard Hartshorne to Owen Lattimore, via Hans Weigert and Isaiah Bowman. *Foreign Affairs* agreed that “The Round World” should once again be reproduced in this collective, in a form slightly reworked by its author⁷⁵. Remarkable detail: one of the epigraphs in *Compass of the World* symbolizes the dark side of political geography, which all the assembled authors declare to condemn: the vilified passage about the relativity of moral values for the conduct of foreign policy is taken from Spykman’s *America’s Strategy*⁷⁶.

Given these worrying elements and this almost hysterical atmosphere, it’s not entirely impossible that Frederick Dunn, himself deeply involved in the networks of American foreign policy specialists, and attached to the influential positioning of the YIIS he now chaired, thought it prudent, in view of the importance and interpersonal links of Spykman’s “enemies”, to soften the last part of his former director’s critical charge against Mackinder in the final assembly of *The Geography of the Peace*. In the very first paragraph of his introduction, his priority is to make it clear that not enough attention has been paid to Mackinder’s writings of the Interwar period.

Spykman’s opinion of Mackinder is not the only point that may have preoccupied Frederick S. Dunn. We need to transport ourselves for a moment to Yale, at the end of 1943, and climb in imagination to the second floor of the *Hall of Graduate Studies*, the windows of which overlooked the massive tower of the Sterling Memorial Library, at the heart of the university, where the offices of the YIIS researchers were then concentrated. Dunn, director of the Institute since 1940, when the ailing and diminished Spykman voluntarily handed over the reins, is at his desk, poring over the proofs and maps of *The Geography of Peace*, examining the final layout and redrawing proposals submitted by Helen Nicholl at the end of September⁷⁷. He puts the finishing touches to his introduc-

74 Hans W. Weigert, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (eds.), *Compass of the World, a symposium on Political geography*, maps by Richard Edes Harrison, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1944.

75 This makes it the last and most complete version of this text, which is rarely mentioned in bibliographies. Sir Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace”, in Hans W. Weigert, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (eds.), *Compass of the World, a symposium on Political geography*, maps by Richard Edes Harrison, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1944, pp. 161-173.

76 *America’s Strategy in World Politics*, 1942, *op. cit.* p. 18. Cf. *Compass of the World*, *op. cit.* vi.

77 This date is specified in the YIIS executive report of 1942-43. *RAC*, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 418, Folder 4959, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1942-1943. p. 16.

tion, which he completed on November 1st 1943. Of course, he had to respect the personality of the deceased - their friendship was sincere. But must he do so at any cost? For a moment, his pen stops above the page he's annotating. The discomfort of his position is commensurate with his ambitions for the YIIS, an institute with a growing reputation, which he wishes to transform from a simple research structure, attached to Yale's International Relations Department, into a veritable *think-tank*⁷⁸, capable of renewing and influencing US foreign and defense policy. We have extracted Dunn's "roadmap" from the YIIS archives, entitled "*The Place of University Research Agencies in International Relations*"⁷⁹. A formidable organizer, Dunn recruited some of the brightest young researchers of the time to YIIS, including William T.R. Fox, Klaus Knorr and Bernard Brodie⁸⁰. To replace Spykman in the field of "international security" and political geography from 1943 onwards, he brought to YIIS Grayson Kirk and Stephen Jones, two former State Department employees⁸¹. An extremely gifted *fund-raiser*, he did not lose sight of the media plan, and considered the creation of an "in-house" journal dedicated to International Relations⁸², and a

78 This policy, which was crowned with success in the late '40s, when YIIS enjoyed real influence, was nevertheless to be the cause of the rift between Frederick Dunn and Yale's new president, Alfred Whitney Griswold, himself a former YIIS researcher and colleague of Spykman's, who felt that the institute's research and teaching vocation had been hijacked, and that its drift towards becoming a media-driven *think-tank* prescribing security and defense policy had to be halted. As a result, the YIIS was dissolved in 1951, and Dunn moved with seven of his colleagues to Princeton, where he set up the Center of International Studies, and which he headed until 1961, when he was succeeded by Klaus Knorr, another YIIS defector. The episode left a deep mark on the way Yale reorganized the teaching of International Relations. See Olivier Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*, 2016, op. cit.

79 This program, which theorized the YIIS research method and influence objectives, was sent by Dunn to the Rockefeller Foundation's Social Science Division at the end of 1943. Cf. Frederick S. Dunn, "The Place of University Research Agencies in International Relations", December 23, 1943, *RAC*, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4947.

80 Cf. Paulo Ramos, *The role of the Yale Institute of International Studies in the Construction of the United States National Security Ideology, 1935-1951*, University of Manchester thesis, department of Government, unpublished, 2003. Accessed at Yale University's Department of Manuscripts and Archives in 2012. See also Olivier Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2016. Also: Robert Vitalis, review of David Ekbladh, "Present at the Creation: Edward Mead Earle and the Depression-Era Origins of Security Studies", *International Security*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12), in *H-Diplo | ISSF Article Review*, June 15, 2012, p. 8.

81 Report of the YIIS Executive Committee for 1942-43, p. 3.

82 This project gave rise to the journal *World Politics*, still published today by Princeton University, which in 1951 welcomed Dunn and his YIIS researchers, "exiled" from Yale by Griswold.

radio interview program for his institute's researchers. To protect all those accomplishments, he can't allow the kind of controversy that accompanied the publication of *America's Strategy in World Politics* in 1942 to develop again – the one which saw Spykman denounced as a deterministic neo-Machiavellian⁸³, an unreasonable follower of American-style “neo-Prussianism”, and a disguised apostle of General-Doctor Haushofer's diabolical *Geopolitik*⁸⁴. This critical reception, in which Mead Earle, Clyde Eagleton⁸⁵ and Michael Greenberg⁸⁶, *inter alii*, had distinguished themselves negatively, was certainly of concern to Dunn, who, as we have said, personally maintained excellent relations with the circles of influence of American political science, international relations and diplomacy⁸⁷. In these conditions, and while defending the memory of the founder of his institute, the probable solution he found to avoid a new trial for witchcraft in “German” determinism against his late colleague – and, in turn, for preventing a possible controversy to damage the reputation of the YIIS – was, as we have seen, to merge *in extremis* Spykman and Mackinder's analyses, by suggesting that the Briton had recognized the interest of the American's work, all at the risk of a certain contradiction.

The prospects offered to the “Grand Alliance” between London, Moscow and Washington were a buoyant theme in 1944, and indeed corresponded to Mackinder's “Round World” plea. Dunn demarcates the terrain in an additional way, arranging *The Geography of the Peace* in such a way as to unambiguously distinguish between “good” and “bad” geopolitics. The message is clear: Spykman's approach should not be mechanically confused with an aggressive foreign policy roadmap⁸⁸. This didactic bias adopted by YIIS makes *The Geography of the Peace* a defense brief that does not say its name. The pedagogical insistence on “good” geopolitics, which aims to clear Spykman's *Weltanschauung*, also provides an explanation for the insertion of the book's highly pedagogical chap-

83 Michael Greenberg, review of Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, in *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 15, n°3, Sept. 1942, p. 383.

84 Edward Mead Earle, “Power Politics and American World Policy”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1, March 1943, p. 94.

85 Clyde Eagleton, review of Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 222, “Winning Both the War and the Peace”, July 1942, pp. 189-190.

86 Michael Greenberg, *op. cit.*

87 William T. R. Fox, “Frederick Sherwood Dunn and the American Study of International Relations”, *World Politics*, vol. 15, no. 1, October 1962, pp. 1-19.

88 Dunn insists heavily on this point, devoting almost half of his introduction to it. Cf. *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, xi.

ter II ("Mapping the World")⁸⁹. *A priori*, this insertion is totally exogenous: one of the very few footnotes in *The Geography of the Peace* mentions that it comes, not from Spykman's texts, but from two works published in 1938: *General Cartography* by Erwin Raisz, and *Elements of Map Projection* by Charles H. Deetz and Oscar S. Adams⁹⁰.

Would Spykman have approved of the general *tone* of the book? Let's go even further: does the centrality of the *rimland* concept in *The Geography of the Peace* reflect the general economy of the original texts from which Helen Nicholl worked, or is it rather an induced effect of the division adopted by the latter⁹¹? Beyond the place of *rimland* in Spykman's work, and the YIIS's insistent reminder of the difference to be made between *Geopolitics* and *Geopolitik*, it should be noted that the realist apprehension of international relations promoted by Spykman is in no way erased in *The Geography of the Peace*: its very spirit was shared by Dunn and most of the YIIS researchers.

Summarizing these repositionings, Dunn states on the book jacket that *The Geography of Peace* was conceived by Spykman as "*a concise and graphic presentation, in text and maps, of the power position of the United States and our strategy for achieving security in a peaceful post-war world*". Which is true. The book, he continues, "*proves conclusively the value of geopolitics for solving the problems of peace as well as those the strategy of war.*" Here again, Spykman would not have denied his colleague. Finally, Dunn concludes that *The Geography of the Peace* "(...) *provides a realistic foundation for an American policy of close cooperation with Great Britain and Russia, through permanent participation in world affairs*". This, on the other hand, poses a real problem in terms of its relevance to Nicholas Spykman's actual thinking, and reinforces our hypothesis that this posthumous work has been partially reinterpreted. With the "Grand Alliance", we reach the heart of the exegetical problem never accounted for in *The Geography of the Peace*.

Spykman, promoter of the "Grand Alliance"?

One of Nicholas Spykman's most enduring ideas was the need for the United States to turn to its former vanquished adversaries as soon as a conflict was over, in order to permanently re-establish a balance of power, particularly in

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹¹ Cf. Nicholas Spykman, *The Invention of American Geopolitics*, *op. cit.*

Eurasia. This classic theory, as expressed in *America's Strategy*, had led him to recommend the recovery of Germany and Japan after the end of the current war - a major transgression in 1942, to say the least! - which did much to alienate a large number of critics, who laughed at the idea, calling its author a "defeatist"⁹² or a cynic. Spykman, it's true, was blunt in his recommendations: "*The present war*," he analyzes in substance, "*is undoubtedly being fought to destroy Hitler and the National Socialist Party, but this does not necessarily mean that it must destroy Germany as a military power*"⁹³. Aggravating his case in the light of the recent trauma of Pearl Harbour, he wrote just as coldly - and once again in 1942 - that the danger of another Japanese invasion of Asia must certainly be averted by victory, but that this "*does not mean that Japan's military strength must be totally eliminated*", as this would leave the field open to China and Russia on the Pacific coast of Eurasia. Today, it's hard to imagine the degree of freedom, lucidity - or careerist recklessness - it took for an American academic to write this *a few months* after Pearl Harbour. Spykman's intuition was nonetheless put into practice by the Americans at the start of the Cold War⁹⁴. Admittedly, it is somewhat strange not to find this intuitive and provocative audacity in *The Geography of the Peace*, which, two years after these prophetic views, is content with a formalistic conclusion promoting the "Grand Alliance".

This astonishing conformism can be explained, however, if we return to the central fact of our introduction. And that central fact is that Spykman *did not* compose *The Geography of the Peace*. So, in absolute terms, there is nothing to prevent the book's conclusion from being "brought into harmony" with the line of metapolitical influence that Frederick Dunn cautiously assigned to the YIIS, given the context of 1943-44: "*The Institute*," Dunn announced in one of his reports to the Rockefeller Foundation, "*has undertaken to position itself in such a way as to be able to contribute as much as possible to the intelligent solution of the problems facing the nation*"⁹⁵. *The Geography of the Peace* be-

92 Cf. James T. Watkins IV, "Regionalism and Plans for Post-War Reconstruction: The First Three Years", *Social Forces*, vol. 21, no. 4, May 1943, p. 382.

93 *America's Strategy in World Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

94 Cf. Edgar S. Furniss, "The Contribution of Nicholas John Spykman to the Study of International Politics", *World Politics*, vol. 4, no. 3, April 1952, pp. 382-401. Edgar S. Furniss Jr, was the son of Yale provost and former head of the social sciences department, Edgar S. Furniss, who recruited Spykman from New Haven in 1925. A brilliant student of the international relations department created by Spykman, Furniss Jr. went on to a distinguished career in this field and taught international relations himself at Ohio University. He is the author, among others, of studies on French foreign policy (*Troubled Ally*, 1960).

95 RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 418, Folder 4960, Yale Institute of International Studies, Re-

comes a vehicle for this positioning. The method and foundations of Spykman's geopolitical reasoning are *broadly* respected, but the conclusions and *updated* diplomatic perspectives become those of YIIS. At least one critic of Spykman's book noticed this: in *Military Affairs*, in the summer of 1944, Robert Strausz-Hupé remarked that *The Geography of the Peace* "abandons Spykman's earlier thesis of a new balance of power, instrumented and stabilized by the dominant power of the United States. Instead," he notes, "a more muted type of 'security policy' is suggested, in the form of cooperation between the USA, Russia and Great Britain"⁹⁶. Here, several factual hypotheses help to explain what may have happened. The first relates to the role of William T.R. Fox, YIIS researcher and Frederick Dunn's right-hand man. Fox, whom Dunn had appointed secretary of the institute's executive committee in 1943, revised the final text of *The Geography*, as Helen Nicholl points out⁹⁷. However, at the very time he was providing this service to his colleague, Fox was preparing the book that would make him famous. Issued in 1944 - again with Harcourt, Brace and co., the usual YIIS publisher - it was entitled *Superpowers: the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union: their responsibility for peace*. The title, in which the expression "superpower" appears for the first time in history, is in itself a program⁹⁸. Is it any coincidence that this cautious act of faith in the *Grand Alliance* corresponds precisely to the final recommendations of *The Geography of the Peace*? The page 58 of *The Geography*, in particular, strongly evokes Fox's analysis in his *Superpowers*, which argues for a joint custody of European maritime approaches between the US and the UK. On page 57 of *The Geography*, the expression "the three superpowers" is used: who, if not Fox, could have decided to use it in Spykman's book⁹⁹? Finally, Dunn insists on promoting Fox's forthcoming book in the very introduction to *The Geography of the Peace*¹⁰⁰. All of this suggests the possible existence of a wider logic.

port for the Year 1943-1944, p. 1.

96 Strausz-Hupé insightfully points out that the book no longer reflects either "the massive contradictions" or "the brilliance of the author's style". Cf. Robert Strausz-Hupé, review of Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of The Peace*, *op. cit.* in *Military Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 2, Summer 1944, p. 144.

97 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, "Acknowledgments".

98 William T.R. Fox, *Superpowers: the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union: their responsibility for peace*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and company, 1944.

99 Either Fox wrote this passage. Or it is attributable to Spykman, in which case the latter must be credited with the coining of the structuring term "superpower". Understandably, we favour the former hypothesis.

100 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.* xi.

Let's turn again to the archives: if we study the research program of the Yale Institute of International Studies as it evolved from 1935 to 1944, it is possible to notice that the studies placed under Spykman's responsibility during this period tended towards a geo-centric analysis of U.S. security in international society - this was the theme of the 1934 *Urtext*. By contrast, those for which Frederick Dunn was *rapporteur* focused more on improving relations between the Anglo-Saxon powers. In 1941, Arnold Wolfers (another reviewer of *The Geography of the Peace*) was entrusted with a study devoting "special attention to relations between the United States and Europe"¹⁰¹; he made Anglo-American cooperation one of his favorite subjects¹⁰². In 1942, a "new series" of studies was launched by the YIIS: the "main" project dealt with "Anglo-Saxon relations"¹⁰³, whose "starting conviction" was that "(...) the key to a satisfactory peace and to the preservation of Western culture lies in the maintenance of unity and closeness between the United States and Great Britain"¹⁰⁴. Dunn took personal responsibility for this "I-C Study", entitled "Anglo-American Relations". The following year, the "I-C" was accompanied by related works: "The Super-Powers: their responsibility for the organization of security" (entrusted to Fox), "The United States and the British Lifeline" (Stephen Jones), and "Anglo-American Economic Problems" (Bert F. Hoselitz)¹⁰⁵. Dunn inaugurated a "special relationship" director between the YIIS and British research institutes specialized in foreign policy: in 1943, he contacted Arnold Toynbee in London to discuss setting up joint research groups between Yale and Chatham House.¹⁰⁶

These studies and initiatives, which are easily justified in the context of the Second World War, nonetheless go beyond the framework of the conflict, to relate to a certain "natural" vision of the common destiny of the English-speaking peoples. But this was not to Spykman's taste. He denied any mechanical convergence between the national interests of London and Washington, due to their

101 *RAC*, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4958, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1941-1942, p. 8.

102 Arnold Wolfers, "Anglo-American Postwar Cooperation and the Interests of Europe", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 36, August 1942.

103 *RAC*, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4958, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1941-1942, p. 13.

104 *Ibid*, p. 13.

105 *RAC*, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 418, Folder 4959, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1942-1943, pp. 9-17.

106 Letter from Arnold Toynbee to Frederick Dunn, May 28, 1943, Yale University Archives, *Institute of International Studies Records 1935-1955*, RU 482, YRG 37, Series I, Box 1.

different geopolitical locations. By contrast, Frederick Dunn appears as one of the precursors of a civilizational Atlanticism. To understand the specificity of Spykman's view of Great Britain, it is very enlightening to reread the pages he devoted to it in *America's Strategy* in 1942, and to supplement them the acid criticism of the "Pilgrims Dinners" we find in "Geography and Foreign Policy" in 1938¹⁰⁷. I also discovered in the unpublished YIIS Executive Report for 1942-43 that Spykman was indeed preparing "a study of the security policy of the United States in the light of its geographical location" (this, of course, would become *The Geography of the Peace*), but also - and this failed to be noted (including by Dunn in his introduction) - that he had planned to devote a *second, twin study* to British security policy, using the same methodology¹⁰⁸. This study never saw the light of day. But the significance of this discovery, hitherto hidden in the archives, is not insignificant. It confirms that Spykman separated the studies of these two countries. He saw as having distinct strategic interests, while his colleagues treated them as a civilizational unit.

It seems to us, in the light of what has just been said, that the paragraphs of *The Geography of the Peace* entitled "The Different Paths to Peace" (p. 4), "The Strategic Framework of the Second World War" (p. 47) and above all "A Foreign Policy for the United States" (p. 58) are likely to involve some rewriting, or even exogenous insertions, whether from the pen of Fox or Dunn. The result is an interventionist *vade mecum* fitting the framework of the "Grand Alliance", sent (with a card signed by the YIIS director) to the decision-makers in charge of the post-war US security technostucture. In other words, Frederick Dunn's priority targets. Dunn's entire project, for the sake of which he would reorganize the Yale Institute of International Studies from 1944 to 1951, was summed up in the first sentence of his introduction to Spykman's book: "*If there is one field in which the planning of our statesmen has proved completely inadequate, it is in the maintenance of national security (...) While the record of our actions shows that our statesmen were certainly not indifferent to the fate of the nation, it also shows that their expectations regarding the outcomes of these actions were constantly wrong, and that their methods of thinking about the problem generally failed to provide successful answers. Hence, warns Dunn, there is good reason why we should seek by every possible means to improve our tools of analysis*

107 "Geography and Foreign Policy I", *op. cit.* p. 43.

108 RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 418, Folder 4959, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1942-1943, p. 16.

and ways of approach to this most difficult of all subjects¹⁰⁹.” A major architect of post-1945 American foreign and security policy, James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy and future Secretary of Defense, warmly thanked Dunn for sending him the book in 1944: “I greatly appreciated receiving a copy of *The Geography of Peace*,” he confided. *Its approach to geography is far more realistic than the one we teach in our high schools and university colleges*¹¹⁰.” The year 1943 also saw a dramatic increase in the number of *memoranda* sent by the YIIS to American policymakers. The majority were devoted to the London-Washington relationship¹¹¹. Another example of this desire to influence American defense and security policy: in 1945, Dunn coordinated a 33-page collective memorandum to the Pentagon, entitled “A Security Policy for Postwar America¹¹²”, which again advocated a Grand Alliance, while stressing the need not to allow any hegemony to develop in Eurasia, and warning of the possibility of difficulties should the “great ally” Russia decide to give way to a temptation to expand in Europe. Among the co-authors of this plea, in which official enthusiasm for the Grand Alliance began to be tinged with cautious doubts, were all the big names in academic security, strategy and defense studies of the 1940s: William T.R. Fox, Arnold Wolfers and David Rowe for the YIIS, but also Harold Sprout of Princeton, Grayson Kirk (who had moved from Yale to Columbia)... and Spykman’s sworn enemy: Edward Mead Earle, of Princeton. The document was read by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and circulated to the Pentagon and State Department as an official memo. Fred Kaplan reports in *Wizard of Armageddon* that a general on the Joint Strategic Survey Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff confided to Earle: “We desperately need civilian input into this kind of strategic thinking and planning”¹¹³. Frederick Dunn was well aware of the opportunities opened up by this need for expertise, expressed by those whom C. Wright Mills would collectively refer to as the “*Power Elite*” of the late 40s and early 50s¹¹⁴.

109 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, ix.

110 James Forrestal to Frederick S. Dunn, Yale Institute of International Studies Records, 1935-55. Yale University Archives, Yale Library, RU482, YRG37, Series 1, Box 7.

111 RAC, RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 418, Folder 4959, Yale Institute of International Studies, Report for the Year 1942-1943.

112 Frederick S. Dunn (dir), “A Security Policy for Postwar America”, March 29, 1945, NHC, SPD, series 14, box 194, A1-2. Cf. Melvin P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power. National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 11.

113 Cf. Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, Stanford University Press, 1983, p. 22.

114 See Bernard Boëne, presentation of C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956, in *Res Militaris* (<http://resmilitaris.net>), vol.2.n°2, Winter-Spring/

This contextual insight allows us to rethink the reality of the Mackinder-Spykman “links”, the controversies surrounding the reception of the “geopolitical” method in the United States in 1944, and also the differences in appreciation between Spykman and his colleagues regarding the Grand Alliance. It’s easy to understand why Frederick Dunn feels compelled to point out in his introductory remarks that Helen Nicholl “*has carried out her difficult assignment with great skill and imagination, as well as with real fidelity to Professor Spykman’s own plan and intentions*”. And also, perhaps, the reason why he immediately adds, as if to close the topic: “*Although of a good proportion of the writing is new, she has managed to keep closely to his thoughts, and even to his phraseology and style*”¹¹⁵. The word “imagination” should be emphasized. The insistence on Nicholl’s “fidelity” and proximity to Spykman also seems significant. Especially as Spykman’s former assistant returns the compliment to Dunn. She writes of the latter that he “*devoted a great deal of time and effort to the careful criticism of the manuscript, and has helped me at many difficult points to interpret Professor Spykman’s views accurately*”¹¹⁶. Did Helen Nicholl, as “close to Spykman’s thoughts” as she may have been, need an occasional filter to ensure a “correct” interpretation? Who provided this filter? We would say: Frederick Sherwood Dunn. When becoming aware of this cross-play of intellectual property, and examine the web of intertextual transfers that makes up the fabric of *The Geography of the Peace*, one question emerges forcefully: if a “*significant part*” of the writing is new, and if the “*difficult points*” were numerous, what exactly do we owe here to Helen Nicholl’s “*imagination*”, to the “*interpretation*” of Frederick Dunn and to Nicholas Spykman himself¹¹⁷? It’s quite curious that no one has ever asked this question about such a massively cited work.

In the end, if Dunn’s aim of defending Spykman’s legacy was present in his mind - and we’re sure it certainly was, to one degree or another - he didn’t dis-

Hiver-Printemps 2012.

115 Frederick S. Dunn, “Introductory Statement”, in Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, x.

116 Helen R. Nicholl, “Acknowledgements”, in Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, v.

117 As far as the cards in the book are concerned, things are clearer. In the YIIS executive report for 1943-1944, Dunn states that the maps were prepared by Spykman (Yale Archives, RU482, YRG 37, Series I, Box 7). Nicholl adds that she produced the sketches under the supervision of Spykman himself (presumably for the fall 1942 conference). The mention of cartographer J. McA Smiley on the title page of the original edition shows, however, that these sketches were reprinted. Finally, four maps are reproduced from sketches by Richard Edes Harrison who had already contributed to *America’s Strategy in World Politics* in 1942.

arm all the critics. Some, quite few, were sympathetic to the YIIS booklet¹¹⁸. It's true that the author's recent death softened the bite of his opponents. But in his review of *The Geography of the Peace* for the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1944, Hans Weigert felt that the late Spykman was nothing less than "*the voice of destruction and nihilism*"¹¹⁹. He would not be the only one to persist in a more or less fierce - and more or less calculated - reticence towards the geo-realist orientation of the Yale professor's work. Frederick Dunn, having fulfilled his duty to his friend's memory, did not insist. Throughout the seven years he would spend as head of YIIS, and despite his explicit mention of putative projects in this direction, he would refrain from publishing any further unpublished works by the founder of the *Yale Institute of International Studies*¹²⁰.

Conclusion: Spykman, a complexity to be rediscovered

The critical reinterpretation proposed in this chapter leads us to assume that the algorithm for the elaboration and rearrangement of *The Geography of the Peace* is a function of *the objective* assigned by Dunn to this illustrated booklet. The director of YIIS aims to make the Institute a trusted scientific interlocutor for the State Department and the Pentagon in matters of national security and defense policy. Our central hypothesis is that the *digest* of Spykman's thought - which Dunn lets Nicholl articulate and sign - is arranged, corrected and oriented by him in such a way as to open, without too many apparent hiatuses, onto a prescriptive conclusion corresponding to the convictions of the new YIIS: to be influential, "realism" must evolve within the "circle of reason" of American culture, and not outside it. On the dust jacket's back cover, as we already quoted it, Frederick Dunn sums up these convictions for the influential recipients of *The Geography* in case they don't bother to read the volume in its entirety: "(...) [*this book*] provides a realistic foundation for an American policy of close cooperation with Great Britain and Russia, through permanent participation in world affairs".

How can we assess the relevance of this hypothesis, beyond the correlations we've established from various archival sources? *Felix qui potuit rerum co-*

118 R.B. Frost, review of Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and co. 1944, in *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 38, no. 4, October 1944, pp. 755-756.

119 Hans W. Weigert, "America's Security Situation", review of N.J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, in *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXVII, 1944, pp. 10-31.

120 Yale University Archives, RU482, YRG 37, Series I, Box 7.

*gnoscere causas*¹²¹ : the most interesting thing, obviously, would have been to question Helen Nicholl about the production process of this posthumous book, in order to determine what was really Spykmanian, what she had transformed or added, and, above all, to isolate any corrections by Frederick Dunn, William Fox or Arnold Wolfers, Spykman's colleagues¹²² . Failing that, it would have been even more significant and enlightening for our exegesis to consult the "*steno-graphic recording*" of Spykman's lecture that Dunn, in his 1944 preface, claims to have kept¹²³ . This would have enabled us to assess exactly what percentage of the original Spykmanian material contained *The Geography of Peace*.

Pending the outcome of our own research on these delicate points, we will conclude this chapter by emphasizing two points. Firstly, we believe that it is now difficult to "read" this reference work of geopolitical historiography without being aware of all the implications of an "Introductory Statement" that Frederick Dunn would have been clearer to call a *warning*. That said, if the text of *The Geography of the Peace* has been rearranged and its content is not entirely Spykman's own, no *absolute* contradiction appears when we compare this posthumous work with the rest of his bibliography (that which is generally known), as well as the unpublished works we have been able to study. While *The Geography of the Peace* undeniably has a pseudepigraphic dimension¹²⁴ , the probable reinterpretation we see of Mackinder or the Grand Alliance is a warping: it is neither a total forgery, nor a betrayal; the mirror used has simply been frosted. Antiquity accepted as authentic a work that was known not to be from the pen of its official author, but which had been written and arranged by a group of disciples "reflecting" the master's thinking. In this respect, *The Geography* is "authentic", even if Spykman's colleagues are by no means all disciples of his thought.

Hence the second and final observation of this chapter, which concerns not this book in particular, but its "author": it seems to us that sequencing the DNA of *The Geography of the Peace* invites us to re-establish the nuances that existed within the *Yale Institute of International Studies* itself, and all the more so as the different positions taken by its researchers reflect quite well the diversity

121 "Happy is he who has been able to penetrate the secret causes of things". Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 489.

122 Cf. Elmer Plischke, *US Department of State: A Reference History*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 513.

123 *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, x.

124 A pseudepigrapha is a work whose origin cannot be ascertained, or attributed to a person who cannot possibly have written it.

of the intellectual circles that were to forge the new external consciousness of the United States, in a world transformed by the Second World War. With this in mind, it seems all the more necessary to put the little-known career of the founder of the YIIS back into perspective. This is the only way to fully grasp the *Weltanschauung* of this atypical Dutchman, one of the founders of the discipline of International Relations, whose posterity has made the most famous of American geopoliticians.



Discussion group – Yale institute of international studies (YIIS).

From left to right: N.J. Spykman, F.S. Dunn, A. Wolfers.

First publication in O. Zajec, *Nicholas Spykman, l'invention de la géopolitique américaine*, Presses de la Sorbonne, 2016.

Source: Rockefeller Archive Center, RG 1.1. Series 200, Box 417, Folder 4957:
YIIS Annual report 1941

The Making of Modern Strategy: Geopolitics and American Grand Strategy in World War II

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In 1943, exiled Polish political scientist Andrew Gyorgy observed that the expanding interest in geopolitics both in American government circles and among the public was a direct product of “turbulent twentieth century world politics” unfolding at the time.¹ “A science named geo-strategy,” he concluded, “would be unimaginable in any other period of history but ours.” In the early-war United States, geopolitics did indeed seem to be everywhere, as public-facing intellectuals like Nicholas Spykman discussed the geopolitics of the world war—and of the peace that would follow—in a veritable torrent of best-selling books and articles, while mapmakers like Richard Edes Harrison used striking new projections to popularize global geographies of distance and power.² Inspired to provide the reading public with a “well-rounded picture of the factors [playing] dominant roles in the present war,” the Foreign Policy Association published a series of low-priced booklets and atlases inspired by geopolitical analysis.³ In the academy, scholars ran seminars on ‘international studies’ at elite universities, filled journals with learned articles, and secured generous funding from charitable foundations, while in 1942 the Army established a Geopolitical Section in the Intelligence Department (G-2) of the general staff. This surging interest in geopolitical analysis was part of a broader wave

- 1 Andrew Gyorgy, “The Geopolitics of War: Total War and Geostrategy,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4. November 1943, 347.
- 2 Richard Edes Harrison, “The War of the Maps: A Famous Cartographer Surveys the Field,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, August 7, 1943, 26; See also Timothy Barney, ‘Richard Edes Harrison and the Cartographic Projections of Modern Internationalism’: *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3. (2012).
- 3 Emil Herlin and Francis Brown, *War Atlas* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1942), 7; On the Foreign Policy Association, see David Allen, *Every Citizen a Statesman: The Dream of a Democratic Foreign Policy in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023).

of enthusiastic globalism, championed by the likes of publisher Henry Luce, former Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, and Vice President Henry Wallace, that enwrapped America's entry into the world war.⁴

Geopolitics, as Jeremy Black points out, is a distinctly "amorphous concept" that draws on "space, location, distance and resources" to model the "spatial dynamics of power."⁵ "Geopolitics before the term," as Black describes it, had long been intertwined with both military strategy and foreign policy, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the modern 'scientific' doctrine of geopolitics emerged directly from a transatlantic nexus of imperialism and inter-imperial competition.⁶ In Britain, the seminal work of scholar-politician Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) was driven by fears that London's blue-water global predominance was under threat from the Eurasian 'heartland,' while in both Germany and the United States geopolitical thinking reflected the challenges facing late-arriving imperial powers. Following ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), the Germans eyed an expansive and contiguous autarkic bloc connecting central and eastern Europe to 'Eurafrica,' while the Americans, following the navalism of Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), saw the rise of Britain's worldwide empire as a template for their own overseas power-projection.⁷ As radical critics pointed out, it was not hard to construe these US geopolitics as an "outline of the future course of American imperialism," while, in turn, Americans like Edward Mead Earle saw German geopolitics as nothing but a "rationalization of German imperialism."⁸

For its American champions, geopolitics' claim to scientific objectivity was critical to its appeal, but in the interwar years the doctrine's association with

- 4 See, for example, Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 80; Matthew Farish, *The Contours of America's Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5-15; Andrew Buchanan, "Domesticating Hegemony: Creating a Globalist Public, 1941-1943," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2021), 301-329.
- 5 Jeremy Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 2016), 3.
- 6 See Black, *Geopolitics*, Chapters 2 and 3; On the transatlantic origins of geopolitics see Matthew Specter, *The Atlantic Realists: Empire and Political Thought between Germany and the United States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).
- 7 On the development of 'Eurafrica,' see Sven Beckert, "American Danger: United States Empire, Eurafrica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870-1950," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 122, No. 4, (October 2017).
- 8 James Cadman, "Geopolitics: An Imperialist Myth," *Fourth International*, September 1942, 275; Edward Mead Earle, "Power Politics and American World Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (March 1943), 95.

Nazism presented a major problem.⁹ In the 1920s, the ideas of General Karl Haushofer, Germany's leading geopolitician, had a significant influence on Nazi thinking and, perhaps more importantly, they lent intellectual legitimacy to Nazi expansionism.¹⁰ Haushofer's geopolitical program, distilled into a series of maps distributed widely in the United States and elsewhere by Nazi propaganda agencies, focused on the achievement of 'living space' for the German people.¹¹ This struggle for *Lebensraum* envisaged the establishment of a vast "panregion" that would unite German-speaking people, control eastern Eurasia, establish hegemony over western Europe, and extend southwards to dominate the vast resources of Africa.¹² This expansive vision of German living space, however, was explicitly *not* a program for world domination: instead, Haushofer's division of the world into autarkic panregions included a Japanese-dominated Pan-Asia and a US-dominated Pan-America codified by the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.¹³

There were some obvious theoretical problems with Haushofer's panregions, not least the fact that they didn't account for either the blue-water British Empire—an explicit challenge to a world structured around contiguous autarkic blocs—or for the Soviet Union, even if in some renditions 'Russia' was awarded a panregion of its own that, mysteriously, included India. Despite these anomalies, Haushofer's panregional division of the world reflected an idealized and—from Berlin's standpoint—hopeful reorganization of a world economy shattered by war and the economic breakdown of the Depression. In the United States, this autarkic declension from a common world market was acknowledged by Dutch émigré geographer Nicholas Spykman, who noted in 1938 that the world was now divided into "great spheres" dominated respectively by the United States, Japan, and—rather vaguely—"Europe."¹⁴ Clearly, neither Haush-

9 Colin Gray, "Nicholas John Spykman, the Balance of Power, and the International Order," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 6 (2015), 877.

10 See Specter, *The Atlantic Realists*, 53. For a contemporary account of Haushofer's career, ideas, and relationship to the Nazis see Derwent Whittlesey, "Haushofer: The Geopoliticians," in Edward Mead Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943).

11 See Giseler Wirsing (ed.), *The World in Maps, 1939/40*, (New York: German Library of Information, 1941).

12 Whittlesey, "Haushofer: The Geopoliticians," in Edward Mead Earle (ed.), *The Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), 400-403.

13 See John Bellamy Foster, "The New Geopolitics of Empire," *Monthly Review* January 2006, 4.

14 Nicholas Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy, I," *American Political Science Review*, Vol 32, No. 1 (1938), 45. See also Gray, "Nicholas John Spykman, the Balance of Power, and

ofer's panregions nor his specific identification of a US-dominated western hemisphere seemed particularly outlandish in the Depression-era United States. Indeed, beginning under Herbert Hoover and formalized by the Roosevelt administration, Washington's Good Neighbor Policy used a raft of economic, diplomatic, cultural, and military initiatives to promote the creation of a US-led bloc in the Americas.¹⁵ By 1938, US war planning reflected this advancing hegemony in Latin America by abandoning proposals for the 'continental' defense of the United States in favor of broader 'hemispheric' planning.¹⁶ This turn was buttressed by a network of bilateral military agreements that soon covered most of Latin American and provided for shipments of US arms and equipment, officer training at US military schools, and the establishment of US military bases in the Caribbean, Brazil, and then throughout the region.¹⁷

These bilateral agreements meshed with plans, adopted at special pan-American conferences in Panama (1939) and Havana (1940), for a reciprocal hemispheric defense agreement that projected hemispheric neutrality deep into the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. These developments conformed to Haushofer's division of the globe into autarkic blocs and modeled the exercise of hegemony in a continent composed largely of independent and sovereign nation-states. In this light, it is not surprising that Spykman's popular 1942 *America's Strategy in World Politics* devoted a great deal of attention to Washington's relations with the Americas. The Monroe Doctrine, Spykman concluded, was now a "doctrine of total hemispheric defense," and US security rested on the maintenance of regional predominance and on the ability to establish a global balance of power capable of preventing the subversion of that position by a rival autarkic hegemon in Europe or Asia.¹⁸ Other geopolitically-minded writers developed similar ideas, with William S. Culbertson, former diplomat and a lecturer on world politics at Johns Hopkins University, warning that if Germany succeeded in creating

the International Order," 877. For contemporary discussion on the rise of autarkic blocs, see articles by Whitney Shepardson, "Nationalism and American Trade," and Leon Trotsky, "Nationalism and Economic Life," in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (April 1933).

15 See Ruth Lawlor and Andrew Buchanan, "Latin America, the Good Neighbor, and the Global Second World War," *Antiteses*, forthcoming, 2025.

16 See Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 15.

17 See Gerald K. Haines, "Under the Eagle's Wing: The Franklin Roosevelt Administration Forges and American Hemisphere," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 1, No. 4, (1977).

18 Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (1942; reis., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publications, 2007), 88.

a unified “European economic system” it would be able to use barter arrangements to gain influence in Latin America, thus challenging the Monroe Doctrine and destroying the “solidarity of the Americas.”¹⁹ From a regional hegemony in Europe, Berlin could thus advance its global ambitions not by invasion and conquest in the Americas—always a fever dream—but by undermining Washington’s predominance in its own panregion.²⁰

Even as Spykman was completing his book, both the world situation and Washington’s response to it were evolving rapidly. The fall of France in summer 1940 initially prompted the American government to double-down on hemispheric defense, a response reflected in the Havana conference in July and in the abandonment of all top-level strategic plans except for *Rainbow 4*, a scheme for the defense of the Western Hemisphere.²¹ But, as historian Stephen Wertheim has demonstrated, this reflexive hemispheric hunkering-down was short lived, and the Roosevelt administration quickly moved beyond simply reacting to the deepening world crisis and instead began to embrace the new global prospects it opened up.²² The result was ‘Plan Dog,’ an outline war plan drafted by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark in October 1940. Stark’s memorandum framed a course towards a global war, proposing a world strategic approach based on delaying war with Japan while fighting alongside Britain and the British Empire to defeat Germany. Stark’s plan thus envisaged the first large-scale deployment of US military force outside the Western Hemisphere since 1918.²³

This dramatic shift in US strategic planning was underpinned by the work of a slew of geopolitically-minded academics and public intellectuals. Organized through several high-powered academic seminars—including Nicholas Spykman’s Institute for International Studies at Yale and Edward Mead Earle’s Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton—and funded by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, practitioners advocated for the integration of academic geopolitics and state policy-making.²⁴ After the fall of France, planners at the New York-based Council

19 William S. Culbertson, “Economic Defense of the Americas,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. 211, No. 1 (Sept. 1940), 186-187.

20 For recent discussion on the relationship between regional and global hegemony, see John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3 (2010), esp. 387-388.

21 See Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 24-25.

22 See Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of US Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

23 See Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 29-37.

24 See David Ekbladh, “Present at the Creation: Edward Mead Earle and the Depression-Era Or-

on Foreign Relations (CFR) argued for the creation of a US-led ‘quarter-sphere’ stretching from Canada to the northern ‘bulge’ of Brazil, a region adjudged to be militarily defensible and to contain sufficient resources for US survival.²⁵ In line with developments at the Pan-American conference in Havana, this area was soon expanded to include the entire Western Hemisphere. By October, even the hemisphere was judged too restrictive, and planners proposed joining the Americas to the British Empire to create a “Grand Area” encompassing the entire non-Axis world apart from the Soviet Union.²⁶ This geopolitical evolution mapped directly onto the development of Plan Dog, signaling a sharp turn towards a struggle for global predominance both at the theoretical level and in terms of top-level strategic planning.

The work of this burgeoning nexus of security intellectuals, state department officials, and military strategists necessarily drew on geopolitical concepts of ‘space, location, distance and resources’ to provide scientific-sounding justification for its strategic planning. In particular, discussion on the geographical space required for the economic prosperity of the United States paralleled the work of Austrian geopolitician Alexander Supan, whose 1922 *Guidelines of German Political Geography* used ratios of space, population, and resources to calculate a “colonial quotient” that—unsurprisingly—demonstrated Germany’s objective need for empire.²⁷ As they developed the ‘Grand Area’ concept, American planners sketched the outlines of an American economic domain on a far more expansive scale than the Afro-Eurasian living space projected by German geopoliticians. Isaiah Bowman, dean of American political geographers and a leading CFR activist, recognized and embraced the parallel, arguing that “*Lebensraum* for all is the answer to *Lebensraum* for one” and pointing out that for the United States this was an “economic question” in which control of resources, labor, and markets replaced the territorial colonialism of the Old World’s great powers.²⁸

This powerful vision of a new worldwide economic order with the United States at its head emerged from the government-academic nexus with striking rapidity in late 1940, dovetailing with Plan Dog to shape Washington’s orientation to the coming world war. At the same time, semi-formal collaboration between the government and security intellectuals intensified before being reg-

igins of Security Studies,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/2012).

25 Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World*, 55-56.

26 Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World*, 68-69.

27 See Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt’s Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 282.

28 Bowman, quoted in Smith, *American Empire*, 319.

ularized in early 1942, when CFR planners were transplanted directly into the State Department to form the core of the new Advisory Committee on Post-war Foreign Policy.²⁹ As Henry Luce's February 1941 "American Century" article announced, global hegemony was an idea whose time had come: faced after the fall of France with a choice between hunkering down in the Western Hemisphere or striking out for world predominance, American policymakers and their supporting milieu of geopolitically-minded intellectuals had opted decisively for the latter. In doing so, they opened the road to a genuinely *global* Second World War.

This sweeping vision of the Grand Area—to be augmented after victory by predominance over the former autarkic blocs ruled from Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo—pictured the coming US-led world order as an arrangement between sovereign and formally equal nation-states. From this point of view, Washington's hegemonic project in Latin America, advanced during the 1930s under the aegis of the Good Neighbor Policy, now assumed global significance as a model of interstate relations with worldwide validity. "Hemispheric consciousness," Vice President Henry Wallace announced in summer 1942, had become a "powerful and determining entity in world affairs," and one that would "inaugurate an era of peace and understanding for the whole world."³⁰ This perspective, codified in the Anglo-American Atlantic Charter in August 1941 and embedded, with the critical backing of nine Central American and Caribbean states, in the January 1942 Declaration of the United Nations, set the ideological framework for the allied war effort from the opening of the global war following Pearl Harbor.

Given that both the Grand Area and Plan Dog, along with the Anglo-American war plans and 'combined' military leadership bodies that flowed from them, all rested on an alliance between the United States and the British Empire, the nation-state-centric universalism projected by Washington was always qualified by its support for continued territorial colonialism. This contradiction was at the heart of heated public discussion on journalist Clarence Streit's 1940 proposal for an Anglo-American 'Federal Union,' with George Orwell noting pointedly that this plan did not take into account the opinions and aspirations of Britain's colonial subjects.³¹ In general, however, this difficulty was glossed over, and

29 See Smith, *American Empire*, 329.

30 Henry Wallace, "Why Did God Make America?", speech to New York conference organized by *The Churchman*, June 8, 1942, Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Box 3, Folder 24, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY.

31 Clarence K. Streit, *Union Now: The Proposal for Inter-democracy Federal Union* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), ix; see Talbot Imlay, "Clarence Streit, Federalist Frameworks, and

Washington's march towards world war was accompanied by fanfares of "nationalist globalism" and gauzy one-world liberalism.³² Henry Luce's February 1941 article "The American Century" led the way, accompanied by other influential works, including Wendell Willkie's *One World* and Henry Wallace's "Century of the Common Man," along with a vast outpouring of likeminded newspaper and magazine articles, radio shows, and public lectures. Luce's strangely supra-geographic article offered a shimmering vision of a world remade under American leadership, with individual nation-states appearing to dissolve as a US-led world economy brought prosperity at home while raising living standards across the globe. Luce thus forged a profound connection between the domestic and the global while building popular support for Washington's coming hegemony and for participation in the world war. The publisher assured his top journalists that "there really isn't as much difference as people think between domestic and foreign policy," and this mantra underlay the broader public promotion of globalism that peaked in 1943 before dimming as the hard-edged realities that accompanied the end of the war came into view.³³

As liberal globalism accompanied and justified Washington's push for world predominance, scholars and journalists sought to expose the dangerous nationalist geopolitics said to be driving the German war effort. In June 1941, a *Reader's Digest* article presented Karl Haushofer and the "1,000 scientists, technicians, and spies" assembled at his Geopolitical Institute in Munich as the "super-brain" behind Nazi expansionism.³⁴ At the same time, a long and only marginally less hyperbolic *New York Times* article highlighted the dangers of the "Nazi blueprint," reproducing a map of German-dominated Eurafrika that was ostensibly based on "numerous Nazi plans that the author saw in Germany."³⁵ Backed by a

Wartime American Internationalism," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (Nov. 2020). For Orwell's critique, see George Orwell, "Not Counting N——s," *Adelphi*, July 1939.

32 Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013) 80; See also Andrew Buchanan, "Domesticating Hegemony: Creating a Globalist Public, 1941-1943," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2021); Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1971); Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

33 Henry R. Luce, "Memorandum to Managing Editors," August 17, 1943, Folder 8, Box 54, Henry Luce Papers, New York Historical Society.

34 Frederic Sondern, Jr., "The Thousand Scientists Behind Hitler," *Reader's Digest*, June 1941, 23.

35 Joseph C. Harsch, "The 'Unbelievable' Nazi Blueprint," *New York Times*, May 25, 1941, SM3.

slew of academic books and articles—including several by German émigrés—and by the 1943 MGM movie *Plan for Destruction* that depicted Haushofer as a sinister mastermind, this sensationalized reporting attributed German military successes to this all-knowing geopolitical methodology.³⁶ It was, in Gearóid Ó Tuathail's memorable phrase, a vision of geopolitics as an "ultimate global panopticon" geared to advancing the Nazi's "diabolical global design."³⁷

In June 1942, Columbia University geographer George Renner badly misjudged the mood created by these lurid exposés when he wrote an article in *Collier's* that used maps to argue for a postwar world composed of large states formed through the amalgamation of the small nations whose proliferation he held to be the cause of war. This bizarre exercise, which included awarding Berlin a massive colony in the "German Congo" and Japan a sizeable section of East Asia, claimed legitimacy from the "scientific" logic of German geopolitics as it reformulated Haushofer's panregions.³⁸ Worse, at least for the amour-propre of the scholars concerned, Renner attempted to fold himself, along with Isaiah Bowman and other leading American geographers, into a US school of geopolitics. Renner's article provoked a storm of criticism, with influential commentators Walter Lippmann and Dorothy Thompson delivering blistering public rebuttals while Bowman denied any association with geopolitics and demanded an apology from *Collier's*.³⁹ In a follow-up article, Bowman sought to differentiate German geopolitics, stigmatized as a "way of rationalizing greed and violence," from the democratic and good neighborly impulses of American political geography.⁴⁰

The ferocity of the response to Renner's article, building on fears of the omnipresent Haushofer, chilled identification with 'scientific' geopolitics in the

36 On the Munich Institute, see Specter, *The Atlantic Realists*, 118. For polemics against geopolitics, see, for example, Andrew Gyorgy, *Geopolitics: The New German Science* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1944); Robert Strausz-Hupé, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Power and Space* (New York: C.P. Putnam's, 1942); Hans Weigert *Generals and Geographers: The Twilight of Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942); and Derwent Whittlesey, *German Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942). See also Black, *Geopolitics*, 164-65.

37 Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996), 132.

38 George T. Renner, "Maps for a New World," *Collier's*, June 6, 1942, 14-16, 28; see also Karen DeBres, "George Renner and the Great Map Scandal of 1942," *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (October 1986).

39 See Smith, *American Empire*, 285-286.

40 Isaiah Bowman, "Geography vs. Geopolitics," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Oct. 1942), esp. 648.

American academy and beyond. Spykman came in for particular criticism, and his geopolitically-inflected defense of force—"states," he argued, "can survive only by constant devotion to power politics"—appeared radically out of step with the liberal one-worldism dominating public discourse.⁴¹ Reviewing Spykman's *America's Strategy in World Politics*, Office of Facts and Figures head Malcom Cowley lambasted the "realism" that he accused of leading "back into the past" of immoral power politics.⁴² Similarly, Edward Mead Earle argued that Spykman's insistence on the need to maintain a postwar balance of power would "cause us to lose both our shirts and our soul."⁴³ While Earle thought that Spykman's work was not entirely without merit—his analysis of US policy in Latin America was held to be "first-rate"—it was damned by its implied association with Haushofer's Germanic "pseudo-science."⁴⁴ Andrew Gyorgy's *Geopolitics* drew similar conclusions, bundling Renner and Spykman together as representatives of the "few American geographers endorsing views derived from Haushofer."⁴⁵

Other scholars had a more positive appreciation of Spykman's work, with—surprisingly—Isaiah Bowman praising its "merit and public value," while Walter Lippmann, OSS analyst Whitney Shepardson, and Princeton historian Harold Sprout all expressed guarded support.⁴⁶ Buoyed by these accolades and by the suggestion that it was being widely studied by policymakers, *America's Strategy in World Politics* sold well to a reading public eager for a theoretical framework that explained the unfolding world war. Nevertheless, in October 1942 Bowman responded to the antipathy to geopolitics in the public sphere by restating his hostility to this "German pervasion of truth" and distancing himself from the "self-destroying principle" that "might alone shall decide."⁴⁷ As Neil Smith notes, this article was clearly intended to separate Bowman—represent-

41 Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, 18-19; see also Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World*, 116.

42 Martin Cowley, "Geopolitik," *The New Republic*, April 20, 1942, 546.

43 Earle, "Power Politics and American World Policy," 102.

44 Mead Earle, "Power Politics and American World Policy," 98, 94.

45 Andrew Gyorgy, *Geopolitics*, 254-255.

46 Isaiah Bowman, "Political Geography of Power," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1942), 350, 349; Whitney H. Shepardson, "Review of America's Strategy in World Politics, by Nicholas Spykman," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 22, 1942; Harold Sprout, "Review of America's Strategy in World Politics, by Nicholas Spykman," *American Political Science Review* 36 (October 1942).

47 Isaiah Bowman, "Geography vs Geopolitics," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (October 1942), 646.

ing the bulk of the academy—from Spykman.⁴⁸ Revisiting the “storm of protest” that had greeted *America’s Strategy*, Ladis Kristof noted in 1960 that the book had deservedly won Spykman the title of the “American Haushofer.”⁴⁹

Outside of the public view, however, geopolitically-informed thinking continued to play a significant role in shaping Washington’s turn from hemispheric defense to the pursuit of global predominance. During 1941, US planners fleshed out the framework of Plan Dog, turning the algebraic formulas of its grand strategic vision into the precise mathematics of military planning. The result, delivered to Roosevelt in September 1941, was the “Joint Board Estimate of the United States Over-all Production Requirements,” colloquially known simply as the “Victory Program.”⁵⁰ The chief architect of the new plan, Major Albert C. Wedemeyer, had been seconded to the German *Kriegsakademie* from 1936 to 1938, and this “professionally remunerative” assignment had given him a “real education as a strategist,” in particular by enabling him to attend lectures by the “great geopolitician” Karl Haushofer.⁵¹

While at the *Kriegsakademie*, Wedemeyer also assimilated Mackinder’s ‘heartland’ thesis, and he returned to the United States convinced that the decisive battles in the coming struggle for global predominance would be fought in Central Europe. The Victory Program distilled this geopolitical prognosis into a plan to build a massive 215-division army that would be ready to be launched into Europe in 1943. With its bold declaration that “air and naval forces seldom if ever win important wars,” this army-centric plan directly challenged London’s so-called ‘peripheral strategy,’ which envisaged wearing down Nazi-dominated Europe by a combination of operations in the Mediterranean, naval blockade, and a bombing campaign against German industry.⁵² Wedemeyer’s approach was colored by virulent Anglophobia, and, using language redolent of Ratzel’s organic concept of the nation, he suggested to army Chief of Staff George Marshall that an alliance between the “virile power” of the United States and the

48 Smith, *American Empire*, 288-289.

49 Ladis Kristof, “The Origins and Evolution of Geopolitics,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1960), 31; see also Gray, “Nicholas John Spykman,” 873-874, 878-879, 881-882.

50 See Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 47-50.

51 Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 49-53; Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West*, (New York: Harper, 2009), 130-131.

52 The Victory Program, quoted in Steven T. Ross (ed.), *U.S. War Plans 1938-1945*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 104.

“decadent power” of Britain would be helpful insofar as it provided a base for operations in Europe, but would be a disaster if it subordinated US interests to those of the British Empire.⁵³

As Mark Stoler points out, the Victory Program delivered to Roosevelt in September 1941 “went far beyond” the study of America’s potential wartime production that the president had requested.⁵⁴ Moreover, while it conformed to the facile ‘get there fastest with the mostest’ operational doctrine that masqueraded as an ‘American way of war,’ Wedemeyer’s proposed incursion into the Eurasian ‘heartland’ stood in sharp contrast to the Mahanian navalism that had long shaped Roosevelt’s grand strategic outlook.⁵⁵ That is not to say that Roosevelt doubted that Germany would ultimately have to be defeated on land and in the heartland, but rather that he didn’t want the bulk of the fighting to be done by Americans. Instead, and although he had stood almost alone among top policymakers in the weeks following Germany’s June 1941 assault on the Soviet Union, Roosevelt saw the USSR’s continued resistance as critical to overall outcome of the war. By the end of the year, and at Roosevelt’s insistence, Washington was beginning to supply Moscow with large quantities of war materiel via Lend-Lease: as historian Waldo Heinrich points out, sustaining the Soviet war effort was becoming a “centerpiece of [Roosevelt’s] world strategy.”⁵⁶ Through this wartime marriage of convenience, Washington effectively sub-contracted the bulk of the ground combat in the western heartland to Moscow. As a student of Mahan, Roosevelt was undoubtedly aware of the parallel between this emerging American strategy and that pursued by Britain during its long struggle with France. Here, Mahan reminds us, victory went to a British state that “paid for [a] continental war and even backed it with her troops” while focusing its own military effort on a global and navy-led drive for empire and commerce.⁵⁷

53 Wedemeyer, quoted in Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 49.

54 Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 47.

55 For the classic study, see Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington IA: Indiana University Press, 1973). There is remarkably little on the Mahanian roots of Roosevelt’s grand strategy, but see Andrew Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 9, 269; see also James Tertius de Kay, *Roosevelt’s Navy: The Education of a Warrior President, 1882-1920* (New York: Pegasus, 2012).

56 Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 159.

57 A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1600-1783* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1987. First published 1890 by Little, Brown & Co.), 223. See also Philip A. Crowl, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: Naval Historian,” in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Ma-*

Moreover, the subsidies that helped to keep the armies of Britain's continental allies in the field were themselves the product of the "abundant wealth and credit" generated by worldwide trade, so that empire was both the cause and the consequence of a grand strategy that privileged naval predominance over continental engagement.⁵⁸

As Washington developed its strategic alliance with the USSR, Roosevelt was also pushing hard for a US-led front in French North Africa and in the Mediterranean more broadly.⁵⁹ This critical strategic orientation in the rimland has long been obscured by the historiographical narrative that pictures the United States being lured in the Mediterranean "cul de sac" by the wily British, but Roosevelt's own intense focus on the region was well known to senior policy-makers, with Secretary of War Stimson dubbing it the president's "great secret baby."⁶⁰ Roosevelt's pursuit of an US-led front in the Mediterranean, linked to the advance of American economic and political influence in the region, led during 1942 to months of heated debate with senior military leaders in the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Led by George Marshall and top army planners, JCS thinking was informed by the Victory Program's vision of a major land campaign in Central Europe and was focused on preparing an early cross-channel invasion of France. The deadlock between Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs was only resolved in July 1942 when the president issued what amounted to a direct order to launch an invasion of French North Africa in the fall.⁶¹

Roosevelt's policy of backing a major ally in the Eurasian heartland while developing 'peripheral' operations in the Mediterranean was grounded in his navalist outlook and expressed in his support for Mahan's dictum that, as he told senior *New York Times* correspondent Anne O'Hare McCormick, "in the long run land power cannot defeat sea power."⁶² The full consequences of this approach—

chiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 451-452.

58 Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power*, 295.

59 I have developed this argument more fully in my *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II*, esp. Introduction and chapters 1, 2, and 14. See also Arthur Layton Funk, *The Politics of Torch: The Allied Landings and the Algiers Putsch* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1974)

60 Stimson, quoted in Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 18; Funk, *The Politics of Torch*, 72.

61 See Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 51-52; Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 85-90.

62 Roosevelt, comment in interview with *New York Times* editorial board member Anne O'Hare McCormick, *New York Times*, June 15, 1940. McCormick was also a member of the Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy. See Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Med-*

sharply at odds with the land-based assertions of the Victory Program—unfolded incrementally during 1942, but by early 1943 they had come to define both Washington's mature grand-strategic orientation towards fighting the world war and its initial appreciation of the contours of the postwar order. Moreover, and like the previous shifts in American policy, this new grand strategic orientation was intertwined with a new turn in American geopolitical thinking.

Despite public hostility to the 'German science' of geopolitics, the move of CFR analysts and strategic think-tank members into government in early 1942 ensured that modes of geopolitical thinking and analysis took firm root within the administration. At the same time, new courses on political geography and military strategy were being offered at several Ivy League schools, while at West Point Colonel Herman Beukema was running classes on geopolitics that reflected both his own admiration for Haushofer's "sensational theories" and his desire to equip officers for "global thinking."⁶³ Beukema also recommended Charles Bonesteel and other former West Point instructors who shared his enthusiasm for geopolitics for assignment to the General Staff's Operations Division, and to its new (June 1942) Strategy and Policy Group in particular.⁶⁴ In December 1942, Beukema was appointed head of the new Army Specialized Training Division, established to coordinate university programs in subjects of interest to the Army, including, as he told Isaiah Bowman, classes on political geography and area studies.⁶⁵

This early-war development of a dense matrix of military planning bodies and government agencies staffed by officers and analysts trained to think in geopolitical terms was reinforced in May 1942 by the formation of the Geopolitical Section of the army general staff's Military Intelligence (G-2) Division. The product of intense lobbying by Father Edmund Walsh, Regent of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, the section was headed by newly-commissioned Lt. Colonel William Culbertson. Culbertson, then teaching courses on the political economy of total war at Georgetown, argued for the rescue of "geopolitical practices" from "misuse" by the Germans.⁶⁶ General George Strong,

iterranean, 51-52; Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 269.

63 "Geopolitics in College," *Time*, January 19, 1942, 56; Herman Beukema, "School for Statesmen," *Fortune*, January 1943.

64 See Peter Francis Coogan, "Geopolitics and the Intellectual Origins of Containment," PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1991, 217-219; Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 104.

65 See Coogan, "Geopolitics and the Intellectual Origins of Containment," 224.

66 See Gerard Colby, "William S. Culbertson and the Search for the Geopolitical Imperium," MA thesis, University of Vermont, 2020, 290-294.

Culbertson's new boss at G-2, had himself been recently appointed as part of a broad reorganization of army intelligence, and having previously served at the CFR's War and Peace Studies Project in 1940 and then on the State Department's Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy, he was steeped in geopolitical thinking.⁶⁷ Moreover, Strong's own view on the coming postwar order was clear: as he explained to a May 1942 meeting of the Advisory Committee's subcommittee on armaments, the United States "must cultivate a mental view toward a world settlement after this war which will enable us to impose our own terms, amounting perhaps to a Pax Americana."⁶⁸

Culbertson hoped that his new section would tap into this powerful nexus of top-level policymakers and high-powered businessmen while giving army leaders a center of geopolitical analysis that could act as a counterweight to what he saw as the enthusiastic but undisciplined work of the "university committees."⁶⁹ By summer 1942, Culbertson's staff of seven officers was hard at work preparing maps, charts, and economic and political analyses of every major state in the world.⁷⁰ More importantly, Culbertson organized a Board of Consultants whose luminaries included Edward Earle, Harold Sprout, Nicholas Spykman and Fr. Walsh, and he planned to mobilize this academic firepower to impress the importance of geopoliticians on wary military commanders. It was not all plain sailing, with an illustrated lecture to top war department officials by Spykman eliciting a grumpy "we are not yet ready for your guidance" from one general.⁷¹ Culbertson's geopolitics division also launched public-facing initiatives, organizing two conferences in fall 1942—one at Yale on the "Moslem World" and one at Princeton on "Military Manpower and American Policy"—as well as a forum on colonial policy and a series of discussions on 'energy minerals' at the Brookings Institution.⁷²

Participants in these conferences included leading academics, top figures from the world of business and finance, and representatives from the administration's boards of War Production and Economic Warfare, the OSS, and the Office of War Information. Alarmed by this unprecedented public activity and wary of public association with geopolitics, senior army officers changed the

67 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 170.

68 Minutes S-3, Security Subcommittee, Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy, May 6, 1942, Notter File, Box 77, RG 59, U.S. National Archives.

69 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 292-293.

70 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 300.

71 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 296.

72 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 313-314.

group's name to the innocuous-sounding "Analysis Section" in April 1943 before dissolving it entirely—ostensibly on budgetary grounds—in June.⁷³ Despite this setback, Culbertson continued to participate in the OSS's influential Strategic Planning Group and to organize further conferences, including one on the Middle East that was hosted in the brand-new Pentagon building in July 1943. Clearly, while the 'German science' might attract suspicion, geopolitically-informed ideas continued to impress themselves on the top echelons of the military and on members of the executive agencies charged with planning for both the war and the postwar.

In this light, it is not surprising that Nicholas Spykman continued to exert considerable influence in official circles despite the public criticism levelled at *America's Strategy in World Politics*. Moreover, at the time of his premature death in June 1943 he was working to revise and update his earlier analysis in the context of the unfolding world war, and this work was completed and published posthumously in 1944 by his research assistant Helen Nicholl. Short and concise where *America's Strategy* was long and discursive, and forcefully proscriptive where the earlier book had been tentative, *The Geography of the Peace* was the product of Spykman's engagement with the big questions of global strategy as they unfolded following Washington's entry into the world war. The earlier book had concluded with a firm rejection of a US grand strategy based on hemispheric defense and had advocated securing a world balance of power, but the new study went beyond this to advance a genuinely global vision of US predominance. This turn, registered in the contrast between the substantial space devoted to Latin America in *America's Strategy* and the continent's virtual absence from *The Geography of the Peace*, has led some commentators to see a sharp shift in American "attention away from Latin America and toward Europe and the Pacific."⁷⁴ This judgement is mistaken: Spykman did indeed pay less attention to Latin America in his later work, but only because he now assumed that Washington's predominance in the Western Hemisphere—and hence its participation in world politics at the head of a unified hemispheric bloc—had already been secured. From this standpoint, Spykman concluded, both the postwar security of the Americas and the global US predominance that it sustained would be dependent on establishing a balance of power on the "Eurasian continent" that could prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon capable of

73 Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 300.

74 David Rock, "War and Postwar Intersections: Latin America and the United States," in David Rock (ed.), *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 27-29.

disrupting the new world order.⁷⁵

In drawing these conclusions, Spykman built on the original geopolitical analysis of Halford Mackinder, the first person who had “studied in detail the relations between land and sea power on a truly global scale.”⁷⁶ However, where Mackinder had viewed the ‘Heartland’ of Eurasia as the emerging ‘pivot’ of world power, Spykman focused on what he termed the ‘rimland.’ In a clever inversion of Mackinder’s dictum that the heartland held the key to world domination, Spykman argued that control of the broad crescent of rimland—encompassing Western Europe, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, China, and the ‘mediterranean’ seas of Europe and Asia—was critical: “who controls the rimland rules Eurasia,” he quipped, and “who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.”⁷⁷ The “amphibious nature” of the rimland enabled it to function as a “vast buffer zone” between sea power and land power, making it inherently susceptible to naval force projected from the “off-shore islands” of Britain, Japan, and the US-dominated ‘world island’ of the Western Hemisphere.⁷⁸ The world war that Spykman thought the United States should fight could thus be conceptualized as a struggle for “control of the rimland littoral of Europe and Asia” in which the projection of US sea and air power, deployed in conjunction with British-Imperial forces, was allied to massive ground wars waged in eastern and western Eurasia by China and the Soviet Union, supported by American industrial capacity.⁷⁹

In its essentials, this was the world war that the United States actually fought. Only the United States, as Phillips Payson O’Brien underscores, had the capacity to fight “two different and approximately equal” wars simultaneously, allocating the bulk of its air and ground assets to one and the overwhelming majority of its naval forces to the other.⁸⁰ This effort, which involved both the domination of vast “air-sea super-battlefields” in the Atlantic and the Pacific and US control of the American, European, and Asian ‘mediterraneans,’ was underpinned by a torrent of industrial output sufficient to supply the needs of the United States, Brit-

75 Nicholas John Spykman (ed. Helen R. Nicholl), *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), 60–61.

76 Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 35.

77 Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 43.

78 Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 41.

79 Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 45–46.

80 Phillips Payson O’Brien, *How the War was Won: Air-Sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 199.

ain, the Soviet Union and, to a lesser degree, China.⁸¹ The centrality of industrial production to the overall shape and balance of Washington's warfighting strategy effectively precluded the construction of the Victory Program's 215-division army. By late 1942, US planners were insisting that only 10.5 million soldiers could be mobilized without dislocating the war economy, a 7.8 percent slice of the population that was far less than the 10.9 percent under arms in Germany.⁸² A series of reductions in the projected size of the army followed, bottoming out at ninety divisions in late 1943 as the westward advance of the Red Army picked up steam and the Allied strategic bombing campaign from its 'offshore' bases in Britain and North Africa intensified.⁸³ This 'ninety division gamble' did produce a short-term manpower crisis in the US army in Europe in early 1945, but by then the major strategic question implied by the decision to slash the massive army called for by the Victory Program had long been resolved: while US troops would make a major contribution to the defeat of Germany, there would be no gigantic American land force committed to the heartland.

The striking convergence between Washington's mature wartime strategy and the analysis advanced by Spykman, Culbertson, and other geopolitical thinkers in academia, the government, and the military is not presented here to suggest a simple causal relationship between geopolitics and US grand strategy. American policy was not the product of geopolitical analysis, but instead emerged incrementally in response to the actual economic, political, and military situation in the world as it unfolded after 1940. At the same time, however, geopolitics did not exist simply to add a justificatory or explanatory gloss to pragmatic decision-making. Instead, geopolitics and strategic planning were co-constituted, with the former providing the intellectual milieu within which issues of world-level power could be openly discussed and the modes of analysis that enabled military planners, top-flight business figures, senior politicians, and influential opinion-formers to chart a course toward predominance in a complex and rapidly-changing global environment. In this sense, geopolitics provided the breadth of vision, the language, and the thought patterns that made genuinely global strategy possible.

Not all senior offices were willing to buy into geopolitics, as the reception to Spykman's Pentagon lecture indicates. There was a generational divide here,

81 On air-sea power, see O'Brien, *How the War was Won*, esp. "Conclusion: The Supremacy of Air and Sea Power and the Control of Mobility."

82 Maurice Matloff, "The Ninety-Division Gamble," in Kent Roberts Greenfield (ed.), *Command Decisions* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1960), 367.

83 Matloff, "The Ninety-Division Gamble," 374-375.

with older officers, long trained to think in terms of continental defense, often reluctant to embrace world-level thinking: General Stanley Embick, for example, chief of the powerful War Plan's Division of the General Staff and then of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, maintained throughout his long career what historian Ronald Schaffer scathingly describes as "the outlook of a coastal artillery officer."⁸⁴ Other senior officers, including George Marshall and Admiral William Leahy, Roosevelt's senior military advisor and informal chair of the JCS, did not express any strong opinions on geopolitics, and as a discrete doctrine it had little direct purchase at the Naval War College.⁸⁵ Here, however, the Navy's traditional blue-water Mahanism already inclined top leaders towards global thinking, and in 1943 undersecretary of state James Forrestal strengthened this leaning by promoting an educational program for Navy ROTC students developed by Bowman, Earle, and naval historians Harold and Margaret Sprout.⁸⁶ Other generational tensions surely led to some interesting family dynamics: as we have seen, Albert Wedemeyer, Embick's son-in-law and deputy at War Plans, was a confirmed disciple of geopolitics.

While some planners and military leaders undoubtedly embraced geopolitics more readily than others, the issue was not—as Timothy Coogan suggests—one of decisionmakers who were simply too "exhausted by the burdens of managing a global war" to be interested in "academic debates over the value of geopolitical constructs."⁸⁷ Instead, it is important to recognize the challenges that the new world into which the United States was moving placed before the entire American elite. Sitting atop a rapidly expanding economy as new opportunities opened around the world, this was a ruling class brim-full of self-confidence, but it was also one largely without experience of world-level strategic thinking and planning. Naively, as it turned out, the worldly-wise British hoped to turn this contradiction to their advantage, with the Harold Macmillan, the leading British official in the Mediterranean, picturing himself as a clever Greek manipulating the "big, vulgar and bustling" Roman-Americans.⁸⁸ To avoid this fate, American leaders had to learn very quickly, and in this context even simplistic nostrums presented as geopolitical theory were seized on to develop and justify

84 Ronald Schaffer, "General Stanley D. Embick: Military Dissenter," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Oct. 1973), 90.

85 See Coogan, "Geopolitics and the Intellectual Origins of Containment," 233.

86 See Coogan, "Geopolitics and the Intellectual Origins of Containment," 226-228.

87 Coogan, "Geopolitics and the Intellectual Origins of Containment," 196.

88 Harold Macmillan, quoted in Matthew Jones, *Britain, the United States, and the Mediterranean War 1942-1944* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 80.

strategic decision making.

Roosevelt himself was central to the formulation of American grand strategy, and while his decision-making was notoriously opaque, with numerous and often conflicting lines of command concentrated in his own well-concealed hands, it was also remarkably well suited to the task at hand.⁸⁹ In the rising arc of Washington's drive to global predominance, and before the more prosaic tasks of consolidating hegemony were posed in the immediate postwar, American leaders were presented with numerous possible lines of advance. Deciding between them in order to shape specific strategies was not, as Williamson Murray points out, simply a matter of applying a "recipe," but was by necessity an "idiosyncratic process" that flowed largely through informal and thus inherently unrecoverable channels of debate and discussion.⁹⁰ In this context, the language and mental modes of geopolitics were as much a part of Roosevelt's strategic thought process as they were co-constitutive of high-level policymaking in general. While Roosevelt probably read some key geopolitical works—he had several, including Spykman's *American Strategy*, in his personal library—he was also immersed in a milieu in which discussion in world-political terms was increasingly pervasive.⁹¹

The process of co-constitution between geopolitical analysis and strategic decision-making flowed through a blurring of the lines of divide between theoretical inquiry and practical work. As we have seen, at the very start of the world war CFR members and participants in elite prewar 'security studies' seminars moved directly into government and the military.⁹² Individual trajectories underscore the point. Princeton-based Edward Mead Earle worked for the Research and Analysis Division of the OSS and then for the air force's Committee of Operations Analysis, while also assembling the influential collection of essays—including Derwent Whittlesey's article on Haushofer—that appeared in 1943 as *The Makers of Modern Strategy*.⁹³ Others moved back and forth across this

89 See Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), esp. Ch. 1 and 203; Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 108.

90 Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy," in Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (eds), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9.

91 The card index to Roosevelt's Hyde Park library shows that it included Spykman's *American Strategy in World Politics*, Bernard Brodie's *Sea Power in the Machine Age*, and *The Rise of American Naval Power* by Harold and Margaret Sprout.

92 Ekbladh, "Present at the Creation," 133-134.

93 See Edward Mead Earle (ed.), *The Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Uni-

porous border between academia and various branches of the state, with William Culbertson leaving Johns Hopkins for the War Department before leading a top-level mission to the Mediterranean in summer 1944 to prepare the ground for postwar 'free trade' and American economic penetration of the region.⁹⁴

The utility of geopolitical analysis for the development and justification of strategy did not end with the formal conclusion of the global war in September 1945. Indeed, the mature form of Washington's wartime world-strategic approach, centered on using sea and air power to dominate the rimland and thus block the emergence of a counter-hegemonic power in the heartland, was quickly and easily repurposed to meet the new challenges of the postwar. Spykman had anticipated this shift in 1942, noting that from Washington's point of view a "Russian state from the Urals to the North Sea can be no great improvement on a German state from the North Sea to the Urals," but he hoped that an "effective security system" based on ongoing collaboration between the United States, Britain, and the USSR could maintain "balanced power" and peace in Eurasia.⁹⁵ Likewise, in his last major writing Halford Mackinder warned in 1943 that after defeating Germany, the Soviet Union would be the "greatest land Power on the globe" and the predominant power in the Heartland.⁹⁶ Like Spykman, at the height of the wartime alliance with the USSR Mackinder optimistically envisaged Soviet power being balanced across a neutral Germany by the vast economic and military capacity of the United States whose "amphibious power" could use France as a "bridgehead" into Europe and Britain as a "moated aerodrome."⁹⁷

Consistent geopolitical through-lines thus helped to shape Washington's strategic thinking as the full consequences of subcontracting the ground war in western Eurasia to Moscow came into focus in the closing phases of the war. Flowing from its broad strategic approach, Washington had approved the division of the world into spheres of influence, first in outline at Tehran in 1943 and then in more detail at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945. As the fighting concluded,

versity Press, 1943).

94 On the Culbertson Mission, see John A. DeNovo, "The Culbertson Economic Mission and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1944–1945," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (1977)

95 Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, 460; Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 60–61.

96 Halford Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (July 1943), 601.

97 Mackinder, "The Round World," 604.

however, both the loss of potential markets in Eastern Europe and the emergence of a new hegemon in the Heartland began to seem unconscionable. William Culbertson had analyzed the potential for postwar conflict with the Soviet Union while head of the Geopolitics Division, pointing out that under Stalin's leadership Moscow was no longer animated by a desire to advance world revolution but instead pursued foreign policy goals motivated by the search for security and access to resources. "What occurred in 1917," he concluded, "was not the first stage of the world revolution but the rise of a new class in the Russian nation-state," and he expected Moscow's war aims to conform to traditional Tsarist goals, including securing access to warm-water ports and the creating a defensive buffer between itself and Germany.⁹⁸

These theoretical elements, combining Culbertson's picture of Stalinist Moscow as Tsarist Russia redux with Spykman's world-strategic vision of dominance via maritime pressure in the rimlands, informed Washington's early Cold War strategic thinking, and it is not hard to see their reflection in George Kennan's February 1946 "Long Telegram." Written from Moscow as an internal state department memorandum and then edited for publication in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947, Kennan's "Sources of Soviet Conduct" is often viewed as the first articulation of the perspective of "containing" Soviet power through the "adroit and vigilant application of counter-force."⁹⁹ Like Culbertson, Kennan saw Soviet behavior as being governed in large part by essentialized national characteristics through which the "powerful hands of Russian history" reached out to shape its modern leaders. Although Kennan himself never recognized any particular intellectual debt in this direction, his thinking, as Richard Russell points out, could hardly escape being deeply influenced by the broad intellectual milieu of the wartime geopoliticians.¹⁰⁰

Other aspects of Washington's postwar strategic were also strikingly prefig-

98 William S. Culbertson, Report for Geopolitical Section of Military Intelligence, "Russia and the Border States with Special Emphasis Upon Poland," February 1943, quoted in Colby, "William S. Culbertson," 303-304, 308.

99 George Kennan (writing as Mr. X), "Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1947), 576.

100 Richard L. Russell, *George F. Kennan's Strategic Thought: The Making of an American Political Realist* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 9-10, 53, 62n46, 154. For more detailed studies of the influence of geopolitics on early Cold War policymaking, see G. R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy, 1890-1987* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), esp. Ch. 5; Black, *Geopolitics*, esp. Ch. 8; Thomas W. Bottelier, "The Geopolitics of Containment: Reappraising American Foreign Policy during the Early Cold War, 1945-1953," MA thesis, Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communications, 2011.

ured by wartime geopolitics, with Spykman warning of the potential threat to US interests in Asia posed by a “modern, vitalized, and militarized China.”¹⁰¹ Spykman’s prognosis, which foresaw “advanced technology” reshaping regional power relations by allowing Chinese airpower to dominate the Asiatic Mediterranean, concluded with the then deeply shocking suggestion that postwar Washington should extend a “protective policy” towards Japan that would strengthen its former enemy against its current ally. In Europe, Spykman proposed establishing a balance of power between Germany and the USSR underpinned by the “third party strength” offered by the ongoing commitment of US troops in Europe.¹⁰² To sustain the forward deployment of its forces in both Europe and Asia, Spykman observed, Washington should build on the gains of its wartime air-sea war by establishing an extensive network of overseas military bases stretching from Greenland, Iceland, and Dakar in the Atlantic to Alaska, the Philippines, and the ‘mandated islands’ in the Pacific.¹⁰³

It is striking how closely these wartime prognoses conformed to the actual unfolding of US strategy in the immediate postwar. By the end of the war, Washington certainly anticipated enjoying a sustained nuclear monopoly, but the scarcity of atomic weapons, the difficulty of delivering them against a country with a functioning air defense system, and the dramatic collapse of US ground forces in the wake of the great soldier rebellion of 1945–1946, all pointed towards a grand strategy based on controlling the heartland through air-sea power and balance-of-power politics in the rimlands. Given these important continuities both in strategic practice and geopolitical thinking, it is clear, as David Ekbladh points out, that the deployment of nuclear weapons did *not* fundamentally “reset” strategic inquiry, as Bernard Brodie and other prominent postwar analysts argued.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, something significant did change at the level of theoretical enquiry and understanding, because while the academic modes of spatial, economic, and power analysis that had helped to shape wartime strategy expanded in the postwar, the field of study known as ‘geopolitics’ did not. Instead, as Matthew Specter argues, “realism”—a phrase that had peppered the wartime work of Spykman and others—emerged as a “semantic refuge from the dis-

101 Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics*, 469–470.

102 Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics*, 465–467.

103 Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, 58.

104 Ekbladh, “Present at the Creation,” 138.

credited discourse of Nazi geopolitics.”¹⁰⁵ This may be overly restrictive: what needed to be escaped were not just the Nazi associations that clung to geopolitics—as we have seen, they were battled throughout the war—but an entire strategic approach that seemed to privilege hard-edged power over moral considerations. What had made Spykman and others such lightning-rods was not simply their connection to the suspiciously German ‘science’ of geopolitics, but was the mounting difficulty of reconciling the “practice of power politics”—the inevitable character of global war—with the appearance of transcending such crudity through the establishment of a new world order based on free and equal nation-states.¹⁰⁶ In this context, geopolitics could not simply morph into the ‘realism’ of a rebranded field of ‘security studies.’ There had to be a break, not only in packaging, but also in personnel, and it is striking how few of the wartime geopoliticians were able to refashion themselves as realists as that school took shape in the late 1940s.

This break was aided by mortality. Spykman died at the age of 49 in 1943 and Edward Mead Earle at 60 in 1954, while Halford Mackinder, long the central figure in Anglophone geopolitics, died in 1947. William Culbertson was pushed out of the state department and returned to law, still insisting that Americans needed to make themselves “masters of geopolitical analysis and geopolitical fact.”¹⁰⁷ Earle’s Princeton seminar held a series of important postwar conferences but was quickly dissolved after his death, and while Spykman’s Yale Institute for International Studies continued under Frederick Dunn, powerful new players like the RAND Corporation, the new Central Intelligence Agency’s own in-house analysts, and college ‘area studies’ and ‘security studies’ programs dominated the field amid a strengthening nexus of government, academia, private foundations, and business.¹⁰⁸

This shift from wartime geopolitics to postwar ‘realism’ was personified by Hans Morgenthau, another German exile, but one untainted by prior association with *Geopolitik*. Morgenthau’s great contribution to the forging of an analytical doctrine capable, as Matthew Specter puts it, of building a “consensus on the new global-facing posture of a hegemonic, interventionist United States,” was his ability to fuse hard-nosed ‘realism’ with high moral purpose: as he put

¹⁰⁵ Specter, *The Atlantic Realists*, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ William Culbertson, *Liberation: The Threat and the Challenge of Power* (Atlanta: Tupper & Love, 1953), 45.

¹⁰⁸ See David Engerman, “Bernath Lecture: American Knowledge and Global Power,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2007), 603.

it in a description of Roosevelt's wartime strategy, "what the moral law demanded was by felicitous coincidence always identical with what the national interest seemed to require."¹⁰⁹ It is striking that Morgenthau's best-selling *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948 and quickly adopted as the main textbook for foreign policy and international relations courses at universities across the United States, dismissed geopolitics in just two pages while making no reference to the writers who had dominated the field just a few years earlier.¹¹⁰ Instead, Morgenthau decried geopolitics as a "pseudo-science" that turned geography into an "absolute" determining factor in world politics and created, in Haushofer's hands, the "metaphysics" that forged a key "ideological weapon" for Nazi Germany.¹¹¹

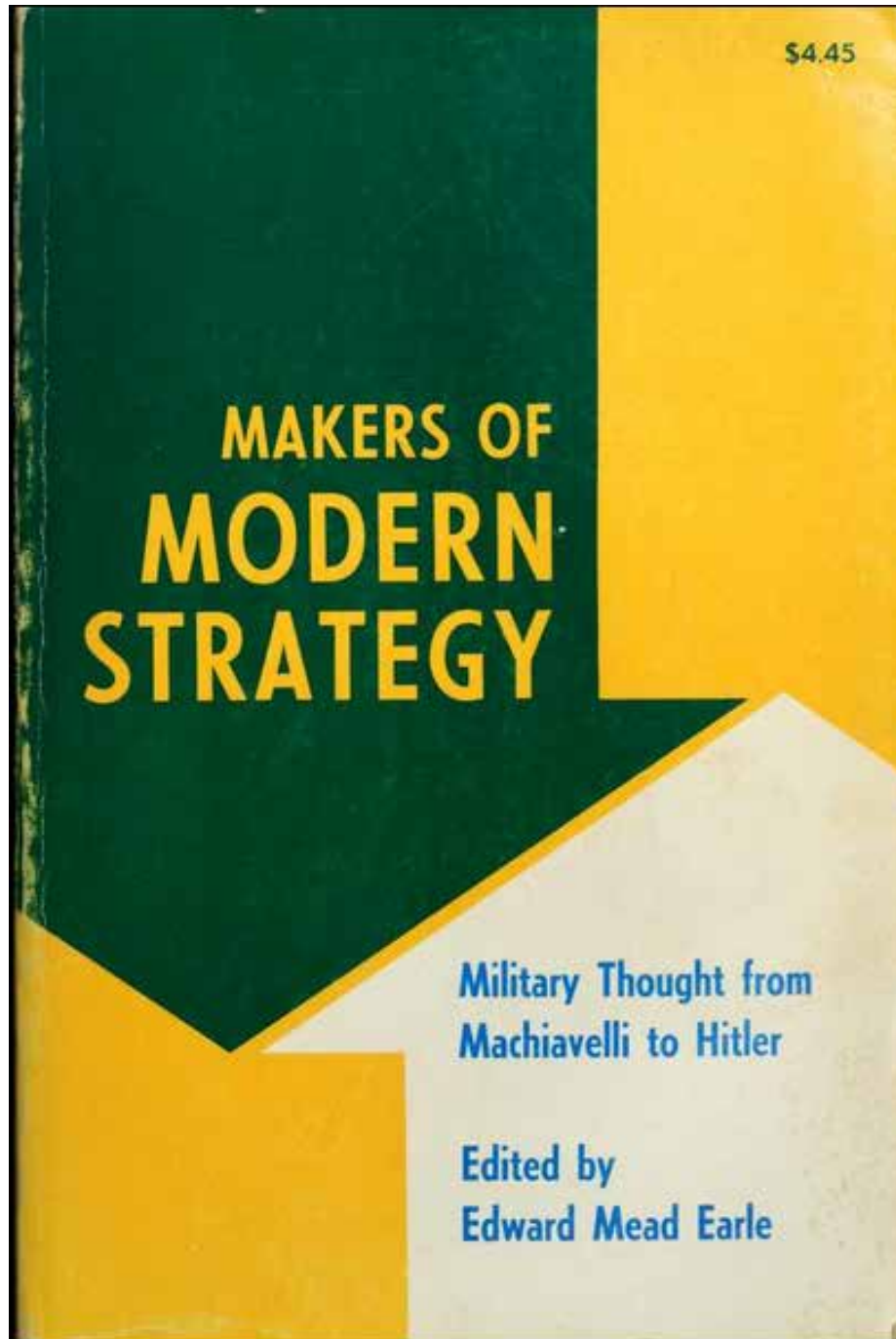
Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* helped to shape the outlook of generations of scholars and foreign relations professionals and is now in its seventh edition. Moreover, his 'felicitous coincidence' between virtue and power politics helped to enwrap postwar American foreign policy in a veil of high moral purpose. This process, buttressed by the work of numerous other scholars and policymakers, demanded that the specific language of geopolitics—if not the modes of thinking it imparted—be quietly but entirely retired. In this light, it is striking that while there are numerous studies that seek to trace the concealed influence of geopolitics—and of Spykman's 'rimland' theory in particular—on the development of US strategy in the early Cold War, there are few that attempt, as I have done here, to project this relationship back into the formulation of grand strategy in World War II. It is also striking, therefore, that as the world order put together in the aftermath of the world war unravels at an accelerating pace, overt discussion of geopolitics is once again becoming fashionable, both as a tool of contemporary analysis and—as here—of historical enquiry.¹¹²

109 Specter, *Atlantic Realists* 159; Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Mainsprings of American Foreign Policy: The National Interest vs Moral Abstractions," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec. 1950), 844.

110 On the widespread adoption of *Politics Among Nations* in US classrooms, see Specter, *Atlantic Realists* 138. The book is now in its seventh edition.

111 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 1948) 118.

112 See, for example, Gray, "Nicholas John Spykman, the Balance of Power, and the International Order"; Mackubin Thomas Owens, "In Defense of Classical Geopolitics," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 1999); and, from a different point of view, Foster, "The New Geopolitics of Empire."



Mackinder's Game, Mahan's Rules: Classical Geopolitics and the U. S. Navy in the Cold War

BY PETER JOHN BROBST¹

A mong the first principles of classical geopolitics is the juxtaposition between land power and sea power.² Over the last century, two avatars came to personify that opposition: the British geographer, Halford Mackinder, and the American naval officer and historian, Alfred Thayer Mahan. Although other theorists emerged over the twentieth century, 'Mahan versus Mackinder' remained a standard framework of strategic debate in Anglo-American circles throughout the Cold War, from early conceptual skirmishes in the 1940s and 50s through battles of over policy and budgets in the 1980s. The partisans of Mackinder presented their champion to embody a vision of resurgent land power and continental advantage, while casting Mahan to personify a parochial, exaggerated, and 'retrospective' defense of navies as the indispensable key to victory in the global arena; Mahan's backers and proponents of maritime resilience more generally, often portrayed Mackinder as a Chicken Little of geopolitics. In truth, Harold Sprout cautioned officer-students at the U. S. Naval War College in 1953, the polarization of Mackinder and Mahan reflected basic 'misconceptions' if not an entirely false distinction. The Princeton-based professor of politics, who was a leading authority of the day on both geopolitics and naval history, said that a "careful reading of Mackinder's writings ... reveals that he was interested in predominately the same question as Mahan—the control of the seas."³ He might just as easily have said that Mahan was ultimately concerned,

1 Associate Professor of History, Ohio University.

2 On this theme broadly, Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires, and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018). In relation to current American naval thought, S. C. M. Paine, "Maritime Solutions to Continental Conundrums," *Proceedings*, August 2021. Older but indispensable, Colin S. Gray and Roger W. Barnett, editors, *Seapower and Strategy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1989).

3 Harold Sprout, "Geopolitical Theories Compared" (lecture at the U. S. Naval War College on 16 September 1953), *Naval War College Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1954, p. 30.

like Mackinder, with the problem of power balancing in Eurasia. While Mackinder and Mahan saw the global chessboard from distinctive vantage points, their theories largely harmonized as aids to statecraft and strategy. Overall, 'Mahan and Mackinder' better describes the geopolitical outlook of American naval thinkers during the Cold War than does 'Mahan *versus* Mackinder'. American naval writing of the era evinces a more imaginative understanding of Mahan and a wider reflection of Mackinder than generally supposed. The Cold War continued 'Mackinder's Great Game', to use the phrase of one well-placed observer from the Royal Navy, and Mahan's rules still applied.⁴

The persistence of the rhetorical polarization belied the basic complementarity between the ideas of Mahan and Mackinder. Thirty years after Sprout's lecture in Newport, any number of scholars, commentators, and policymakers continued to set Mackinder against Mahan.⁵ Robert Komer, for instance, emphasized the dichotomy in his indictment of the 'Maritime Strategy' propounded by the U. S. Navy during the Reagan years. The Maritime Strategy envisaged using carrier groups and attack submarines to go on the offensive around the Eurasian littoral of the Soviet Union early in a war, striking in the high Arctic, in the Far East, and from the Mediterranean. Komer, like other critics, derided the Navy's plan as fanciful and reckless.⁶ His views carried weight. Komer, a former colonel in the U. S. Army, had spent three decades in high-level positions in government, including on the National Security Council staff, directing counter-insurgency programs in Vietnam, and serving as Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Carter administration. By distracting from the main battle on the intra-German frontier, Komer warned, the Maritime Strategy undermined the credibility of NATO's conventional deterrent and the cohesion of the alliance itself. He believed that the priority of the U. S. Navy in a war against the Soviet Union, apart from its nuclear role, had to be protecting the Atlantic sea-lanes that linked North America to the 'Central Front' in Germany. The United States and its allies had to hold the Soviet enemy at the point where they

4 For the phrase, Vice Admiral Louis Le Bailly to Ambassador René Serve, 25 March 1986, LEBY 10/4, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge.

5 On the persistence, Roger W. Barnett, "The Maritime-Continental Debate Isn't Over," *Proceedings*, June 1987.

6 For the Maritime Strategy, John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the Maritime Strategy, 1977-1986* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 2004). For able and compelling defense by one of principals, John Lehman, *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018). For Komer's side, Frank Leith Jones, *Blowtorch: Robert Komer, Vietnam, and American Cold War Strategy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2013), pp. 248-266.

expected his weight would fall. If NATO's vital center collapsed, no amount of countervailing pressure along the Soviet periphery would matter. The Maritime Strategy, Komer argued, amounted to "ignoring Mackinder in favor of Mahan."⁷

Komer's critique began in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* in 1981 and culminated in 1984 with the publication of a short monograph remarkable for its erudition rather than its impact, *Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense?*⁸ Komer's short treatise reflected an impressive knowledge of strategic history and wide reading in academic literature. Komer's explanation of Mackinder's theories and their relevance in the Cold War was forceful and incisive, but he did not base his remarks directly on Mackinder's articles and books. He relied instead on Paul Kennedy's famous study, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, originally published in 1976. "The past seventy years," Kennedy asserted, "has only served to reveal correctness of [Mackinder's] forebodings."⁹ World power had become, as Mackinder had foreseen, a measure of land power. It was a matter of economics and technology as much as military strength per se. Mechanized transport heralded the emergence of a consolidated super-state based in the Eurasian 'Heartland', which in Mackinder's definition encompassed Central Asia and its marchlands in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Anglo-American sea power may have enabled the defeat of Germany in its bid to capture this 'natural fortress', but Allied victory represented more of a reprieve for the maritime powers than a lasting reversal of continental fortunes. The Soviets now stood on the verge of finally making good on Mackinder's prediction.

A decade earlier, in 1965, another historian of British naval power, Gerald Graham, anticipated Kennedy's appraisal of Mackinder's acuity and foresight. "Mackinder," Graham wrote, "predicted that the unity of the land was about to become the vital element in what today we call 'global strategy'." This, Graham continued, "had been the Napoleonic dream, which sometimes in the nineteenth century became the British nightmare." It was, he said, "a recurrent nightmare based on the fear that a continental alliance by making itself master of the Eurasian 'Heartland' would not only exclude British trade, but could strike at the

7 Robert W. Komer, *Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Abt Books, 1984), p. 59.

8 Robert W. Komer, "Military and Political Policy: Maritime Strategy vs. Continental Defense," *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1982; and letters by Komer, Stansfield Turner, and John Lehman in "Comment and Correspondence: Maritime Strategies," *Foreign Affairs*, winter 1982/1983.

9 Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: reprinted by The Ashfield Press, 1983), p. 185.

peripheral British empire anywhere, from Egypt and the Straits, to India and the Far East.”¹⁰ Today, such estimates of Soviet capacities seem overblown and perhaps even risible. The Soviet Union never consolidated in Central Asia a base of power “immune,” as Graham put it, “from the oceans.”¹¹ Still less did the Soviet Union emerge as a ‘continental monolith’, although some observers see in China the potential to forge a Mackinderan ‘super continent’ in our own century.¹² Yet, while Soviet continentalism did not ‘overset’ the balance between global land and sea power, that is a judgment from hindsight. The underlying ambitions and trajectories of both Russian and German expansion that informed Mackinder’s theories were real. Cold War strategists dismissed them only with imprudence. What really troubled at least one contemporary observer was that a British nightmare of the nineteenth century should similarly convulse Americans, or an American-led maritime combination, in the twentieth.

This was Captain George Miller. “Must we live in fear,” he asked as the Korean War reached its end in July of 1953. Miller wrote in the *Proceedings* of the U. S. Naval Institute, the semi-official professional organization of the U. S. Navy. At the time, he was Head of the Strategic Studies Branch in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. In 1958, Miller gained promotion to Rear Admiral and took command of Surface Striking Forces, Seventh Fleet in the Western Pacific. In the 1960s, he returned to the naval staff in Washington, serving as Director of the Long-Range Objectives Group for three years and in his final assignment as Director of Naval Strategic Offensive and Defensive Systems. Throughout that time, Miller regularly spoke and published on geopolitics and grand strategy. He became so prolific, and outspoken, that Thomas Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations between 1967 and 1970, and subsequently Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dubbed Miller the “Mahan of the twentieth century.”¹³ In his early essay in 1953, Miller made a forceful case for the resilience of sea power in the face of Mackinder’s vision of a continental future. He focused, in particular, on the double-edged quality of mechanization. While Mackinder was correct that the steam engine had revolutionized overland transport, it had also brought comparable and ‘even greater’ advances in transportation at

10 Gerald S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 29-30.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

12 For example, Kent Calder, *Super Continent: The Logic of Eurasian Integration* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

13 Jerry Miller, *Nuclear Weapons and Aircraft Carriers: How the Bomb Saved Naval Aviation* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), p. 38.

sea. The advent of the airplane and nuclear weapons had likewise increased the reach and punch of both land and sea power, but the latter had benefitted more. According to Miller, increased exposure to attack from mobile, sea-based forces was matching, even outpacing, the expansion of fixed infrastructure, such as railroads, highways, and airfields, on which continental integration depended. Miller ultimately reckoned that "the chances of a land power being able to move out and engulf the entire perimeter of the European-Asiatic continent are not great—unless the maritime powers bring about their own destruction by abdicating their dominating position at sea."¹⁴

In January 1954, a detailed reply to Miller from Captain John Hayes appeared in *Proceedings*. Hayes agreed with Miller about the relative strength of America's maritime position, but he took issue with his colleague's "incorrect appraisal of Mackinder's writings." Like Miller, Hayes, who was about ten years senior, was another sailor who had spent his early career in the surface navy, mainly in engineering billets. Hayes rose to command destroyers on the eve of the Second World War. He saw combat in the Solomons campaign, and ended the war helping to plan amphibious operations in the Philippines and north China. After the war, Hayes turned to academic pursuits, including serving as the president of the American Military Institute, which renamed itself the Society for Military History in 1990. Hayes wrote in response to Miller fifty years to the month after Mackinder delivered his famous lecture on "The Geographical Pivot of History." That essay, Hayes emphasized, contained the core of Mackinder's thinking, but he also noted that Mackinder's ideas were "spread throughout his many books and articles." Miller had relied on *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919), apparently without considering Mackinder's earlier book on *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), his lesser-known but revealing essays, or his wartime reassessment, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1943. Hayes asserted that Mackinder's last article expressed a view on the impact of the airplane "coinciding entirely with that ... held by the U. S. Navy and outlined by Captain Miller." Even more, Hayes wrote, "Mackinder was not essentially an exponent or advocate of land power." Mackinder was "completely aware" of the lasting efficacy of such principles as peripheral strategy, insular position, and maritime consortium. Mackinder "realized the basic advantages of sea power," but thought, perhaps as a good intelligence officer might, that sound maritime strategy required being "conscious of the potentialities of the land powers."

14 George H. Miller, "Must We Live in Fear?" *Proceedings*, July 1953, p. 32.

In advancing his Heartland theory, “Mackinder was trying to do what Captain Miller is trying to do—make his countrymen understand their favored positions in proper perspective.”¹⁵ Put in the jargon of the present day, Hayes might have said that Mackinder was ‘red teaming’.

More and Better Geography

A few months later, in May 1954, a young political science professor at Harvard offered his own assessment of Eurasian power balancing and the role of the navy. Samuel Huntington’s essay in *Proceedings*, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy”, was destined to become one of the most influential pieces of American naval thought and applied geopolitics in the twentieth century. Huntington did not mention Mackinder by name, but his article bore the imprint of Mackinder’s theories, and was broadly consistent with the prescriptions of Miller and Hayes. Huntington argued that after the Second World War, what he called ‘American national policy’ had entered a ‘Eurasian phase’ that “involved the projection, or the possible projection in the event of war, of American power into that continental heartland.” While this new phase seemed to accord primacy to America’s nuclear-armed air force and its forward-deployed army in Europe, Huntington insisted that the navy could still make an effective and substantial contribution in a general war. He explained that the U. S. Navy had emerged from the Second World War with effective command of the sea across both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It therefore could and should maintain a ready, ‘transoceanic’ posture. “The locale of decisive action has switched from the sea to the land: not to the inner heart of the land mass,” Huntington argued, “but to what various writers have described as the Rimland, the Periphery, or the Littoral. It is here that the battles of the cold war and any future hot war will be fought.” Modern maritime forces seemed well suited to this geography. Huntington reasoned that the navy should organize itself around a combination of carrier-based naval air power, sea-based amphibious forces, and ‘naval artillery’, including guided missiles for long-range strikes. “It is not utopian,” he declared, “to envision naval task forces with the primary mission of attacking, or seizing, objectives far inland through the application of these techniques.”¹⁶

To Miller’s confidence in maritime advantage, Huntington added a dash of

15 John D. Hayes, response to George H. Miller in “Discussions, Comments, and Notes,” *Proceedings*, January 1954.

16 Samuel P. Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” *Proceedings*, May 1954, pp.

iconoclasm. "The bipolarity around this land-sea dichotomy," he wrote, "is the fundamental fact which makes the Mahanite concept inapplicable today." Huntington boiled Mahan's concept of sea power down to fleet action and destruction of the enemy's navy. "All the facets of Mahan's thought rest upon his assumption of the existence of two or more competing naval powers." Mahan's ideas served the U. S. Navy well during what Huntington called its 'oceanic phase' from the 1890s through the Second World War, but new circumstances required new thinking. Perhaps it is in the nature of academic authors, especially policy-minded ones, to claim a greater degree of novelty than warranted. Huntington's essay actually synthesized a number of tried-and-true ideas. One might even suggest that the article was ultimately derivative—of thinkers who themselves largely derived their ideas from Mackinder and Mahan. Huntington used Nicholas Spykman's evocative phrase, 'Rimland', to describe the conjectural battlespace along the coastal margin of Eurasia. Spykman's 'Rimland' compared to James Fairgrieve's 'Crush Zone', which in turn represented an effort to elaborate and explain Mackinder's 'Inner or Marginal Crescent' of lands interposed between the Heartland base of a continental empire and the oceanic base of global sea power. For its part, Mackinder's concept sounded a lot like Mahan's notion of the 'Debatable Ground', girding the Eurasian periphery between thirty and forty degrees north latitude.¹⁷ These were, to be sure, varied conceptions, but their collective lineage traced to the precepts of Mackinder and Mahan. This is not to suggest that Huntington's eye was any less perceptive or that his strategic prescription less compelling, but it does underscore an important caveat about the nature and conception of geopolitics as a way of thinking across time as well as space. As a 'durable mindset', to use an apposite definition, geopolitics reflects the plasticity of ideas and their interpretation, not a literal reading or reverent insistence on the direct applicability of theories from the past to particular problems in the present.¹⁸ Moreover, as Colin Gray remarked in 1986, "one cannot find and indeed should not look in Mackinder's writings for authoritative and formulaic answers to the persisting middle-level questions of U. S. national security Rather, what Mackinder provides is a framework and perspective, organizing qualities that have been notably lacking

17 For Mahan's definition, A. T. Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), pp. 21-29. For an incisive analysis, William D. Walter, "The Context of Mahan's 'Debatable Zone'," *The Geographical Bulletin*, November 2000.

18 Jeremy Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 4.

in American foreign and defense policy.”¹⁹ What was true of Mackinder also held for Mahan.

John Hayes conveyed precisely this notion of geopolitics in his supple reading of Mahan as well as Mackinder. Hayes admitted that there was some truth in Henry Stimson’s famous quip that the Navy Department sometimes “seemed to retire into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the U. S. Navy the only true church.”²⁰ There was, he said, a widespread and long-standing habit in the navy to see Mahan in the same vein as Huntington. Hayes believed this reflected the same myopia through which the navy’s critics glimpsed Mahan. He understood Mahan, however, to have promoted a more ecumenical concept of ‘sea power’, one that had direct applicability in the context of the Cold War. By ‘sea power’, Hayes argued, Mahan had meant ‘maritime strategy’, in which naval strategy formed a critical part but hardly the whole. In fact, Hayes added, Mahan had once explained to his English publisher that he chose ‘sea power’ because ‘maritime’ was “too smooth to arrest men’s attention or stick in their minds.” Furthermore, ‘maritime strategy’, as Mahan conceived it and the Cold War navy should comprehend it, was ‘peripheral strategy’. Here Hayes explicitly brought Mahan into a mutually reinforcing dialogue with Mackinder. Modern sea power, or maritime strategy, meant more than a doctrine for air-sea-amphibious operations, it meant global mobility; it meant the sustainment of allied armies, proxy states, and, in Mahan and Mackinder’s own time, imperial bastions on the Eurasian periphery.²¹ Hayes argued that Mackinder himself imagined a chain of effectively defensible if not perfectly fortified outworks along the Inner or Marginal Crescent. He noted that in “The Geographical Pivot of History,” Mackinder forecast, “France, Italy, Egypt, India, and Korea would become the bridgeheads where the outside navies would support armies to compel the pivot allies to deploy land forces and prevent them from concentrating their strength on fleets.”²² Maritime strategy, or ‘peripheral

19 Colin Gray, “Keeping the Soviets Landlocked: Geostrategy for a Maritime America,” *The National Interest*, summer 1986, p. 26.

20 Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 506.

21 John D. Hayes, “Peripheral Strategy: Mahan’s Doctrine Today,” *Proceedings*, November 1953. For a recent treatment of Mahan’s breadth and nuance, Nicholas A. Lambert, *The Neptune Factor: Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Concept of Sea Power* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2023).

22 As quoted by Hayes in response to George Miller, “Discussions, Comments, and Notes,” *Proceedings*, January 1954. For the original, H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, April 1904, p. 436.

strategy' as Hayes would have it, also enabled limited wars of restricted aims and isolated objects, whereas a continental commitment in Europe would ineluctably lead to total war. In articulating this point, Hayes echoed the British theorist Julian Corbett more than Mahan or Mackinder, but the upshot was the same: sea power opened expansive and advantageous geography against a centrally based adversary in Eurasia, whether in 1904, 1954, or 1984.

In an interview conducted during his last days in uniform, overseeing the navy's development of new weapons and concepts for nuclear warfare, George Miller counseled that a "strategist must above all be a geographer ... he must understand his own geographical assets and liabilities as well as those of his adversaries."²³ James Hornfisher, the American naval historian, has suggested that Miller's attitude was typical among American naval thinkers of the early Cold War. "The discipline of geopolitics," he writes approvingly, "was [their] pole star." Their doyen, by Hornfisher's lights, was William Hessler.²⁴ Trained as an economist, Hessler had a brief career as a consular officer with the State Department before becoming a newspaperman. He spent thirty-five years, straddling the Second World War, as foreign affairs editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. During the war, Hessler accepted a commission in the navy, serving as an information and civil affairs officer with fast carriers in the Pacific. One might even say he was a true 'heartland' navalist. In 1944, then Lieutenant Hessler penned an essay in *Proceedings*, "A New Geopolitics for America," winning the annual Prize Essay Contest of the U. S. Naval Institute. The award placed him in a group that included the likes of Bradley Fiske, Dudley Knox, and P. H. Backus, whose essay in 1959 coined the term 'finite deterrence'. While Hayes won the prize once, and Miller garnered several honorable mentions, Hessler went on to become one of only of a handful of three-time winners.²⁵ Like Hayes, Hessler recognized that Mahan's ideas needed "extensive reworking, to fit the facts of our own times and especially today's technology ... but they [remained] a foundation for an American geopolitics."²⁶ Hessler's writings also reflected

23 *Reminiscences of Rear Admiral George H. Miller*, interviewed by John T. Mason, Jr. (Annapolis, Maryland: U. S. Naval Institute, 1975), p. 217.

24 James D. Hornfisher, "Rise and Fall of a Seven-Ocean Fleet: The U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, 1940-49," *Proceedings*, December 2014. Also, James D. Hornfisher, *Who Can Hold the Sea: The U. S. Navy in the Cold War, 1945-1960* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2022), p.

25 Ellery H. Clark, "The Significance of the Prize Essay Contest, 1879-1961, *Proceedings*, March 1962.

26 William H. Hessler, *Operation Survival: America's New Role in World Affairs* (New York:

the influence of Mackinder's ideas and nomenclature. Hessler emphasized in particular the notion of global, geographic 'balance' as developed by Mackinder in his last, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," published in 1943.²⁷ Hessler followed Mackinder along a somewhat different path as well. Like Mackinder, Hessler often turned his attention to the importance and improvement of geographic education. When, in 1959, Hessler published an essay in *Proceedings* on 'more and better geography', he spoke in the same sense that Miller did. Hessler's article was a plea for increased emphasis on geography in naval training and in the American school system at large. Hessler emphasized physical geography and human geography alike, but stressed in particular the need to inculcate a basic understanding of maps and globes, the use of different projections, and cartographic technique.²⁸

Hessler instinctively understood the power of maps not only to convey information but also to shape a narrative, for good or ill. He had a shrewd grasp on the importance of elements such as orientation and framing. A revealing example of what Hessler had in mind, appeared in the May 1954 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*. The map was entitled 'The Navy's Middle East'.²⁹ Its cartographer used an orthographic projection, conveying a visceral sense of the long *curving* sweep around several thousand of the globe that comprised what the U. S. Navy considered its Middle East. The comparatively narrow, horizontal framing of the map indicated at a glance the exposure of the region's wide expanse to the Heartland, and of the Heartland to the possible offensive punch of maritime power. The idea of the Mediterranean as a long and vulnerable highway, not least for the then increasing flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe, is readily apparent. So too is the idea of the Mediterranean as salient by which naval air and amphibious forces could cut deep toward the Heartland from the west.³⁰ In a strikingly Mackinderian tone, Hessler described the Medi-

Prentice-Hall, 1949), pp. 212-213.

27 Halford Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1943, especially pp. 601-605.

28 William H. Hessler, "More and Better Geography Needed," *Proceedings*, December 1959.

29 Ernest M. Eller, "Troubled Waters East of Suez," *National Geographic Magazine*, April 1954, pp. 488-489.

30 For the strategic concept, Michael A. Palmer, *The Origins of the Maritime Strategy: The Development of American Naval Strategy, 1945-1955* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1990), pp. 34-39 and 97-98. Also, Andrew Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 271. For the operational difficulties, Corbin Williamson, "Mediterranean Marines: The Challenges of Forward Deployment, 1948-1958," *The Journal of Military History*, April 2021.

terranean as “an extension of the Atlantic for 2,000 miles into the very heart of the world island.”³¹ As portrayed in *National Geographic*, however, the ‘Navy’s Middle East’ did not center on Greece or Turkey, Egypt or the Levant; its axis fell further east, on Iran, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf. The Indian subcontinent loomed as large, and in full, on the eastern side of the map as the Mediterranean did on the west.

The map conformed to Mahan’s ‘debatable ground’ between global land and sea power, or at least to its core segment, which in 1902 Mahan styled, the ‘Middle East’. Mahan did not actually coin the term, as sometimes believed. It had originated in the military and intelligence circles of British India during the late nineteenth century. General T. E. Gordon, a prominent officer in the Indian Army, was probably the first to use it in print, two years before Mahan.³² Viewed from British India, the ‘Middle East’ was the area in which power based on Britain’s own continental bastion in Asia collided with the southward pressure exerted from Mackinder’s ‘Pivot Area’, or what he later called the ‘Heartland’. Mahan’s ‘Middle East’ was somewhat different. In the words of one recent scholar, it was “a terraqueous zone of confrontation where British supremacy at sea—the foundation of its global power—was encountering imperial challenges from Russia and Germany.”³³ In their own day, the distinction between Gordon and Mahan was perhaps one without much of a difference. Five decades later, in Hessler’s time, the contrast had sharpened. The Indian subcontinent no longer formed a single mass offsetting the Heartland. The British Raj was gone, its former army divided between two mutually antagonistic successor states. Maritime counter-pressure, be it military, diplomatic, or economic, now had to come from the ocean as a base, perhaps with some regional states functioning as allied ‘bridgeheads’, to use Mackinder’s word, but unmediated by an army or organizing center on the Asian periphery. Moreover, the ‘Great Game’, taken to mean the persistent struggle between land and sea power in that part of the world Gordon and Mahan called the ‘Middle East’, was becoming as much an American problem as it had been a British one in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

31 Hessler, *Operation Survival*, p. 188.

32 Clayton R. Koppes, “Captain Mahan, General Gordon, and the Origins of the Term, ‘Middle East’,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 12, no. 1, 1976.

33 Guillemette Crouzet, *Inventing the Middle East: Britain and the Persian Gulf in the Age of Global Imperialism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022), p. 6.

Save in the Persian Gulf

Sailing south from the Persian Gulf, “into the empty waters between Africa and India,” Captain Ernest Eller sensed the stakes involved in the ‘Navy’s Middle East’. “Here,” he wrote with a historian’s eye, “may be shaped again the destiny of the world.”³⁴ The map as well as that bit of declamation had accompanied an otherwise anodyne article by Eller, who had recently served as the commander of the U. S. Navy’s small Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR). Eller later headed the navy’s historical branch from 1956 to 1970. The small flotilla that made up MIDEASTFOR consisted of a flagship, USS *Valcour*, an ex-seaplane tender, usually accompanied by two destroyers or similar vessels. The navy had created MIDEASTFOR in 1949 to show the flag between ‘Suez and Calcutta’ and to coordinate any American naval activities as might arise from time to time in those ‘empty waters’. Eller’s command of MIDEASTOR during 1950 and 1951 coincided with the outbreak of the Korean War and the nationalization of oil production in Iran. The latter led to the crisis that culminated in 1953 with the ouster of Iran’s prime minister, Muhammad Mossadegh, and a redoubled commitment to the rule of the Shah. Eller wrote in the combined aftermath of both crises, perhaps trying to take stock of the strategic lessons while memories remained fresh. While his piece in *National Geographic* was more travelogue than hard-boiled geopolitics, he minced few words in *Proceedings*. Iran, Eller argued, “occupied a unique position between our sea power” and Soviet land power. It was also the weakest spot along the ‘fearful length’ of the strategic frontier from the Baltic to the Adriatic, round the southern rim of Asia, all the way to the Sea of Japan. “If Asia opens the back door to Europe as Lenin held,” Eller posited, “Iran and the north Arabian peninsula open a much nearer side door.” According to Eller, this area was the “center of Soviet aspiration” and the “key” to the far-flung network of Western defense.³⁵ It formed, in Mackinder’s phrase, a ‘passage-land’ between the singular ‘Northern Heartland’ and the secondary but vital ‘Southern Heartland’ of Africa south of the Sahara and east of the forest belt along the Atlantic coast. Put together, they comprised the bulk of what Mackinder described as the ‘World Island’.³⁶

34 Eller, “Troubled Waters,” p. 514.

35 Ernest M. Eller, “Troubled Oil and Iran,” *Proceedings*, November 1954. For Lenin, Peter Hopkirk, *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin’s Dream of an Empire in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985).

36 Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Norton Library edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), pp. 81-83.

Eller thought comparably. Brought inside the Soviet empire, Iran and the adjoining steppe of northern Arabia would open a land route to the Indian Ocean and the world beyond. He supposed the oil fields of the Gulf to be Moscow's immediate objective, but that oil ultimately mattered because it would "permit land, air, and naval forces of almost any size ... to expand in any direction."³⁷

Eller also emphasized the relevance of maritime strategy as in Iran and its surrounding region, especially carrier-based air power and the diplomatic advantage gained by a regular naval presence. Eller brought regional focus and a specificity of scenarios to the wider and more abstract discussion of the navy's role in Eurasian power balancing among the likes of Miller, Hayes, and Huntington. That their collective discussion occurred largely over the course of the early 1950s is unsurprising. Five years earlier, the advent of intercontinental bombers and an independent U. S. Air Force to fly them, seemed to render the navy's carrier groups, if not the navy itself, irrelevant. The Korean War had instead vindicated the aircraft carrier. To whatever degree these naval thinkers were capitalizing on the moment, another change of fortune was about to set the navy on a course right into the waters that Eller, like Mahan and Mackinder, thought would provide the very base from which the power of Heartland would either be checked or unleashed into the oceanic system. In 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, precipitating joint but failed military action to recapture the canal by Britain, France, and Israel. The crisis resulted in a lengthy closure of the canal, and generated substantial strategic recalibration in Western capitals, including Washington as well as London and Paris. The debacle at Suez did not mean that the withdrawal of British forces in Indian Ocean was imminent, but Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, believed that fleet-level operations by the U. S. Navy were inevitable in the future. Burke raised the issue with his British counterparts and initiated studies on the basing and other logistical requirements. The process that Burke began eventually led to the development of an American base on the British island of Diego Garcia in the 1970s. As of the late 1950s, however, the Indian Ocean remained the 'neglected ocean' in American naval thinking and policy.

Commander Malcolm Cagle, an aviator and future vice admiral, complained in 1958 that American sea power in the 'Third Ocean', as Burke called it, was "barely visible, weakly represented, and only spasmodically present." Cagle

37 Eller, "Troubled Oil." Also, Ernest M. Eller, "Implications of Soviet Sea Power," in *The Soviet Navy*, edited by M. G. Saunders (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1958), especially pp. 318-324. For Eller's participation in war plans for the Middle East, Editorial Note, *FRUS*, vol. 5, Near East and Africa, 1951.

shared Eller's concern about the possibility and feasibility of an overland advance by the Soviet army on the Persian Gulf. As Eller later recalled, "we were afraid World War III was about to start."³⁸ Why would the Soviets move on the Persian Gulf? Beyond the larger ideological motive, Cagle imagined the importance of a window on the Indian Ocean in the Second World War must have exercised considerable influence on Soviet thinking. The Iranian corridor was second in the delivery of crucial lend-lease supplies only to the trans-Pacific routes from ports on the west coast of North America. "The lesson," Cagle said, "is not likely to be forgotten." Whatever the balance of Soviet motivations, the potential impact seemed dire. Cagle assessed Soviet objectives in Eller's terms. He reiterated Eller's warning about Mackinder's 'passage-land', what Cagle called "the bridge to Africa," and the prodigious oil fields of the Gulf. "The possibility of the presence of a naval power of the magnitude, resources, and persistence of Russia on the Persian Gulf is in itself," Cagle wrote, "sufficient to revolutionize the strategy in respect to the Indian Ocean."³⁹

Here were Mahan and Mackinder in full force. Even before the region's oil fields became a factor in world politics, Mahan foresaw the likelihood of future competition among the great powers over bases in and around the Gulf. Mackinder explained that Britain had in the nineteenth century managed to transform the Indian Ocean into a 'closed sea'. It had done so on the basis of its empire in India, the strength of its position in East Africa, its control of the Malacca Strait, and not least its possession of Australia. "Save in the Persian Gulf," Mackinder declared, "there could be no rival base for sea-power which combined security with the needful resources."⁴⁰ The danger that alarmed Cagle and Eller compared, perhaps exceeded, the historical peril in the Baltic and Black Seas. "The islanders of the world," Mackinder warned, "cannot be indifferent to the fate of either Copenhagen or of Constantinople ... for a great power in the Heartland and Eastern Europe could prepare, within the Baltic and Black Seas, for war on the ocean."⁴¹ Neither could the maritime powers of the Cold War, it stands to reason, be indifferent to the fate Bandar Abbas or Muscat, or Oman's former footholds of Gwadar and Chabahar along the Makran coast which today

38 *The Reminiscences of Rear Admiral Ernest M. Eller*, interviewed by John T. Mason and Paul Stillwell, vol. 3 (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2016), p. 884. For Eller's participation in war plans for the Middle East, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1951, vol. 5, Near East and Africa.

39 Malcolm Cagle, "The Neglected Ocean," *Proceedings*, November 1958, p.

40 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 57.

41 Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 172-173.

overlaps Iran and Pakistan. Attaching those barbicans to the Heartland might 'close' the Persian Gulf, providing an expansive harbor with unrivalled bunkers in which to prepare a navy for 'war on the ocean'.

For his part, George Miller reversed the formula, suggesting that the Americans and their maritime allies could with real effect use the open ocean to brace the 'Persian Shield'.⁴² In 1958, a few months before Cagle wrote, Miller presented a bold vision of the Indian Ocean as an ideal bastion for maritime forces arrayed against power based in the Heartland—a 'new dimension of sea power', he called it. Miller believed that time, distance, and physical terrain worked to America's advantage in the Persian Gulf and wider Indian Ocean. In the first place, the Indian Ocean seemed to Miller "about as far removed from the threat of interdiction by the submarines of the Asiatic heartland as it is possible to be." Secondly, Miller imagined nuclear propulsion would soon enable Western navies to exploit the great expanse of the Indian Ocean, "between the Persian Gulf and the Antarctic continent far to the south." From the far reaches of "this southern ocean", Miller suggested, "the sea powers may one day be able to exert their strongest influence in the Middle East." He envisioned American and Anglo-American battle groups "moving into the more restricted waters to the north for specific purposes and disappearing again toward bases deep in the Southern Hemisphere." Miller admitted that Soviet forces on Iran's northern frontier stood just 800 miles from the Gulf, but he maintained that the formidability of Iran's topography made a speedy advance nearly impossible. Miller contended that the combined safety and mobility of a maritime posture in the southern Indian Ocean would "exercise a strong deterring influence on any aggressive inclinations which might develop in the Asiatic heartland to the north."⁴³ The vision proved fanciful but it attracted serious attention behind closed doors. Thomas Moorer, who preceded Miller as director of the Long-Range Objectives Group in the early 1960s, plumped for Miller's concept of a 'southern fleet', telling higher authorities that "is a good idea and we will definitely move in that direction as time goes on."⁴⁴ China's war against India in

42 For the phrase and its nineteenth century context, Gerald S. Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean: A Study of Maritime Enterprise, 1810-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 262-282.

43 George H. Miller, "Beyond Suez: A New Dimension of Sea Power," *Proceedings*, February 1958, p. 81.

44 Rear Admiral Thomas Moorer, Director, Long Range Objectives Group, to Vice Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Plans and Policy), 1 February 1961, Secret, U. S. Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, Strategic Plans Division, Box 411, via

1962 followed by China's first successful nuclear weapons test in 1964, led British as well as American strategists further down this path. Both the British and Americans contemplated deployment of nuclear deterrent forces in the Indian Ocean, including Polaris missile submarines. Although neither Britain nor the United States stationed Polaris submarines in the Indian Ocean, Moorer, who became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1970, saw advantage in the fact that the possibility alone rattled the Soviets and complicated their military planning. "The day could come," Moorer said in 1971, "when we might want to put Polaris submarines into the Indian Ocean.... We want them to look 360 degrees." "We can use the Indian Ocean," he added, "better against them than they can use it against us."⁴⁵

If Miller's assessment encouraged confidence in maritime advantage in the Indian Ocean, a trip to London in 1972 reinforced Moorer's apprehensions about Soviet objectives in the region. Moorer met with his old friend Vice Admiral Louis Le Bailly, who had recently become Director-General of the Defence Intelligence Staff. Le Bailly had served as Britain's naval attaché in Washington during Moorer's tenure as Chief of Naval Operations between 1967 and 1970. Le Bailly hoped to impress on Moorer a sense of urgency about the Indian Ocean and the persistence of the 'Great Game'. Le Bailly claimed that Britain historically had as its aim in the contest, "the exclusion of Russia from a warm water port." The Russians had as theirs "an actual land bridge between the Russian homeland and the target." Port facilities in the Indian Ocean that were "physically separate" from Central Asia would not satisfy the Soviets. Le Bailly explained they were a poor substitute for the "strategic prize ... represented by the absorption of Afghanistan and Baluchistan into the Soviet Union and the opening of a Soviet Indian Ocean port." He produced a hydrographic chart of Chabahar, on Iran's southeastern coast nearly to the border with Pakistan. "This prize," Le Bailly told Moorer, "is huge and could be followed by a Soviet Southern Fleet on a major and permanent basis."⁴⁶ In Le Bailly's telling, Mackinder's 'empire of the world' seemed nearly at hand. Ernest Eller echoed the sentiment in 1974. "[Russia's] long yearning for India and the In-

National Security Archives, George Washington University.

45 Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, 22 April 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. 24, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula.

46 Presentation to Admiral Thomas Moorer, USN by Vice Admiral Louis Le Bailly, RN, 6 July 1972, confidential, FCO 46/877, British National Archives. For a similar argument, Jan Kowalewski, "The Geopolitical Aspects of Soviet Imperialism," in *The Soviet Navy*, edited by Saunders.

dian Ocean,” seemed to him, “close to fruition.”⁴⁷ The British had withdrawn from their base at Singapore and last protectorates in the Persian Gulf in 1971. The Yom Kippur War and subsequent Arab oil boycott threatened to escalate into direct hostilities between the superpowers in 1973. That same year, Zahir Shah, the king of Afghanistan, fell in a military coup. The Afghan communist party seized power five years later. Revolution convulsed Iran in 1979, toppling Muhammad Reza Shah. Back in 1972, Le Bailly had predicted to Moorer that if the Shah lost power in Iran, the Soviets would soon be in Afghanistan. By the end of 1979, they were. “I remember only too well,” a retired Admiral Moorer wrote to a retired Vice Admiral Le Bailly in January 1980, “your understatement eight years ago that the Shah was in effect the only thing that stood between the Soviets and an invasion of Afghanistan. I concur that their next stop will be down through Baluchistan and finally to the Indian Ocean. You are quite the prophet.”⁴⁸

How Far Can the Bear Walk?

The Anglo-American intelligence establishment took Soviet activities in the Indian Ocean seriously, but adopted a circumspect position on the likelihood of possible Soviet expansion through Baluchistan. Still, they did not rule out the danger altogether. Moreover, the mere fact of the Soviet advance southward into Afghanistan left any number of senior officials far from sanguine, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor in the Carter White House, and William Casey, who became the first Director of Central Intelligence in the Reagan Administration. As Margaret Thatcher put it in early 1980, “whether or not Russia’s old desire for a warm water port in the Indian Ocean was a determining factor in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan, that aim is now easier of achievement than it was before.”⁴⁹ Admiral Elmo Zumwalt imagined that from their position in Afghanistan, with a ‘weakened Iran’ distracted on the west, the Soviets would be able to foster through subversion the emergence of a “Soviet-dominated state of Baluchistan.” They would then “immediately build

47 Commentary by Ernest M. Eller following “Russia’s Road to the Sea, Peter I to Napoleon,” by Sergei G. Gorshkov, in *Red Star Rising at Sea*, translated by Theodore A. Neely (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1974), p. 23.

48 Thomas Moorer to Louis Le Bailly, 29 January 1980, LEBY 7/4, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge.

49 Margaret Thatcher, Airey Neave Memorial Lecture, 3 March 1980, Document 104318, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online Archive.

a blue water port for the Baluchis and the Soviet navy at Chabahar.”⁵⁰ Zumwalt was retired when he wrote in 1981, but he was Chief of Naval Operations in 1972, when Le Bailly had raised the issue with Moorer. Like Eller and Cagle, Zumwalt used Mackinder’s terminology, referring, for instance, to the Soviet Union as the “heartland nation.” Zumwalt’s insistence that the navy represented the “geopolitical cavalry” rather than the “guardian of the moat” echoed Miller, Hayes, and Huntington’s vision of a ‘transoceanic navy’. The difference was Zumwalt’s frank sense of pessimism. “We could lose,” he wrote. Technology, had transformed the interface of land and sea power on the Indo-Iranian rimland. Eller, Miller, and particularly Hessler, had all argued that the depth and formidability of the region’s terrain, its trackless deserts and mountains, would slow, whether by nature or exploitation, the advance of a Soviet army to the Persian Gulf or Arabian Sea. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, Soviet Tu-22M ‘Backfire’ bombers, armed with anti-ship missiles, could range deep into the Indian Ocean from airfields in Central Asia, menacing carrier battle groups and tanker traffic alike. Flying at supersonic speeds, the ‘Backfire’ could pass through the poorly surveilled airspace over eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan in short order.⁵¹ Zumwalt’s assessment reflected secret information to which he was privy as a former CNO. As of early 1980, naval planners expected “Soviet land-based [anti-ship missile] bombers will continue to outrange our carrier aircraft. This will necessitate carrier ‘hit-and-run’ tactics and make carrier level-of-effort bombing support of friendly ground forces fighting the Soviets difficult.” They concluded that, “only the development of a sure capability to kill Soviet ASM bombers before they can launch their missiles will change the situation.”⁵² The navy needed better radar and land-attack cruise missiles to strike the bases of Soviet naval bombers. Those systems were in the offing, but in the meantime, tense days lay ahead.

One can almost hear George Miller intoning from the wings, “Who’s afraid of Halford Mackinder?” Early during the Korean War, two years before Miller first asked whether we must live in fear of power consolidated in the Heartland,

50 Elmo R. Zumwalt, “Naval Battles We Could Lose,” *International Security Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1981, p. 152.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 147. For a similar assessment by the British First Sea Lord, and future Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Terence Lewin, RN, “The Indian Ocean and Beyond: British Interests Yesterday and Today,” *Asian Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1978.

52 “War at Sea in the Indian Ocean,” memorandum by Admiral Sylvester R. Foley, 7 April 1980, secret, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. Collection, Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

Vice Admiral Morton Deyo wondered how far the Soviet 'Bear' could walk. Deyo, who commanded naval bombardment forces during the landings in Normandy, and similar task groups in the assaults on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, argued that the Soviet position in the Far East during the Korean War differed little from the Russian position during the war with Japan nearly half a century beforehand.⁵³ Anticipating John Hayes' argument about the advantages of 'peripheral strategy' as much as Miller's skepticism about continental invulnerability, Deyo made the case for playing on the fears and frustrations that the tyranny of distance imposed on the would-be world conquerors in the Kremlin. He suspected that the 'bear that walks like a man' would soon begin to "wonder whether he really wants to take on a long hard struggle for new fishing grounds so far from his home lair."⁵⁴ The recently retired admiral mentioned neither Mahan nor Mackinder by name in the thought-piece he that published in *Proceedings*, but Deyo made his allusion to the Great Game unambiguous—Rudyard Kipling's Adam-zad, the 'bear that walks like a man'. For his part, William Hessler wrote about the same time that despite Mackinder being one of their own, the British, "with their talent for improvisation ... skipped the theory, and left it to their poets to write the moral justification for imperial expansion." Instead, the British moved "intuitively on the path ordered by an insular position."⁵⁵ The ethos at the Naval War College was less improvisational and intuitive. They did not skip the theory in Newport, but to the extent related articles from the college's journal in the 1950s and 1960s offer a clue, Deyo's 'poetic' read on the Soviet predicament in the Heartland was well inside a main current of strategic opinion. The number of geographers and geographically minded economists who spoke at the Naval War College and contributed to its journal in those decades is striking. Transportation in the European territories of the Soviet Union generally struck expert observers as on a "rather primitive level."⁵⁶ In Central Asia and across Siberia, the situation was even worse. John Morrison, a professor of geography at the University of Maryland who worked as a research analyst in OSS during the Second World War, went so far as to dismiss anxieties about Soviet ambition to acquire a warm water port on the Indian Ocean. The theory,

53 For Korea as a dimension of the classic 'Great Game', including the tension between continental power and maritime strategy, Shelia Miyoshi Jager, *The Other Great Game: Korea and the Opening and the Birth of Modern East Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2023).

54 M. L. Deyo, "How Far Can the Bear Walk?" *Proceedings*, November 1951, p. 1205.

55 Hessler, *Operation Survival*, p. 211.

56 Holland Hunter, "Soviet Transportation," *Naval War College Review*, May 1957, p. 58.

Morrison warned, rested on “broad, sweeping generalizations,” detached from the “realities of geography.”⁵⁷ Kipling, he later wrote in *Proceedings*, had in fact conveyed no geopolitical truth or strategic wisdom; Kipling had only “fanned the popular conviction by his inimitable stories and the oft-quoted poem about the ‘Bear that Walked Like a Man’.”⁵⁸

Whether by improvisation, intuition, or absorption, Admiral Thomas Hayward acted on much this thinking. Hayward was Chief of Naval Operations between 1978 and 1982, during which time the Shah fell in Iran, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and debate blew up over the navy’s role in a general war over Europe. Hayward was one of the principle architects of the ‘Maritime Strategy’, but he was hardly the strategic ‘unilateralist’ that Robert Komer imagined the plan’s advocates to be. Reflecting Mahan and Mackinder, Hayward took an integrated, global view of the imperatives in Europe and the Persian Gulf. He maintained there was a “direct linkage between our security objectives in Central Europe and stability in the Persian Gulf.” Warm water ports were largely beside the point. The U. S. Navy needed carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean “to control the oil SLOCs which are vital to the industrialized world in general, and to our European and Japanese allies in particular.” Hayward explained that treating sea control and the projection of power ashore as “discrete categories” of maritime warfare did not “serve us well in the real world.” Sea control and power projection were “closely intertwined.” Hayward contended that striking along the Eurasian periphery, debating the ground as Mahan might have said, “may well be the most rapid and efficient way to gain control of the seas, as contrasted with the simplistic concept held by many that sea control simply means escorting convoys to Europe and little else.”⁵⁹ In other words, he recognized that the issue in the Persian Gulf was ultimately the defense of Europe and the Western alliance in general, much as Eller had suggested in the 1950s. To be sure, Hayward also recognized the difficulties

57 John A. Morrison, “Geography of Russia,” *Naval War College Review*, March 1952, p. 56.

58 John A. Morrison, “Russia and Warm Water Ports: A Fallacious Generalization and Its Consequences,” *Proceedings*, November 1952. For an overview of the debate sympathetic to Morrison’s position, William C. Green, “The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth,” *Naval War College Review*, spring 1993. For a powerful counterpoint, Milan Hauner, *What Is Asia to Us? Russia’s Asian Heartland Yesterday and Today* (London: Routledge, 1992). Also, John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

59 John B. Hattendorf (editor), *U. S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2007), pp. 127-129.

in operating carrier groups against Soviet land-based maritime bombers in a battle for Iran and Baluchistan. After all, Hayward's commanders and staff had generated the classified studies that informed Zumwalt's public statements. One solution echoed another voice from the 1950s—Deyo's. In fact, Hayward had previously experimented with Deyo's strategy, or a strategy that compared to it. Between 1976 and 1978, Hayward commanded the U. S. Pacific Fleet. In that capacity, he developed a concept of operations dubbed, 'Sea Strike'. The idea involved deploying the Pacific fleet to attack targets in the Soviet Far East rather than 'swinging' it into the Atlantic as standing plans called for.⁶⁰ Hayward understood the Soviet posture in their Far Eastern territories to be essentially defensive. An aggressive stance on the American side might have a substantial deterrent effect on such a mindset and pay important dividends in war, by tying down Soviet forces that Moscow would send to Europe if Washington pulled forces from the Pacific for the Atlantic. If some contemporaneous observers from outside Hayward's Hawaii-based group are right, 'Sea Strike' also stood to embolden China, further reducing Soviet flexibility.⁶¹ Hayward recalled that not least he "wanted our people [in particular, his sailors] to recognize that the Russians weren't invincible."⁶² One thinks again of George Miller. Another way to look at 'Sea Strike' is as an example of what John Hayes' called Mahan's 'peripheral strategy'. A third way sees Hayward's concept as playing Mackinder's 'closed system', in which action on one side necessarily reverberates on the other, to maritime advantage.⁶³

Applied to the Persian Gulf following the revolution in Iran and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 'Sea Strike' morphed into the controversial strategy known as 'Horizontal Escalation'. Critics both outside and inside the Pentagon, not least Robert Komer while Undersecretary for Policy through 1980, charged that the Soviets would happily exchange far-flung assets—outposts in Africa and Cuba, naval units in the Indian Ocean, and so forth—for dominance in the Gulf

60 Michael J. Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 381-382.

61 In particular, W. A. C. Adie, *Oil, Politics, and Sea Power: The Indian Ocean Vortex* (New York: Crane, Russak, and Company, 1975), p. 19. For fuller but later assessments, William V. Kennedy, "Moving West: The New Theater of Decision," *Naval War College Review*, winter 1989, and Milan Hauner, "The Soviet Geostrategic Dilemma," in *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: Collision and Transformation*, edited by Milan Hauner and Robert Canfield (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989).

62 *The Reminiscences of Admiral Thomas B. Hayward*, interviewed by Paul Stilwell (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2009), pp. 346-352.

63 For Mackinder's notion, Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, pp. 29-30.

and even more for mastery in Europe.⁶⁴ In the event of actual hostilities, the navy seemed unlikely to receive authorization to attack Soviet territory itself for fear that such operations would make the Soviets feel backed into a corner more than tied down. By 1983, however, events had dampened the debate if not rendered the issue moot. The United States had created a landward counterpoise to the Soviets in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Largely based on Saudi Arabia, this new posture included 'overbuilt' airfields and special facilities for command and control, prepositioned munitions and other materiel, and the expansion of the Rapid Deployment Force into a dedicated, interservice command focused on the Gulf and its wider region (albeit based in Florida). Moreover, just how much the Afghan resistance, sustained by the United States and others, had wrong-footed the Soviets was becoming increasingly apparent. Ultimately, of course, conflict with regional states not great power competition drew American and allied forces into combat in the Gulf. All this significantly replicated patterns of the nineteenth century Great Game, but otherwise moves our story in a different direction.⁶⁵ Besides, the 'quasi-continental commitment' of the United States in Southwest Asia did not derail the navy's plans for 'Horizontal Escalation' in the event of general war in the 1980s.

In fact, the U. S. Navy stuck to that concept of peripheral strategy through the end of the decade. Hayward retired in 1982, but the Mackinderan logic and Mahanian spirit behind 'Sea Strike' endured. Hayward recollected that in the 1970s, he took "a lot of flak" from Pacific allies over 'Sea Strike'. By the mid-1980s, however, 'Horizontal Escalation' was winning adherents in Asia, especially in Japan during the premiership of Yasuhiro Nakasone.⁶⁶ One reason was that intelligence offered mounting confirmation of Soviet susceptibility to direct pressure on their Far Eastern flank. CIA analysts estimated in 1987 that the Kremlin had deployed "as much as one-third of Soviet military manpower and materiel in the Far East." They also judged the transport system linking

64 "Horizontal Escalation as a Response to Soviet Aggression in the Persian Gulf," memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 3 October 1980, top secret, Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter ISCAP-NARA); and "Horizontal Escalation Paper," covering memorandum by R. W. Komer, 10 October 1980, top secret, ISCAP-NARA. Also, Joshua Epstein, "Horizontal Escalation: Sour Notes of a Recurrent Theme," *International Security*, December 1983.

65 For the present author's full argument, Peter John Brobst, "Great Game Redux: The US, Europe, and Gulf Security in the Late Cold War," in *European-American Relations in the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, edited by Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (London: Routledge, 2010).

66 Green, *By More than Providence*, pp. 400-408.

those forces back to the European core of the Soviet Union to be wholly inadequate. The build-up at its Asian end increasingly strained an already severely overburdened Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR). The situation resembled that faced by Russia in 1904-1905. "The same difficulties exist today," the CIA assessors wrote, "while the stakes have escalated." Moreover, completion of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) had not helped. Echoing Miller in the 1950s as much as Hayward twenty-five years later, they concluded that the BAM had added a seemingly indefensible number of fixed aim points—some 2,000 bridges and 30 kilometers of tunnels since the 1960s. All this added up to a compelling motive to seek an outlet on the Indian Ocean, whether as an alternative, intermodal link to the TSR or for bases from which to sustain forces in the Indian Ocean to protect Soviet shipping between Europe and the Far East. The estimate's authors imagined subversion in Baluchistan and diplomacy in neighboring states much more likely than a military grab, but they did not rule it out.⁶⁷ It reads as something of a *mea culpa*. Five years earlier, in 1982, Commander James Westwood had published a similar analysis in the *Naval War College Journal*. Westwood asked not how far can the bear walk, but how far can it swim? He argued that the 'Southern Sea Route' from Soviet ports in Europe through the Mediterranean and Suez Canal, or around Africa, and across the Indian Ocean had become the Soviet lifeline to Asia. An outlet in Baluchistan might figure in Soviet calculations not as part of an offensive design for world dominance but as part of a defensive posture in the Far East, including bases from which to surveil Soviet sea routes, as well as an alternative to the TSR.⁶⁸ Westwood suggested that sea-lane security was the primary purpose behind Soviet naval interest in Aden, Madagascar, and Cam Ranh Bay. Connected directly to the Soviet Union by an overland route, a base in Baluchistan would become the keystone in the network. The next year, General P. X. Kelly, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, inquired with CIA about this interpretation.⁶⁹ The response disputed the patterns discerned by Westwood, a

67 "Afghanistan and the Defense of the Soviet Far East," Afghanistan Situation Report, 12 May 1987, top secret, CREST Online Archive, Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CREST-CIA).

68 James T. Westwood, "The Soviet Union and the Southern Sea Route," *Naval War College Review*, January-February 1982.

69 Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, by Major General Edward Atkeson, National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces, 30 August 1983, secret, CREST-CIA.

naval intelligence officer, and later by various academics.⁷⁰ Fritz Ermarth, the National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union, had no quarrel with the basic circumspection, and he doubted that a Soviet military advance was likely, but he did worry about what appeared a ready tendency to dismiss persistent questions about Baluchistan as unwarranted. “The inflated claims of some that it is the USSR’s final stepping stone the Indian Ocean,” Ermarth advised, “are often countered by a less founded insistence that ‘there is no evidence’ of a Soviet penetration effort.”⁷¹

Ermarth’s perceptive comment reverses the emphasis in the well-worn qualification that the Great Game provides a cautionary tale about the usefulness of geopolitics and grand theories of world power. To be sure, the inherently subjective nature of geopolitics, concerned as it is with the perception of spatial importance, lends itself to exaggeration and propaganda. In 1973, Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, claimed to President Nixon that the Soviets had their “eyes glued to the coast.”⁷² Zia al-Haq, Bhutto’s successor (and executioner), told American authorities much the same about warm water ports in Baluchistan.⁷³ Perhaps they were pitching for aid or armaments. Can one say the same, however, of ordinary Afghan farmers and villagers who routinely attributed Soviet motives behind the invasion to ambitions in the Indian Ocean?⁷⁴ British worry in Mahan and Mackinder’s own time about Russian designs on Chabahar and other outlets on the Arabian Sea reflected hard intelligence, including secret plans, actual surveys in Iran, and open rhetoric, as well as a panoramic view of geography and history. Then there looms the issue of whether the abstraction of geopolitics really forms a foundation of actual strategy and policy. Norman Friedman recounts, for instance, that Captain Peter Swartz, one

70 “Soviet Domestic Seaborne Shipping,” memorandum for General P. X. Kelly, Commandant USMC, by Major General Edward Atkeson, National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces, secret, 22 November 1983, CREST-CIA. For an external academic view, Leslie Dienes, “The Economic and Strategic Position of the Soviet Far East: Development and Prospect,” in *The Soviet Far East: Geographical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1990).

71 “Soviet Strategy in the Southern Theater,” memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, by Fritz W. Ermarth, National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE, 1 August 1984, secret, CREST-CIA.

72 Memorandum of conversation, the White House, 18 September 1973, top secret, *FRUS*, 1973-1976, vol. E-8, South Asia.

73 Bruce Reidel, *What We Won: America’s Secret War in Afghanistan* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), p.113.

74 For Afghan opinion, Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), pp. 86, 126, 153, and 288.

of the architects of the Maritime Strategy, had once observed how closely the navy's vision "matched" that laid out by Mahan in *The Problem of Asia*. Friedman, a doyen of today's naval commentators, suspects that aside from Swartz there would have been no awareness of the book among the planners. Rather, he notes, the "basic logic" of maritime power accounts for the "duplication."⁷⁵ As a 'durable mindset', and on an institutional level, geopolitics represents a form of collective memory as much as original theory; Mahan and Mackinder reflected the 'official mind' as much as they shaped it. Finally, judging the efficacy of strategies of deterrence involves a degree of faith. The success of deterrence is all but imponderable in contrast to the clarity of its failure. Louis Le Bailly complained in the 1990s that too many policymakers in the West failed to appreciate the impact of the Maritime Strategy, and peripheral maneuver more generally, in frustrating Soviet ambitions and preventing a descent into a third world war. Their "hypnotic" fixation on the 'Central Front', he wrote, was like a "chicken with its beak on ... a chalk line ... which it believed tethered it."⁷⁶ For his own part in the 1980s, Robert Komer, that steadfast critic of horizontal strategy, fell back on the old religious metaphors about the navy, suggesting their approach amounted to the 'sin of unilateralism'. Yet, if in the Cold War the U. S. Navy remained the church of Neptune, it was a broad church. Its leaders and thinkers found wisdom in the book of Mackinder as well as the gospel of Mahan. That heterodox exegesis might well find new adherents in the twenty-first century—with North Korean troops in Ukraine, Chinese warships in Chabahar and Gwadar just across the border in Pakistan, and debate over 'distant blockade' in the Indian Ocean to outflank another 'central front' in the Taiwan Strait.

75 Norman Friedman, *Seapower as Strategy: Navies and National Interests* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001), p. 331n14.

76 Letter from Louis Le Bailly, *RUSI Journal*, vol. 140, no. 3, 1995, p. 67.



Yoichi R. Okamoto (1915-1985), *Advisors: Robert Komer and President Lyndon B. Johnson*, White House Oval Office, 16 November 1967. NARA, NAID 192537. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum (NLLBJ), 2313 Red River Street, Austin, TX, 78705-570. Public Domain (Wikimedia Commons)

Geopolitics after the Cold War

BY KENNETH WEISBRODE

Geopolitics is a modern concept unmoored by postmodern nomenclature. Once used to describe the effects of geography on politics, including war, today the terms ‘geopolitics’ and ‘geopolitical’ apply almost to any type of transnational relationship. Borders and boundaries are at once virtually sacred and practically meaningless: thus the number of armed conflicts – hot, cold, or frozen – with little or no real geographical value in a strategic sense.

During the Cold War, geopolitics was a subject that dare not speak its name. When I was a student in South America some thirty years ago, I became interested in the thought of a few early twentieth-century German geopoliticians. My teachers told me that the subject was unacceptable. Their reaction came from having recently lived under a military dictatorship whose leaders were keen students of geopolitics, notably of the German variety; it was also a time when the contest of ideologies and systems applied, in theory, anywhere and everywhere. Geopolitics sounded like a nasty relic from another era. In the Cold War-era West, ‘geopolitical’ writers like Saul Cohen, Colin Gray, and Robert Strausz-Hupé, and even Yves Lacoste, Harm de Blij, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, had a devoted but comparably limited readership. Now there is the frequent and widespread use of ‘geopolitics’ with reference to things like disease prevention, sporting events, computer code, climate change, microchips, and social media, as well as ‘geo-strategy’, ‘geoeconomics’, ‘geoculture’, ‘geo-epistemology’, etc.

Yet, geopolitics remains a descriptive and prescriptive pseudoscience. As a rationalisation of power, it can become a self-fulfilling analysis. ‘Geopolitical’ often appears before ‘rivalry’, ‘competition’, ‘conflict’, etc. but the term’s contemporary usage relates as much to effects as to causes. Both causes and effects suggest a mental shift which has resulted from changes in technology and from the interconnected manner by which all three world wars in the twentieth century, including the Cold War, were fought.

That shift may be broadly attributed to globalisation. However, just as space differs from place, globalisation – a socioeconomic and cultural fact – is distinct from globality – a state of consciousness. The advance of globality at the turn

of the twenty-first century, following the capacity for space travel and the first photographic images of the globe taken from there, along with the transmission of sound, reified the 'planet Earth', that is, a 'planetary' concept of the globe as a single body, for much, perhaps most, of humanity. Unlike globalisation, globality does not routinely wax and wane. 'Global' may be taken to be synonymous with 'total' but social interconnection is not absolute in this way. Rather, global interconnection operates in the realm of the possible: a war could spread or 'trigger' another conflict or an election result on the other side of the world; so could a pandemic or a financial crisis. Or not. Politics and geography remain contingent, which is to say, undetermined and therefore, to many people, uncertain. 'Uncertainty' is also a concept, which means it may be challenged and historicised. Uncertainty at the middle of the twentieth century was not felt in the same way as today, and also has had as much to do with the causes of political and other events as with their effects, but in different ways. Therefore, globality itself is not the sole agent responsible for the semantic alteration of geopolitics. It is more likely to be the disquiet which globality has brought about in human consciousness.

I

The depiction of the Earth from far away – a higher conflation of space and place, as it were – was generally thought to mean a surpassing, or perhaps a conquest, of geopolitics by technology and, as my teachers long ago may have believed, conviction – that is, faith. This impulse is much older and goes by the name of universality. Universal language was noteworthy during the latter decades of the twentieth century in such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the lore of the European movement, which, according to its promoter, Jean Monnet, was based on the need to persuade antagonists facing each other on opposite sides of a table to sit on the same side and face their common problems together. That impulse animated the discussions between Soviet and American negotiators at Geneva and Reykjavik in the mid-1980s when they terminated the Cold War, or at least its main military aspects, as well as the talks a decade earlier between Chinese and American officials in Beijing when their respective interpreters agreed to define 'parallel' as proceeding to the same destination by different paths rather than as two lines that proceed apace and never intersect.

Such diplomatic episodes extended propinquity to much of the globe. At the same time, it is important to state once more that globality is neither synonymous with universality nor always incompatible with particularity. A global form of geopolitics need not extend everywhere in more or less the same fashion; what

it does is relate aspects of politics, economics, and other human activities (and, arguably, natural patterns, such as climate) to one another across time and space through interconnection and, by way of human involvement, interdependence and integration. Those potential acts are qualitatively distinct from imposition. Globality, in other words, is not necessarily a servant of empire.

Globalism, on the other hand, relates globality with universality by conjoining a political and social capacity, or tendency, and an ideology. It has usually been portrayed alongside, and sometimes as analogous to, regionalism. What has made 'geopolitics' apparently meaningless, therefore, has been the spirited re-insertion of ideology into international politics during the final years of the Cold War, extending into the post-Cold War period. Globalism has become so politicised, divisive, and associated with universalism that it resembles what an American secretary of state, Dean Acheson, once called, in referring to McCarthyism, the basis for an attack of the primitives.

Ironically, today's globalism also suggests a resurrection of Halford MacKinder's closed, interconnected world yet it modifies, and maybe vitiates, his notion of insularity, as understood in opposition to isolation. The dissolution of the international order at the turn of the century made that resurrection likely, presumably, because it removed the 'bipolar' system from the public mind without substituting anything, or at least anything simplistically grasped, in its place. Globalism easily became the antagonist of modern internationalism and its institutions, hence the contemporary repudiation not so much of universalism per se but of globalism understood as hegemonic universalism. That repudiation has been translated into a form of anti-geopolitics which denies the inherent, historical nature of particular places and substitutes for them an abstraction of contested, re-territorialized space: the 'Middle East', 'the West', and 'the Indo-Pacific', now accompanied by the 'Global North' (rich countries, minus a few such as China, India, and Russia), and the 'Global South' (the rest).

Calling this repudiation a form of 'glocalisation' would be facile. Transnational networks of goods, people, and institutions do not supplant or simplify territorial relationships so much as they rearrange them into circuits which may be open, closed, or semi-permeable, or sometimes all three at once. Some circuits used to be called blocs, and were mainly defined by an imperial ideology to which polemicists assigned a geopolitical character, as in the 'Eastern Bloc'. Today they are defined in multiple ways, from linguistic affinity (*la Francophonie*), to a dominant currency (the 'Baht Economic Zone'), to a mix of political affiliation and economic power (BRICS).

Post-Cold War geopolitics, then, may be best understood as being cotermini-

nous with a transition from one expression or form of bloc politics to another rather than an erasure of blocs in favour of a single world community comprising separate states and ‘non-state actors’, or a re-division of the world into discrete zones by national or superpower rivals. As I wrote in our previous compendium on strategy (*Fvaina di Marte*, 17, 2024), the Cold War itself was less a straight superpower rivalry than an ideological and cultural formula inscribed upon a longer process of modernisation, in that case, of formerly colonial territories, and their reincorporation into the political and economic affairs of the former colonial powers. Thus, the Cold War may have begun as a contest over a European borderland, and it may have ended more or less with a resolution there – so, in effect, a geopolitical contest from beginning to end; but there is still no hard agreement on when, how, or why it ended. Its historical character and significance are still contested. So, too, is the meaning of ‘post-Cold War’.

Dating the post-Cold War therefore presents a set of problems regarding historical (or ‘geo-historical’) continuity. The boundaries of emerging communities such as the Euro-Atlantic have moved eastward and the distinctions between what used to be called the First, Second, and Third Worlds are now blurred, but the principal political logic of the world remains one of integration – peaceable or violent – between polities, that is, nations and blocs, variably defined, overlapping, and diverse in their composition and activity. Whether or not such a logic is properly geopolitical, however, is also undetermined, despite the reappearance not only of Cold War strategies but also of the language of the late Victorian era: sphere of influence, balance-of-power, energy, vitality, control, struggle, and so on. The post-Cold War period is not home to a novel form of geopolitics as much as it is to senescent concepts superimposed upon one another and applied to various places. It is not enough to define this state of affairs historically as the passing of another post-war era with a half- or non-settlement; it is also ahistorical in once more failing to address the principal historical process taking place, namely globalisation.

II

To restate a simple point about nomenclature: post-Cold War geopolitics understood as global politics rests on the premise of a particular spatial consciousness and on one that may also be historical. The first difficulty with describing it comes from chronology. The familiar term ‘post-war’, as it is still used to name the period after the Second World War, is easily dated from the ‘year zero’, 1945. From when does one date the post-Cold War? As a military conflict over Europe, the Cold War probably ended in the 1960s, although it re-emerged again briefly

in the 1970s, lasting until the early 1980s, and manifested itself in hot wars elsewhere throughout this period. As a cultural and ideological conflict, it probably ended in the 1970s, at which point it became a more straightforward struggle over spheres of influence. They, in turn, may allow one to redefine the Cold War as a narrow, political conflict which began in the 1940s (or perhaps earlier) and continues today, albeit with an armistice having occurred around 1989, also mainly in Europe.

If the chronology of the post-Cold War period is imprecise, so too are its themes. May it be categorised distinctly as political, cultural/ideological, or military? How many of its chronologies overlap? And when does it become possible to speak no longer of a 'post' era but of something else? The import of so much murkiness is that assigning a temporal character to the 'post-Cold War' is difficult, maybe impossible. Assigning a spatial character to it is just as difficult.

For example, a convenient Eurocentric point of demarcation for today's geopolitics is not 1989 but 1919. That is, our world is the successor to a 'long' nineteenth century followed by a 'short' twentieth century that began and ended with a conflict in the Balkans but in reality centred on the German question. Or, to be more precise, the twentieth century began after a war starting in the Balkans, and ended just before another set of Balkan wars defined its aftermath with a reunited Germany dominating Europe. Another name for this period is the Wilsonian Century, and it is apt for describing the ideological transformation attributed to Woodrow Wilson. However, his ideology of national self-determination predated the Great War, in Europe and elsewhere, even if it attained historical significance for becoming the central principle of what has been called world order lasting well into the early twenty-first century.

Moving away from Central Europe and taking a broader transatlantic perspective gives another point of demarcation which may revise the 'long' and 'short' designations, replacing the short Wilsonian Century (or the even shorter 'American Century', starting in 1941) with a long twentieth century starting in the 1860s and continuing until the first or second decade of the twenty-first century. This latter periodisation is perhaps more self-consciously geopolitical, because it rests on a depiction of an Atlantic, or a more precisely Anglo-American, world that emerged from the nineteenth century wars of independence and later unification in the Americas, coinciding with similar campaigns in Europe that followed the breakdown of the Anglo-Russian condominium in the Crimean War. The long twentieth century also attests to the realities of the global economy. Spatial progress was measured temporally as the conquest of markets and the logic of high imperialism became universal, for example with the 'scramble

for Africa'. Aspiring imperialists did not take long to demand their own place in the sun. It became clear just as quickly that they would not stop with challenging older imperial centres – Austria-Hungary, France, Spain, China, Russia, Turkey – by way of vulnerable peripheries, and would train their sights directly on the British Empire, or, in the case of the Japanese, on the USA.

The roots of the Second World War, then, were planted as much in the 1860s as they were in the 1890s or in 1919 if one perceives the great global civil war of the mid-twentieth century to be one defined as much by a set of rival transnational ideologies as by parallel visions of regional supremacy with global overtones: Asia for the Asians, America for the Americans, and one Reich (including the Near East and 'Eurafrica') for the Europeans. Each vision retrospectively combines the progressive language of Wilsonianism with its ostensible nemesis – imperial rule – and an easy, perverse choice: with us, or with the British Empire

That, briefly stated, is the context needed to understand the global appeal of Mackinder's heartland thesis, then and now. It portrayed in a persuasive manner what many people already knew: that the major powers of the twentieth century perpetuated a struggle for and against British prestige and treasure within the bounds of an increasingly interdependent global economy. Mackinder's thesis survived the Great War and the Second World War and, apparently, the Cold War. For lack of an equally persuasive alternative, today's muddle of localism, nationalism, regionalism, globalism, and universalism rests imperfectly and interchangeably on an outdated set of historicist beliefs and geographical preconceptions. The British Empire is gone and the American one seems to be following it into decline and dissolution. Atlantic or Anglo-American declension has opened the way to other imperial aspirants, starting with what appears to be a Sino-Russian ('Eurasian') one based, much like its Anglo-American predecessor, on financial, industrial, military, physical, ideological, and cultural, interdependence. Yet, like any geopolitical concept, 'Eurasia' is an image, an abstraction, a representation, whose significance may be less than the sum of its parts.

III

Now to the parts. The year 1968 has been aptly described as the crack in the Cold War through which the beginning of the end was visible. The Soviet Union's Budapest appeal (1969) was meant to recover some of the prestige lost in oppressing the Prague Spring following a policy of intervention known (especially in the West) as the Brezhnev doctrine. The appeal, perhaps to the surprise of the Soviet leadership, was answered by NATO, which agreed to be-

gin negotiations for a conference on European security. It culminated with the Helsinki Summit of 1975 where nearly every European nation signed an agreement, the Helsinki Final Act, which made sovereignty coterminous with human rights. This amounted to an inversion of the Wilsonian principle of the right of sovereign people to determine the redrawing of territorial boundaries. The Final Act stipulated that any future changes to borders must happen peacefully, but it gave formal recognition to existing borders in exchange for a promise by states to respect the rights of people within and between those borders. In effect, the Final Act was a repudiation, or perhaps a repurposing, not only of the Brezhnev doctrine but also of the American doctrine of containment. At least, as we shall see, until about 1999.

That the Helsinki negotiations coincided with the October 1973 war in the Middle East and the termination of the US intervention in Indochina, was significant. Taken together, these developments meant that international stability relied upon a certain renewed understanding between the superpowers, otherwise known as *'détente'*, except with relation to China. Alignment with China could no longer be taken for granted by one side or the other. China was no longer *'lost'* but would have to be won. Thus, the post-Cold War period assumed its present-day character at Geneva (where the CSCE negotiations also took place) and at Helsinki, with Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Damascus, and Tel Aviv playing host to important developments as well. Even though, as already mentioned, the Cold War nominally continued in the early 1980s with hot wars in Africa, Central America, and elsewhere, and with a so-called second Cold War, that is, an arms race, again in Europe, it is fair to say that all this was in preparation for a quick termination of the whole contest at the middle of that decade, at least so far as the Americans and Soviets were concerned. The end would come, again at Geneva (1985) and at Reykjavik (1986), in two summits in which the leaders of the superpowers proposed to eliminate all nuclear weapons after declaring that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. This, too, brought to a culmination a process that began in 1973 with the US-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War.

The fall of the Berlin Wall did not end the Cold War; it was a manifestation of what had already taken place. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was not. It is still too early to conclude whether or not the latter dramatic event had to happen, or had to happen in the way that it did. At the time it was understood as a natural and an almost automatic reassertion of Wilsonian principles, most of all by the Russians who led it. Once more, it is necessary to place an important event in a global context. For more than a decade, the *'captive nations'* of the Soviet empire

had been demanding greater autonomy on the basis of the CSCE and by way of its 'Helsinki Watch' monitoring groups; Soviet power itself had been pushed to the breaking point with the second Cold War and was embarrassed when Mikhail Gorbachev was enlisted in cheering the US-led intervention in Kuwait, undertaken on the basis of a Wilsonian conceit. That Saddam Hussein had once been an important client of the Soviet Union did not go unnoticed; much of his army, defeated handily by the US, was Soviet in supply. Similar humiliations would occur in the post-Cold War period as one former Soviet client in the Middle East after another switched sides, or expired. What began with Anwar Sadat's expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt and the subsequent October War continued all the way to Saddam Hussein's (2006) and Muammar Gaddafi's (2011) deaths, stopping, for a while at least, with the intervention of Russia in the Syrian civil war (2015–) and the salvaging of Bashar al-Assad's rule there.

The Gulf War of 1990–91 was promoted with clear, and for some people, compelling, Wilsonian language. Its second act or coda, in Iraq in 2003–11, was not. What happened between these two moments is also significant for our depiction of post-Cold War geopolitics.

The main thing that happened was a further inversion of the Helsinki compromise in the late 1990s. Why that happened is still not well understood. This is how it happened. The end of the Cold War in the mid-1980s coincided with another important trend which may also be seen as a type of culmination. That was the Single European Act and its extension in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), followed by the establishment of the European Union. What had once been a modest quasi-cartel for coal and steel amongst a small group of Western European states was now, some argued, a virtuous, technocratic superstate defying or transcending the traditional limitations of geopolitics. The leaders of the other Western superstate, the US, were mainly happy with this development. 'Europe whole and free' became the slogan of the post-Cold War era, even though it probably made more sense to Americans, who tend to see everything 'over there' through one cultural lens, than to many Europeans.

The vision of an integrating, even unifying, region certainly had theoretical appeal. The problem with it came less from how much territory it sought to integrate and how tightly it sought to integrate it, and instead with how much else it sought to demarcate in simultaneously casting itself as a beacon and a fortress. The EU did expand slowly but definitively by admitting some fortunate new members from the former Communist bloc. Others were meant to follow its standards and preconditions for growth and stability, and maybe to admire and emulate them, but never to contemplate anything other than being distinct and maybe inferior

by comparison. The EU was also declared the world's self-appointed 'civilian power' with extraterritorial jurisdiction over other countries' disputes, and with the term 'stability' applying not only to economics and society but also to peace. To the have-not powers, particularly former colonies, this song sounded familiar.

Yet, both the EU and the US appeared to go out of their way to ingratiate themselves with the have-nots following a policy that the administration of the US president, Bill Clinton, called 'engagement and enlargement'. China was especially encouraged, and succeeded with much Western lobbying in becoming a member of the World Trade Organisation, only for the United States to turn the WTO into a paper tiger once China joined (in 2001), and in resisting the push for greater Chinese representation in other organisations. This ambivalent pattern of global integration had already been set with regard to Russia. Back in 1990 during a series of talks between the American and Soviet leaders over German reunification, the two sides agreed that the North Atlantic Alliance would not transfer any of its military assets to the territory of East Germany if a reunified Germany were allowed in NATO. The US Secretary of State said that NATO would not move 'one inch' to the east. This promise was taken to mean, not surprisingly, that NATO, unlike the EU, would restrain itself from accepting new members from the soon-to-be dissolved Warsaw Pact, and would, in principle, evolve in consultation with the successor states of the Soviet Union, chiefly Russia. In fact, that appeared to be the case when NATO and Russia signed a founding act (1997) and NATO had earlier devised a collaborative scheme called the Partnership for Peace (1994–), which was offered to all these states, including those that had been part of the former Soviet Union. The Russian government accepted this arrangement.

The Partnership for Peace extended the Helsinki regime to post-Cold War Europe. Also in 1994, the CSCE moved to become an organisation, the OSCE. The harmonisation of political and military standards, equipment, planning, etc. suggested that geopolitical borders and boundaries, understood in terms of physical territory, no longer mattered as much as functional accommodation and reform. In effect, such institutions recast spatial frontiers as temporal borderlands by offering inclusion and cooperation to any state that agreed to modernise to the point where it could abide by their conditions, much as the EU, in principle, defends its *acquis*. That is, they redefined geopolitics as a form of self-improvement along a universal path in a manner familiar to Wilsonians. Mikhail Gorbachev echoed Jean Monnet in using such terminology – 'common European home', etc. – and probably believed it. Yet, for reasons that are also still debated, the OSCE fell short of expectations and NATO, led by the United States, nipped its own scheme in the bud. Partnership for Peace was replaced in all but name

with an accelerated plan for enlarging the North Atlantic Alliance, first by inviting the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to become members, and by opening the door of membership, on principle, to any other Central or Eastern European state, except Russia.

There has since developed a large literature devoted to blaming much that is wrong in today's world, that is, the collapse of a post-Cold War settlement, on NATO enlargement. It is easy to sympathise with some of that argument but it is too soon to condemn the collapse as a Cadmean victory or, as others would do, as the victim of historical revisionism. In other words, whether the largely peaceful end of the Cold War and its aftermath bought thirty years of peace or prepared the ground for a new Cold War (or worse) will be debated for some time. What can be said now is that it did not help the cause of 'engagement and enlargement' for the two phenomena to be equated so readily with older forms of imperialism, and for Western powers, chiefly the US, to make it so easy to be blamed for a failed peace. Not only that, but the post-Cold War return to power politics undercut globalism's legitimacy, which in theory had been based on geographic as well as political and economic interdependence, but in practice had more to do with ideology per se than with geopolitics. By the turn of the new century, few people spoke of security communities or of collective security, and turned back instead to an older bevy of ideas which masquerades as permanent. Phrases like 'great power rivalry' are used in an uncritical mode where cynicism parades as 'realism'. Their use has accompanied a tendency in academia to indulge in a kind of neo-scholasticism characterised by long debates over the meaning of terms and concepts; and a parallel tendency elsewhere, as first noted in the introduction to this volume, to distort definitions so that even 'war' means something other than what it has customarily meant to most people.

All the above has suggested for the successors to the Cold War a lingering sense of confusion, insecurity, carelessness, and opportunism hiding behind a mask of coarse determinism and feigned certainty. At the root of many of today's geopolitical assertions is the conviction that the end of a war that defined so many people's lives left them at an intellectual, perhaps even a spiritual, loss. It has been suggested that this is a kind of enemy deprivation syndrome suffered by any war-time protagonist, but there may be more to it. The West has acted as if it still has something to prove in the cause of victory. It did so with military interventions in former Ottoman lands, first in the Balkans, and then again in the Middle East; and in both places, punitive or preventive wars reversed much of the progress in statecraft since the 1970s. Meanwhile, Western institutions and arrangements adapted to this new setting less by collaborative reinvention than by competitive

expansions promoted, since the end of the 1990s, with the primitive, and to some people, comfortable, language of threat, protection, danger, and scold.

There is a parallel between Western actions in the Gulf War (1990–91), followed by the Iraq War (2003–11), and in Bosnia (1992–95), followed by those in Kosovo (1998–99). Each action saw a collective effort with a UN mandate followed, after an interval during which multilateral diplomacy had narrowed, by a unilateral intervention – or ‘coalition of the willing’, to use the American term – outside UN auspices and in the face of opposition from one or more permanent members of the UN Security Council. In both of the latter two instances – Kosovo and Iraq – the leaders of the intervention, namely the United States, asserted that resisting a dangerous tyrant was too important to leave to legalities. This new mandate for intervention was blessed by none other the OSCE. At the organisation’s 1999 summit at Istanbul its members debated NATO’s Kosovo intervention by suggesting, according to a contemporary slogan, that ‘human rights trump sovereignty’. That amounted to another inversion of the Helsinki formula with what can only be considered a resurrection of the interventionist principle behind the Brezhnev doctrine. As it happens, ten years earlier (December 1989), the United States invaded Panama in order to remove its ruler, Manuel Noriega, and bring him to the United States to face trial. That same month, a Soviet diplomat told his American colleague that the USSR offered the Brezhnev doctrine as a Christmas gift to the United States.

In 1999, the members of NATO also celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty by welcoming the admission of the first three new members from the former Warsaw Pact. Russia, occupied with a second Chechen War, and desperate for language in the OSCE documents that would minimise interference there as well as in a number of other trouble spots in its ‘near abroad’, had few options to stop NATO enlargement, despite strenuous objections. Russians also consistently opposed NATO’s Kosovo intervention and came close to fighting NATO troops there. They protested the US decision to withdraw from several important arms control treaties. Meanwhile, Kosovo went ahead and declared independence (2008); Russia invaded Georgia (2008), as well as Crimea and other parts of Ukraine (2014–); NATO militarised the Western response to the ‘Arab Spring’ with an intervention in Libya (2011); Russia did something similar in Syria (2015), although, as noted, with the aim of preserving rather than toppling the regime. Other conflicts such as those in Sudan (1983–), Somalia (1992–), Rwanda (1990–94), Burundi (1993–2005), Congo (1993–2003), East Timor (1999–2002), Colombia (1964–2016), Algeria (1992–2002), Sierra Leone (1991–2002), Liberia (1989–2003), Ivory Coast (2002–11), Sri Lanka (1983–2009), and between Iran

and Iraq (1980–88), Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998–2018), and Israelis and Palestinians (1948–), which, despite their transnational nature, did not involve the core interests of major outside powers, nevertheless posed persistent challenges for the international system of collective security into the post-Cold War period.

IV

As remarkable as the erosion of collective security in Europe was the absence of anything like the OSCE appearing in Asia after the end of the Cold War, apart from a few modest institutional efforts, most originating earlier, in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. The regional politics of East and South Asia as well as the Middle East remain governed by an old-fashioned balance – or imbalance, as the case may be – of power. (Central Asia is a partial exception with the former Soviet Republics having become an extension of the Euro-Atlantic security regime by way of membership in the Partnership for Peace and the OSCE.) Each Asian region is home to one or more states – North Korea and Iran being two of the most discussed – which have resisted most efforts at subjugation or absorption by external powers, or, as in the two ‘frozen’ civil wars in China/Taiwan and Korea, by a local rival. By the turn of the century, small and middle powers had grown adept at playing large powers off one another. For their part, Russia, China, and one or two other ‘revisionist’ powers have extended their rivalry with the West throughout Asia, Africa, and, once more, Latin America.

At the intersection of the Asian regions, moreover, occurred one of the most lasting and destructive of internationalised civil wars, in and around Afghanistan (1978–2021). Like the wars of Yugoslav succession and conflicts in the Middle East, the former USSR, and in some parts of Africa, the war in Afghanistan resulted as much from the failure of a post-Cold War settlement as from an apparently independent contest amongst regional and extra-regional powers over spheres of influence. In practice, the two types of conflicts can be tough to distinguish; but in Afghanistan’s case, those spheres were narrowly as political as geopolitical. This blurring of a distinction, summed up by the label ‘internationalised civil war’, came to typify regional conflicts in the post-Cold War period. Viewed in a regional setting, such wars were geopolitical in featuring complex, transnational conflicts over territory, influence, and resources: less so, however, when viewed in a global setting. Most parties in the Afghan war had ties to co-ethnics and others across the country’s borders, and to complex ethno-political and other relationships on the territory of its neighbours. The interest

of actors in neighbouring countries in perpetuating the conflict in Afghanistan had more to do with their 'domestic' interests and vulnerabilities than with any other kind of relationship. This causal hierarchy was not new and resembled the character of earlier regional wars (for example, in Southeast Asia); however, the war in Afghanistan occurred in the absence of a greater geopolitical consensus.

From Afghanistan also emerged a remarkable conspiracy to attack the United States (2001), with negative effects on Western confidence, competence, prestige, and morality that continue to be felt. For example, American neoconservatives – tarred by their enemies with the brush of Trotskyism – universalised the Brezhnev doctrine in an effort, they said, to rid the entire world of adversaries. The 'long global war on terror' promised by the United States may appear over after two decades, but the Manichean reconstruction of international relationships persists. Advances in medicine and their extension of the human lifespan have made it likely that individuals in a position to influence governments will outlive the situations that gave rise to their pet concepts and models, so it may be no accident that the post-Cold War has continued to feature the language of containment, deterrence, appeasement, allies, axes, et cetera. If the innovations of the 1970s in self-determination, ethics, and sovereignty represented an achievement in statecraft three generations after Wilson, the opposite has since occurred, ironically, in the name of geopolitical innovation.

From the perspective of power politics, however, that verdict does not hold true in some places, namely in China, whose own experience in 1989 with a Brezhnev-style oppression of a political liberalisation movement coincided with the demise of the Soviet empire. Mikhail Gorbachev was even on hand in Beijing to witness the protests. Perhaps the Chinese saying that it is impractical to kill ten fleas with ten fingers here proved correct, for Communist China has not suffered the same fate as the USSR. Still, it may be easy to exaggerate the rise of China. It is also common to say that it is too early to form a judgement on how lasting China's progress may be. Today, China looks formidable by any measure; so too may the assertive – or as some would say, confrontational as well as revisionist – diplomacy it has pursued since the middle of the 1990s. What has China's progress meant for an understanding of contemporary geopolitics?

The post-Cold War era is often described as demonstrating a shift or 'pivot' from the Atlantic to the Pacific, or to Eurasia, or maybe to both at once, in the establishment of another 'age'. Spengler survives with Mackinder. The world's economy and its most prosperous and powerful states are no longer those along the North Atlantic. In this sense, not only is the long twentieth century coming to a close; so is a much longer period – half a millennium of European dominance

– as Asia resumes its place at the centre of the world economy. Yet this additional characterisation understates the fact that nearly every one of those Atlantic states has also been an Asian power. China's challenge to the Western order is reflective of the West's own diminishing capacity to export and re-import its behaviour, habits, concepts, and prejudices from one end of the world to the other. China and other Asian nations nevertheless also had something to prove after the Cold War, not only in matters of war and peace, but in economic and social development as well. Perhaps China's aim is to restore something like its historical tributary system vis-à-vis its neighbours and it is to this end, and not to the reincarnation of Mackinder's Heartland, that the Belt-and-Road initiative has been designed further afield, even as far as the warming polar regions, which have come to resemble geopolitical prizes. But Asia for the Asians, in imitation of the Napoleonic system, or the Monroe Doctrine, or the Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, is not a practical geopolitical project. It is difficult to see China interlinked by land, sea, air, and space with most other countries, having many economic and other relationships, and a large overseas diaspora, and at the same time being susceptible to a balance of power or to a closed, geopolitical region like 'Eurasia'.

These points recall the above discussion about globality. There is much to be said for the shift in emphasis from a divided world towards a more integrated, interdependent globe. To refine the observation it may be said that neither worldview is more inherently geopolitical than the other. The post-Cold War world has been as politically divided as its predecessor and fragmented not only politically but also in such areas as payments systems, supply chains, and football leagues. The difference between the two worldviews, rather, comes from the nature of the divisions and, in turn, how each is perceived and depicted. The transformation in mental geography brought about by the ability of human beings to see the Earth from space along with their access to enormous amounts of information, has only just begun to be understood. Relationships between continents, bodies of water, and so on, are no longer mainly imagined over the horizon or represented on a map. They are now perceived more vertically than horizontally, and instantaneously, from almost any angle or direction one chooses by way of global positioning system technology. That is no more vivid than in battle. The standard elements of geopolitics – territorial units, proximity, and distance – have acquired an ostensibly more objective than subjective basis for differentiation. Globality has rendered them and their political roles more similar than they were in the past and, concurrently, has made them and their cultural belief systems appear more different.

Why does globality still elicit so much fear and confusion? Globality trains

the mind to mix the traditional, self-imposed problem of emphasis or preference with an acquired one of concentration or focus; much of what was once familiar locally, nationally, and globally is now unfamiliar, and vice versa. Stated another way, post-Cold War mental maps inflict hypermetropia and myopia at the same time, setting globality against both international comity and the geopolitical imagination. For example, the shift from horizontal to vertical mapping has seen geopolitical relationships defined less often with lines or rings than with points or nodes without clear reference to one another. One may conveniently recall the observation of Jeremy Black that islands are usually the site of illicit activity, which here refers to some violence done to the English language. It helps to explain the present-day fungibility of the term 'geopolitics' being as much the victim of intellectual laziness as of a mind that perceives the parts and sometimes the whole, but little else, spatial or temporal, in between. The interstitial realm – once critical for navigation, cartography, and targeting – gets less attention now that it is easier to identify and focus on a particular node at any moment. This change in geographical consciousness has been described as pointillist, and may well appear to be a refutation of the sort of global interdependence and the harmonisation of technology, politics, morality, and geography that Wilson and his followers once advocated.

It is not. Geopolitical nodes are as old as the first archipelagos, ports, hill towns, and fortresses. They include familiar 'choke points' such as the Straits of Malacca and Hormuz, the control over which still has a global dimension, and feature in the tributary relationships of various Chinese dynasties and in the overlapping leagues, alignments, and spheres of influence once widespread, for example, in early modern Europe. Today they persist not only amongst many new states and in several multilateral and non-governmental organisations, alliances, partnerships, regimes, affinities, ethnicities, nationalisms, 'civilisations', religions, cuisines, 'identities', and so forth, all over the world, and in a number of cultural and political exclaves and enclaves which defy a simple pattern of hegemonic power.

If an international system based on a community of power derives its legitimacy from the acceptance of interdependence, what may serve to legitimise its rejection in a nodal system? The answer would seem to depend on the nature and function of each node: for example, whether it is closed like a circuit or acts as its own kind of satellite. Perhaps a more accurate term than rejection would be self-denial. The significance of blocs may be less inherent than relative inasmuch as their power stems from their consciously evolving – or to use an infamous Cold War-era term, 'organic' – capacity for inclusion, exclusion, and interac-

tion. Thus, today's blocs may appear nodal but may also be, by the nature of the redundancy and complexity of their membership and function, every much as interpenetrated, interlinked, and interdependent, and sometimes as violent, as the land and sea empires they succeeded.

Colonial empires in the past advanced global thinking because what happened in one part of an empire usually affected the other parts; the same was true, roughly, for the 'post-colonial' US and Soviet empires. After the Cold War, a connecting logic of imperialism persisted, yet did so, as noted, alongside the emergence of a different, perhaps more equitable world order whose members renounced territorial conquest. Empires survive, not least in a number of new and old military bases, though without much of an imperial, or imperialist, rationale. Students of geopolitics have turned to recycling whatever images they can to fill in the blanks around so many nodes. It almost seems as if pointillism has brought about the apotheosis of Mackinder's heartland, but without a practical aim or purpose.

The difference between the nodes of the past and those of today is once more partly one of perception. Where nodes were once understood in relation to one another, from within, as it were, today they are perceived from above and therefore in a sense that is more virtual than physical, where geopolitical objectives are usually limited to obtaining access to a coastline, resource, or route. Mackinder's 'landsman' and 'seaman' were supplanted during and after the Cold War not by an 'airman' as they were earlier in the twentieth century, but by an astronaut, a satellite, and a software engineer. Some, but not all, satellites are geostationary and some are more strategically serviceable than others are, but all exist with reference to the Earth, albeit at a considerable distance and, at the same time, in aid of a terrestrial facsimile. Thus there has been a rise in the use of the phrase, 'on the ground', notably in political reporting and military deployments.

Although it may once have been a realistic hope to see the kind of security community such as the one that Europe enjoyed briefly in the 1990s also emerge in East Asia and the Middle East, a United States of Asia, and now of Europe, will remain a distant aspiration dating from the second half of the twentieth century. So too will be the functional alignment of security communities in matters of war and peace by resuming the effort begun before the end of the Cold War to reduce and someday eliminate the world's arsenals of nuclear weapons. It would not be wrong to say that the leaders of the world's major powers have missed an opportunity to reimagine and adjust these and other policies to new geographic, cultural, and technological realities. The post-Cold War, extending well into the twenty-first century, has yet to define a viable geopolitics, and may not do so without another great war.

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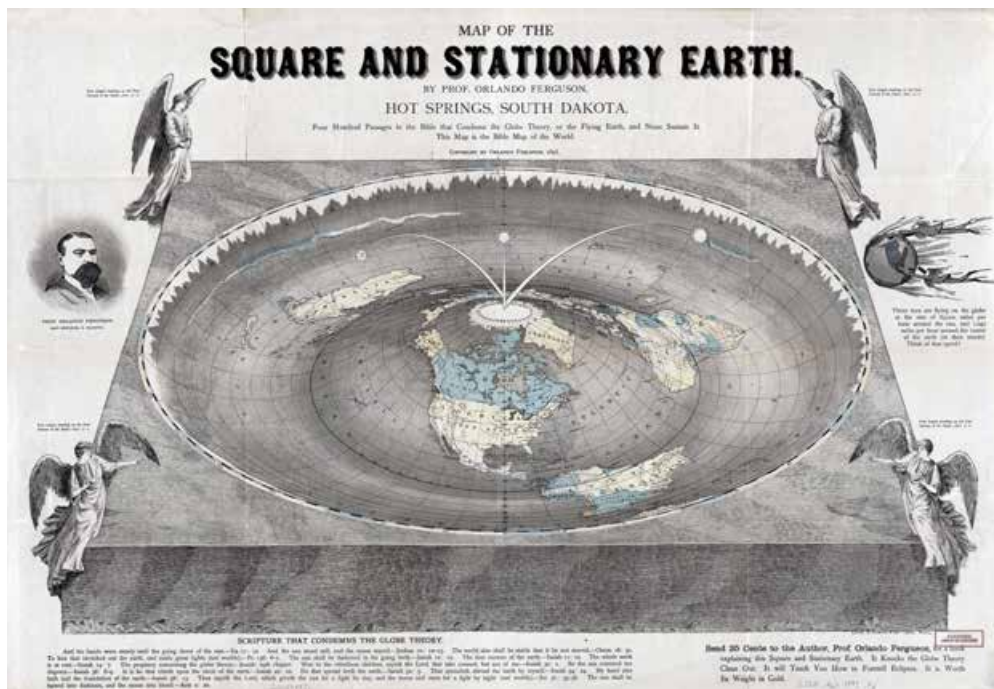
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Map of the square and stationary earth by Prof. Orlando Ferguson, Hot Springs, South Dakota: four hundred passages in the Bible that condemn the Globe Theory, or the Flying Earth, and none sustain it; this map is the Bible map of the world (L.H. Everts & Co.). Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA dcu. Gift; Don Homuth; September 2011. Accompanied by envelope containing illustrations, CD-ROM of Ferguson family gravesite, transcriptions of Orlando Ferguson's obituaries, and photocopy and CD-ROM of "The globe theory of the earth refuted". G3201.A67 1893.F4

The Geopolitics of the Ukrainian Struggle

BY CONSTANTIN HLIHOR

After the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991, Ukraine, like other former communist societies, entered a period of transition. This rare historic event seemed to mark a new beginning, a radical break with Russia's authoritarian past. But Russian geopolitical interests have ensured that the transition of these countries has many peculiarities on their way to democracy and Western modernity. Of the 15 states that emerged from the USSR, only the small Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became consolidated democracies and joined the EU. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine became unstable democracies, and all the rest slipped into autocratic rule, with power in the hands of a small oligarchic elite or a single autocrat¹. Ukraine's transition to democracy, or rather the "transitional diffusion of democracy," is often associated with "democratic revolutions," such as the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the Euromaidan (or Revolution of Dignity) ten years later, which took place in a society deeply divided about its future. People in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are mostly native Russian speakers who want close relations with Russia, while the western part of the country's Ukrainian-speaking community is inclined to integrate with the EU and NATO. The Euromaidan events of 2013-14 sharply polarized Ukrainian society between east and west. This has created a geopolitical chessboard where major powers compete for geostrategic influence and control.

Analyzing this geopolitical chessboard is a difficult task because it is a moving target. A history of the First World War written in 1916 or even in 1918 would have looked very different from the one written after the peace treaty was signed. To paraphrase the famous politician and diplomat Henry Kissinger today, no one knows how the Russian-Ukrainian war will end.² But we have no better alternative to making history in real time, because the world can't wait to

1 Peter Rutland, *Russia's Post-Soviet Elite*, in Heinrich Best, John Higley, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 273-295, online <https://digital-collections.wesleyan.edu/flysystem/fedora/2023-03/16790-Original%20File.pdf>

2 See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, Rockefeller Center, New York, 1994, p. 27.

understand the origins, implications, and geopolitical consequences of a conflict that is becoming as important as the World Wars and 9/11. In the aftermath of Russian aggression in 2022, the world has become polarized to a degree not seen since the Cold War. Now a group of advanced democracies, led by the United States, stands up against a group of Eurasian autocracies—Russia, China, Iran, and other countries from the non-Western world. The Western powers supported the Ukrainian government in its fight against “terrorists” in the east, while Russia gave strong military and political support to the southern separatists, though without openly acknowledging its military incursion until the full-scale invasion in 2022³.

Unfortunately, this geopolitical chasm has deeply influenced most of the analyses which have appeared in recent years. Most Russian geopolitical analysts followed (and still follow) the Kremlin’s narrative that “Ukraine does not exist” and used its definition of “nationalists” as synonymous to “Nazis”. According to Putin’s explicitly imperialist and revanchist interpretation of Russia-Ukraine relations⁴, the Ukrainian struggle for democracy and Western modernity is a big mistake. In his vision, “step by step, Ukraine was drawn into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia. Inevitably, the time came when the concept of “Ukraine is not Russia” was no longer an option. There was a need for the concept of “anti-Russia”, which we will never accept”⁵. All this has nothing to do with geopolitical science and everything to do with Soviet propaganda and geopolitical myths. However, most military and geopolitical analysts saw the Ukrainian conflict as an extension of the events of 1989-1990 and the democratic transition in Eastern and Central Europe⁶. It is becoming increasingly clear

3 Donald N. Jensen, *Moscow in the Donbas: Command, Control, Crime and the Minsk Peace Process*, in NDC Research Report, Research Division, NATO Defense College, 01/17 – March 2017, p.3.

4 André W. M. Gerrits, “The ideological and philosophical context of the war”, in László Andor and Uwe Optenhögel, eds., *Europe and the War in Ukraine. From Russian Aggression to a New Eastern Policy*, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2023, p. 6.

5 Vladimir Putin, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, President of Russia, July 12, 2021, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>, accessed at May 7, 2024.

6 Gerard Delanty, “Introduction to the Special Issue on the Russo-Ukrainian War: A New European War? Considerations on the Russo-Ukrainian War”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 26, issue 4, 2023, 431-449, online <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310231174098>; Borja Lasheras et al., *A Realistic Path towards Ukraine’s Accession to the EU*, NGO Ukrainian Centre for European Policy, June 2023, online, <https://ucep.org.ua/wp-content/>

that after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, including the Kosovo war, there were violent events and that the transition was not entirely peaceful. This line of thought shows that in the current war there is no deviation from a normally peaceful course. I agree with those specialists who believe that geopolitical analysis is a deeply ideological and politicized form of analysis⁷, but I think that by using a scientific methodology, we can pass over these issues. First and foremost, analysts must refute every biased study and geopolitical propaganda that has been published by both belligerent sides.

Theoretical Framework

Ukraine's struggle for dignity, democracy, and sovereignty in the wake of Russia's February 2022 aggression has been widely discussed within several theoretical frameworks. Although this complex struggle cannot be explained through a single theoretical lens, the dominant explanations have sprung from international schools of thought and less from geopolitics, sociology, etc. Prominent realist scholars in the United States, such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, have offered insightful analyses and occasionally sparked debate. Other IR theorists believe that Russia's need for both ontological and physical security led to its decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In this framework, the invasion was a logical response to the expansion of NATO and a long-standing concern that Russia would be buttressed and lose its place as a great power. For the majority of geopolitical and historical scholars, this explanation is insufficient. Prominent professor Jeremy Black argues that to better understand Ukraine's struggle for modernization, we need a "model of geopolitics as a form of problem response. In short, it is, like most forms of analysis, a way of modeling the complexities of existence"⁸. He warns us that the success of an analysis using geopolitical ways and methods depends on the high accuracy of the concepts used as tools. Ignoring this aspect can lead geopolitical discussions "to an elision between objectives and policies, to

[uploads/2023/06/ukraine_accession_to_EU_realistic_path_full_paper_eng.pdf](#), accessed May 8, 2024.

7 Merje Kuus, "Critical Geopolitics", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2017, November 30, online <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-137>; Jeremy Black, "Why Geopolitics Matter", *E-Notes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 17, 2020, online <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/01/why-geopolitics-matters/> accessed at May 5, 2024.

8 Jeremy Black, "Why Geopolitics Matter", cit. work.

the extent that they can help maintain a rigorous distinction between the two. However, what is presented by contemporaries as geopolitical means or operational policies can become ends or strategic goals in themselves by gaining symbolic and practical weight⁹. The importance of concepts, the smallest unit of mental activity, should not be ignored if social studies, including geopolitics, are to be meaningful not as a memorization course but as a reasoning course that generates solutions by recognizing today's social problems and using the past. "Geopolitics, whatever its shortcomings as a formal system of analysis, has many advantages and offers many insights. It is a vehicle for argument as well as analysis, for polemic as well as policy, and these categories are not rigidly distinguished. Geopolitics focuses not only on human society, but also on the contexts in and through which it operates. Geopolitics thus illuminates the basic (but often silent) structure and infrastructure of human interaction, as well as the problems of policy formulation and implementation"¹⁰.

We put forward a way of looking at Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression through a convergence of classical and critical geopolitical thought. Classical approaches view geopolitics as practices embedded in war, foreign policy, and diplomacy, with tangible manifestations in the organization of space. From a classical perspective, "geopolitical" in its most basic sense means "power struggles over specific territories, whether large or small, including territories within urban areas. In fact, geographical territory is essential to geopolitics"¹¹. For a long time to come, geopolitics will continue to be determined by the struggle of classical and non-state actors for territories rich in natural resources, water, and livelihoods. Therefore, it is necessary to use the concepts of space, territory, geopolitical position, spaces of power, zones of influence, and areas of power¹² in the analysis of Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression to maintain its sovereignty. The actors of the classical geopolitical phenomenon were attracted to one or another region of the world differently, according to the priority of the interests they were promoting. Sixty years ago, Ion Conea noted that the political map of the world contained "points and regions of maximum

9 Jeremy Black, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2016, p. 243.

10 Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Geopolitics*, Indiana University Press, 2024, p. 35.

11 Yves Lacoste, "Geography, Geopolitics, and Geographical Reasoning", *Hérodote*, Vol. 146-147, Issue 3-4, 2012, p. 41.

12 See and Rebin Fard, "Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics Bridging Classical and Critical Geopolitics", *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2021, p. 30.

and minimum political interest". He defined the former as "regions of intense political life" and the latter as those where "the political rhythm of the planet is rather slow"¹³. The wider Black Sea region, with Ukrainian territory at its core, is becoming a region of "friction or convergence of interests and disputes"¹⁴. Using the concepts of struggle analysis in Ukraine, it can better understand the contradiction between hegemonic struggle and balance policy in the Ukraine region if we move towards a reconciliation between classical and critical geopolitical methods and concepts.

Another important concept in classical geopolitical analysis is the national interest and its derivatives, such as geostrategic interest, security interest, economic and commercial interest, ideological interest, and so on. In geopolitical theory and analysis, interest becomes a tool to measure and identify, to some extent, the degree of an actor's involvement in solving a problem in a certain region, such as the sovereignty of Ukraine and its borders after February 22, 2022. From this point of view, James Roseau was right when he concluded that the interest is twofold. It was the researcher's tool of analysis in the review of contemporary political phenomena, and a tool of action in the hands of the actors. "As a tool of analysis, James Rosenau wrote, it is used to describe, explain, and evaluate the sources of a nation's foreign policy or its adequacy. As an instrument of political action, it is a means of proposing, justifying, or blaming politics"¹⁵. In geopolitical propaganda, the description of national interests can very well become a tool for manipulating national or international interests. In a world more and more dominated by mass media, "cannons" loaded with information and images, deep fakes and AI can easily convince the public opinion about the "fairness" of their "special operation" in Ukraine and not necessarily about the truth and scales that determined this aggression.

On the other hand, postmodern geopolitics is concerned not only with territory as such, with its surface, topography, and resources, but also with the people who live there and the political elite that accepts, supports, or is imposed upon them¹⁶. A geopolitical rivalry, which can occur in any geographical space, is created by a political decision of a leader. This decision to engage in a geopolitical

13 Ion Conea, *Geopolitics: A New Science*, in E. I. Emandi, Gh. Buzatu, V. S. Cucu, *Geopolitics*, Center for European History and Civilization, Romanian Academy, p. 59. (In Romanian).

14 Ibidem.

15 Quoted by Constantin Hlihor, *Geopolitics*, p. 152.

16 Yves Lacoste, "Geography, Geopolitics, and Geographical Reasoning", *Hérodote*, Vol. 146-147, Issue 3-4, 2012, p. 41.

rivalry is based on the expertise of a specialist in geopolitics and geostrategy. Thus, geopolitics becomes a tool for the production of geopolitical knowledge among political elites. Geopolitical analysts and experts analyze leaders' perceptions of the interests and power of other states operating in different regions and areas of the world. Thus, perception is an important part of the contemporary geopolitical phenomenon and a useful tool for analyzing rivalries and cooperation between different actors and areas of common interest¹⁷. In geopolitical theory and analysis, a result of observation is the understanding of power relations and interests that lead certain actors to dispute or negotiate control or presence in a certain geographical area that supports the guidelines of their foreign policy and actions in geopolitical situations. From this point of view, perception in the contemporary geopolitical phenomenon embodies a set of information that may or may not be accompanied by cartographic or iconographic representations that design the image of a geopolitical field in the "mental map" of political elites and leaders/managers who govern non-state actors. Political and military leaders often initiate wars based on an assessment (accurate or not) of the balance of power. They will engage in geopolitical confrontation or even war if they believe the balance of power is in their favor. Even a relatively equal distribution of power can induce leaders to believe that they can benefit from war¹⁸. This is what happened in the case of Putin in February 2022. To this was added the Russian leaders' geographical mental map, which is rooted in the tradition of Russian imperialism and the deep belief that the West is their eternal enemy.

Misperception is also a very important analytical tool in geopolitical analysis. According to the conceptual framework, some categories of misperceptions play an important role in leading countries into geopolitical rivalry or even war, such as: misperception of one's own and the enemy's military capabilities; misperception of the enemy's intentions and the degree of its hostility; and misperception of the intentions and reactions of third parties¹⁹. Before the war in Ukraine began, both sides had some misperceptions and miscalculations. Putin "made a very bad calculation, thinking that somehow Ukraine was not as much of a country as it turned out to be. He thought he could reabsorb Ukraine by killing President Volodymyr Zelenskyy or capturing him by sending special forces

17 Constantin Hlihor, *Geopolitics*, p. 153-155.

18 Michael McFaul, Robert Person, "Why Putin Invaded Ukraine", in Hal Brands, ed., *War in Ukraine Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World*, Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore, 2024, p. 38.

19 See more, Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. XVIII, no. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 675-700.

to Kyiv. But he was not alone in thinking this way. Most of the Russian elite does not believe that Ukraine is a separate country. They believe in a mystical history of Russia and have not come to terms with the idea that Ukraine really wants to be an independent country²⁰. Putin also believed that the Ukrainian military was weak, based on its past performance during the Russian invasion of Crimea and the creation of Russian proxies in the Donbass. In fact, in the early days of the war, Putin appealed to the Ukrainian military to take political power and make peace with Russia. This did not look like simple propaganda, but rather revealed Putin's view that the Ukrainian army was capable of acting in this direction²¹. Moreover, this misperception of the Ukrainian military possibly led Russian war planners to expect less military and civilian resistance in Ukraine and to create a weak force configuration to quickly establish administrative and political control over the conquered populated areas. The result was an abject failure. According to respected analysts from the Baltic countries, "there are two fundamental misconceptions that Western countries have when trying to deter Russia. First, Russia is expected to be afraid of losing the rules-based world security order, and second, Russia is expected to demonstrate good will and a cooperative mentality to improve relations with the West"²². We had to choose only a few examples, but it can be noticed that today the discourses of political and military leaders both in Moscow and in the capitals of Western countries are full of mutual misperceptions and attributions of non-existent intentions and capabilities. All this will affect Ukraine's struggle for independence and democracy for a long time to come.

By integrating the concepts and approaches of geopolitics as a tool of analysis, we can avoid being misled by the deceptive strategies of political leaders involved in geopolitical rivalries around the globe or in a particular one, such as today's war in Ukraine.

20 Graham Allison, "Dealing with Horrible Leaders Is Part of the History of International Relations", interview conducted by Bernhard Zand in *Spiegel International*, 20.05.2022, online <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-dealing-with-horrible-leaders-is-part-of-the-history-of-international-relations-a-31a0aabb-35eb-4107-a65f-39ae5f79c9e7> accessed at May 30, 2024.

21 Dumitru Minzarari, "Failing to Deter Russia's War against Ukraine: The Role of Misperceptions", *SWP Comment*, no. 33, April 2022, p. 4, online https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C33_WarUkraine_Misperceptions.pdf accessed at June 2, 2024.

22 Viljar Veebel, Liia Vihmand, Illimar Ploom, Raul Markus, "Western Misperception when Detering Russia: Cultural and Linguistic Factors", *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2020, p. 153.

Ukraine's geopolitical position: Why its territory matters in the rivalry between the West and the Global South.

The geopolitical significance of the Ukrainian territory was particularly evident during the major wars and great power rivalries of the 20th century in Europe. Ukrainian territory is part of the Baltic-Black Sea region - a geopolitical fault line that has separated Western and Eastern Europe throughout modern and contemporary history²³. On the other hand, according to Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, which focuses on the territories considered to be the heart of the world, Ukraine represents the epicenter of the heart²⁴. In this area, Ukraine has a unique and significant geopolitical importance due to its geographical proximity. Once again, Russian aggression after February 2022 confirms this observation. In his book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, the famous American geopolitical and international relations scholar Zbigniew Brzezinski emphasized several decades ago that Ukraine's importance stems not from its power, but rather from its strategic geographic location²⁵. In this regard, Ukraine and its territory are treated by geostrategic players as pawns on a chessboard. Ukraine's struggle for Western modernity became an important process influencing the redefinition of the relationship between the West - the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation²⁶. In this context, Ukraine appears both as an entity on the international stage and as an object in the superpower rivalry for influence at the regional and global levels. The former president of the Czech Republic, refer-

23 See Constantin Hlihor, "Provocări de securitate în spațiul ponto-baltic. Actualitatea lui Nicolae Titulescu", in *Perspective*. Revista Fundației Europene Titulescu, nr.1, 2022, pp. 57-77; Mikhail Mel'tyukhov, "Sanitarnyy kordon': strategicheskaya problema i yeye resheniye", *Zhurnal rossiyskikh i vostochnoyevropeyskikh istoricheskikh issledovaniy*, № 1(4), 2012, p. 18-24; Marta Grzechnik, "Intermarium: the Baltic and the Black seas on the Polish mental maps in the interwar period", *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice / The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue 1 (2014): pp. 81-96; Laurențiu Constantiniu, *Uniunea Sovietică între obsesia securității și insecuritate*, Editura Corint, București, 2010, pp. 182-183.

24 Constantin Hlihor, "Regiunea Ponto-Baltică: 'Un ,poligon' geopolitic în secolul xxi. Actualitatea lui Sir Halford Mackinder", *Geopolitica. Revistă de Geografie Politică, GeoPolitică și GeoStrategie*, no. 1/98, 2023, online <https://www.geopolitic.ro/2023/05/regiunea-ponto-baltica-un-poligon-geopolitic-secolul-xxi-actualitatea-lui-sir-halford-mackinder/> accessed at May 13, 2024.

25 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, 1997, pp. 49-51.

26 Wiktor Możgin, "Ukraine in a Geopolitical Game between the West and the Russian Federation", *Ukrainian Policymaker*, Vol. 3, 2018, p. 37.

ring to Ukraine, has stated that, from a geopolitical point of view, it is part of a “fracture line”²⁷. The reasons for this state of affairs should be found in both external and internal factors due to the following characteristics.

Firstly, the geographical factor. Ukraine occupies a vast territory in Eastern Europe, and most of its territory is flat land without any significant natural obstacles. Geostrategically, it plays an important role because it is located along a terrestrial gateway connecting Europe with the core of the Eurasian heartland.²⁸ For centuries, Ukrainian territory has served as a corridor for the imperial ambitions of great powers seeking to move in either direction; it has access to the sea with several large ports, including military ones; it is rich in natural resources and minerals; and it has an advantageous transit position at the crossroads of transportation routes and oil and gas pipelines. Mackinder’s geopolitical vision, launched at the beginning of the 20th century, fascinated both the academic and the political world. In the interwar period, when the rivalry between the great Western democracies and the rising totalitarian powers was manifesting itself, Western democratic leaders found support in Mackinder’s theory, which suggested a possible solution so that the Eastern European space would not fall under the control of the Soviet Russia or a Soviet-German alliance²⁹. After the end of the Cold War, H.J. Mackinder’s theory exerted an equally great attraction on Russian geopoliticians in their attempt to find a scientific argument for their new geopolitical “narratives” of the revival of Russian hegemony and to influence the Kremlin leadership in making decisions on the international political scene. Among them, Vadim Tsymbursky perhaps comes closest to the deterministic-geographical formula of the English scientist by introducing the concept of the “Island of Russia”³⁰. Vadim Tsymbursky defines this space, which includes the Ukrainian territory, as a “platform” inhabited by the Russian ethnic group, which in its historical evolution extends from the border with China to “Romano-German” Europe, separated by a belt of “strait territories” delayed from the political point of view (territories-prolivy)³¹. For

27 Quoted by Michel Foucher, *Ukraine-Russie. La carte mentale du duel*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 2022, p. 9.

28 See more, Sir Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, With a New Introduction by Stephen V. Mladineo, National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, 1996, pp. 53-81.

29 Constantin Hlihor, *cit. work*.

30 V.L. Tsymburskii, *Ostrov Rossiya. Geopoliticheskie i khronopoliticheskie raboty, 1993-2006*, ROSSPEN, Moskva, 2007.

31 *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

the Russian geopolitician, the Russian Island defines Russia's self-identity (*samotzhdestvennost*), which explains why the disintegration of the USSR must be seen as Russia's return to its organic state, and why the country's future depends on a foreign policy of "flexible alliances" that does not allow the West to control these spaces. Although Tsymbursky initially dismissed Mackinder's theory as inappropriate for the many territorial metamorphoses Russia underwent in the 20th century, by 2006 he concluded that Mackinder's ideas could help him construct his own geopolitical scheme of "three cycles of Russian imperial history"³². Many of these ideas, which are part of the new Russian geopolitical myth, can be found in the public discourse of the Kremlin leadership regarding the war in Ukraine and the intensifying rivalry with the West. The real geopolitical value of Ukraine's territory is given by two main strategic features. First, Ukraine's geographic location "can be used as a spearhead of military power projection, a defensive buffer state offering the strategic advantage of distance, or a borderland where conflicting spheres of influence overlap. Not surprisingly, Ukraine has witnessed a considerable amount of war, violence, and bloodshed throughout its history. This troubled background includes chapters such as the Mongol invasion, the Crimean War, World War I, the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, the carnage of World War II, the massive impact of the Holodomor and the draconian Stalinist terror, among others"³³. On the other hand, "Ukraine is also an asset whose control is strategic for military purposes. During the Cold War, the Kremlin decided to place nearly 3,000 nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil because of its pivotal position for defensive and offensive purposes, an arsenal that was sent to Russia after the collapse of the USSR. In addition, the port of Sevastopol - located on the Crimean Peninsula - is a strategic naval facility that currently houses the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Regardless of who operates it, this location is critical for supporting operations in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and the Levantine coast. For example, such an outpost enabled the game-changing intervention of Russian forces in Syria"³⁴.

Secondly, the geo-economic factor is very important for all strategic players involved in Ukraine. Ukraine has significant industrial capabilities in the industries like steel production, aerospace, chemicals and the manufacture of military

32 Ibidem, pp. 388-418.

33 Jose Miguel Alonso-Trabanco, "Ukraine: The Perpetual Battleground", *Geopolitical Monitor*, February 24, 2022, online <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/ukraine-the-perpetual-battleground/> accessed at May 13, 2024.

34 Ibidem.

hardware. The mineral potential was represented by Ukrainian major groups of mineral deposits: fuel and energy raw materials, metallic minerals, non-metallic minerals for ferrous industry, mining chemical raw materials, mineral building materials³⁵. Natural resources are very important for high-tech industries such as IT, electric cars, communications, etc. According to Ukrainian official sources “the discovered reserves of Ukrainian titanium are equal to 15 years of global titanium production”³⁶. The greatest natural wealth of Ukraine is its soil resources. Ukrainian black soils make up a large part of the world’s soils. As of 2016, the land fund of Ukraine is 60.4 million hectares, including agricultural land - 42.7 million hectares³⁷ that is suitable for growing cereals, which makes it a powerful food exporter. In recent years, thanks to well-educated human capital and the flow of foreign investment, Ukraine has developed the production of software, IT services and research and development activities. Finally, its access to the Black Sea and the Dnieper River - a navigable waterway - make Ukraine a good gateway to engage in international trade.

What geopolitical interests are at stake in the Ukraine struggle?

Despite of the fact that many policymakers in the West had stated that the era of geopolitical interests and great-power competition was over after the collapse of the Soviet Union³⁸, the Russian aggression over Ukraine showed that great-power rivalry had not disappeared; it had merely receded from the discourse of political leaders following the end of the Cold War, not yet from expert analysis. Moscow’s geopolitical interests and actions are based on a number of factors rooted in Russia’s history, mentality, stereotypes, and imperial aspirations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is part of an attempt to secure these specific interests and strategic goals. The invasion did not achieve the quick victory that the Kremlin expected, based on misperceptions. The trigger for President

35 Valeriy Rudenko et al., “Dominant and Subdominant Types of Nature Resources in Ukraine: Regional Analysis”, *Natural Resources*, no. 5, 2014, p. 74.

36 Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, *UKRAINE Critical Minerals Portfolio*, online <https://www.geo.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/presentations/en/critical-minerals-portfolio.pdf> accessed at May 13, 2024.

37 N. P. Chorna, R. S. Chornyi, S. K. Shandruk, “Socio-Economic Development of Ukraine: New Challenges and Threats”, *Scientific bulletin of Polissia*, no. 1 (13), 2018, p. 103.

38 Constantin Hlihor, “Spre un nou război rece? Geopolitical codes/Imaginarul geopolitic și relațiile Est-Vest după dispariția Uniunii Sovietice”, in Lilia Zabolotnaia, coord., *Firul viu, ce leagă timpuri/Времен связующая нить/The Thread That Connects Times*, The collection of articles: Ad honorem Victor Țvircun. – Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2020, pp. 151-171.

Putin's decision to invade Ukraine was the misperception of a window of opportunity. As a result, Ukraine found itself at the epicenter of geopolitical turmoil. According to Oleg Kondratenko, "Ukraine is at the center of a clash of great interests, geopolitical gravity, and civilizational rupture"³⁹.

On the other hand, Russia has a constant sense of encirclement and containment by the West. For more than two decades, Russian politicians and state media have peddled fears of external threats, Western containment of Russia, and national grievances related to alienated territories and economic failures⁴⁰. This, along with a never-ending concern to secure and protect its borders - some 60,000 kilometers in all, a third of which are land borders - has led to an almost insatiable need for absolute security and a belief that dangers must be kept far away from the Russian heartland. As a result, Russia believes that it is in its strategic interest to control Ukraine's political affairs, and that the need to maintain a buffer zone between NATO, the European Union, and Russia is, in effect, a barrier against Western encroachment. In Putin's view, "Ukraine has historically been an invasion route for Western powers into Russia. Transferring this route to a rival military alliance would leave Russia vulnerable to attack"⁴¹. According to Dimitri Trenin, Russia's aggression against Ukraine is the result of the West's policy of trying to isolate Russia and its resistance to Russia's participation "as an equal actor in the Western security system, while at the same time its security problems abroad were not taken into account"⁴². Many Western experts suggest that Putin invented this rhetoric to justify Russian dominance in former Soviet territories. In fact, Putin's personality, combined with his imperial ambitions, are the root cause of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As Elias Götz and Per Ekman also argue, Russia's attack is due to Putin's "imperial fantasies, historical nostal-

39 Oleg Kondratenko, "Ukraine as a Geopolitical Priority of the Russian Federation", *Historia i Polityka*, No. 16 (23)/2016, p. 105.

40 Maxim Trudolyubov, "Russia's Catastrophic Geopolitics", *Insight & Analysis*, The Kennan Institute, April 20, 2022, online <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/russias-catastrophic-geopolitics>

41 Дживан М./Murat Civan, Внешняя политика России в отношении НАТО: от сотрудничества к конфликту / Russia's Foreign Policy Towards NATO: From Cooperation to Conflict, Теории и проблемы политических исследований. 2023. Том 12. № 3А-4А/ Theories and Problems of Political Studies. 2023, Vol. 12, Is. 3A-4A, p. 132.

42 Тренин Д./Trenin D., Новый баланс сил: Россия в поисках внешнеполитического равенства. Россия в поисках внешнеполитического баланса/ New balance of power: Russia in search of foreign policy balance, Москва: Издательство Альпина Паблишер/ Moscow: Alpina Publisher, 2021, p. 232.

gia, and resentment of the West”⁴³. In the same vein, Khrushcheva notes, “But Putin’s real reason for invading Ukraine is far less pragmatic and more alarming. Putin seems to have succumbed to his ego-driven obsession with restoring Russia’s status as a great power with its own clearly defined sphere of influence”⁴⁴. By controlling southern Ukraine and Crimea, Russia gains a strategic foothold in the Black Sea region. With a larger and more sophisticated military presence in this area, Russia can project power deeper into the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa, where it has traditionally had limited influence. This means that Russia can acquire the characteristics and capabilities necessary to be considered a superpower, which the West cannot accept because it would change the security architecture on the European continent and in the world.

The warlike aggression of the Russian Federation in February 2022, according to Professor Michel Foucher, “aimed both to destroy the democratic regime of the elected president, Volodymyr Zelensky, and to undertake the conquest, described as “liberation”, of an eastern and southern part of Ukraine”⁴⁵. Putin, like Stalin, wants “all the territories around him - 8 million square kilometers that have become independent since 1991 - to form a strategic and political glacis. This means obedient countries and alliances with authoritarian regimes”⁴⁶. Other experts say that perhaps the most important reason for Putin to invade Ukraine was his fear that it would continue to develop into a modern, Western-style democracy, which would inevitably undermine his autocratic regime in Russia and ruin his hopes of rebuilding a Russian-led sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. According to historian Anne Applebaum, Putin “wants Ukrainian democracy to fail. He wants Ukraine’s economy to collapse. He wants to keep dictators in power. He wants to undermine America. He wants America itself to fail”⁴⁷. Both successful Westernization and prosperity of Ukraine would put into question the effectiveness of anti-democratic regimes in many former Soviet countries, as well as in Russia. Therefore, military aggression of Russia in Ukraine is aimed

43 Elias Götz, Per Ekman, *Russia’s War Against Ukraine: Context, Causes, and Consequences*, *PROBLEMS OF POST-COMMUNISM*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2024, p. 194.

44 Nina L. Khrushcheva, “What’s on Putin’s Mind?”, *Project Syndicate*, Feb 25, 2022, online <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putin-irrational-invasion-of-ukraine-by-nina-l-khrushcheva-2022-02>

45 Michel Foucher, *cit. work*, p. 9.

46 Idem, *Que veut Moscou ? Annexer l’Ukraine ? Vassaliser ce pays?* Online https://www.cercle-condorcet-auxerre.fr/uploads/library/TEXTES_MF_UKRAINE.pdf?t=1647976956

47 Anne Applebaum, “Repetition Compulsion”, *Harper’s Magazine*, online <https://harpers.org/archive/2023/07/repetition-compulsion-anne-applebaum/>

at the prevention of Kyiv reforms. In order to mislead the democratic world, the Russian leader defined this aggression against Ukraine as a denazification operation⁴⁸. Putin's speech to the Russian public on February 22, 2022, included a promise that Russian forces "will seek to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation...."⁴⁹. By launching this narrative of the denazification of Ukraine, Putin also launched the war of disinformation and deception that accompanied the military confrontations on the ground.

The United States and its allies established programs to provide political, military, and financial support to Ukraine in response to Russian aggression. One of the most popular policy tools used by Western nations to maintain peace and security in various parts of the world is the provision of various forms of aid. This consists of supplying weapons, military hardware, training, and other services (including intelligence) to border guards, armed forces, and other entities. Compared to other forms of intervention, military assistance is considered to be more affordable, sustainable, and easily adaptable to the local situation. In line with this, some experts believe that "aid to Ukraine is a good investment for the US"⁵⁰. Ukraine is important to the Western economy, but the reality cannot be judged solely on economic grounds. The West and the U.S. support Ukraine's struggle for independence and democracy because of multiple geopolitical and geostrategic interests.

In terms of geopolitics and geostrategic, Ukraine is fighting for more than just its continued existence as a sovereign nation on the global stage. The outcome of this struggle will have a significant impact on the future conflict between autocracies and democracies. Professor Michael McFaul, director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and former U.S. ambassador to Russia, argues that the United States cannot tolerate Russian aggression in Ukraine because it will only encourage further aggrandizement and expanding

48 Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, Bastiaan Willems, "Putin's Abuse of History: Ukrainian 'Nazis', 'Genocide', and a Fake Threat Scenario", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2022, pp. 2-3, online <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2022.2058179>.

49 V. Putin, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 24 February 2022, 0600 hours, Moscow. The Kremlin
online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/statements/67843>.

50 Luke Coffey, Peter Rough, *Why a Ukrainian Victory Matters to Americans*, POLICY BRIEF, July 2023, online https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/072623_Ukraine_Fact_Sheet_House.pdf.

threats to the United States. “For Russia, defeat in Ukraine will hasten the demise of Putin’s domestic system of autocratic rule, just as the Soviet Union’s bloody and humiliating defeat in Afghanistan hastened the end of communist dictatorship. The end of Putinism will not happen overnight; it will most likely gain momentum only after Putin’s death or incapacitation. The United States and its European allies have a profound interest in weakening autocratic rule in Russia. A Russian defeat on the battlefield accelerates this outcome”⁵¹. The democratic West cannot allow the world to return to the state of dictatorships of the interwar period, when powerful countries could change borders at will, when civilians were slaughtered, prisoners tortured, women raped, and children kidnapped. The struggle in Ukraine is a struggle for democracy against dictatorship. U.S. President Joe Biden, speaking in Warsaw on March 26 about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, talked about how today’s liberal democracies are facing a test, a “great struggle for freedom. A struggle between democracy and autocracy. Between freedom and repression. Between a rule-based order and one ruled by brute force. In this struggle, we must be clear-eyed”⁵². All Western democracies must consider the risk of geopolitical contagion. If Ukraine loses its conflict with Russia, other actors on the international stage - especially China - will be inclined to do the same. A variant of this argument was made by President Joe Biden himself, who wrote in March 2022 that “if Russia does not pay a heavy price for its actions, it will send a message to other would-be aggressors that they, too, can seize territory and subjugate other countries”⁵³. Although most scholars and pundits draw a connection between the struggle of Ukraine and Taiwan, it is important to recognize that international conflicts are unlikely to be replicated in the same way, as they vary with the evolving context. While both Ukraine and Taiwan are undeniably democratic territories targeted by aggressive nationalism from more militarily advanced and dangerous nearby autocracies, there are some differences. These countries do not share the same political and legal status. Although Taiwan considers itself a de facto indepen-

51 Michael McFaul, “The Case for Supporting Ukraine Is Crystal Clear. Note to Congress: Ukraine aid is not charity but serves critical U.S. interests”, *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2023, online <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/16/ukraine-russia-war-us-congress-aid-weapons/>

52 *Full Transcript of President Biden’s Speech in Warsaw on Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine*, *ABC-news.com*, March 26, 2022, online <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/full-transcript-president-bidens-speech-warsaw-russias-invasion/story?id=83690301>

53 Quoted by Joshua Shiffrinson, “What is America’s interest in the Ukraine war?”, *The National Interest*, October 30, 2022, online <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-americas-interest-ukraine-war-205555>

dent country separate from the mainland, only 14 states (including the Vatican) have officially recognized Taiwan (the Republic of China, or ROC) as a nation. On the other hand, the PRC is the only legitimate and legal representative of China in the United Nations. Andrew Scobell and Lucy Stevenson-Yang conclude that “China is not Russia” and “Taiwan is not Ukraine”⁵⁴.

The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent aggression against it violated Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are fundamental principles of international law. These events have tested the effectiveness of international institutions and their principles and norms for maintaining peace and security. Referring to these aspects, Professor Ashley J. Tellis, a well-known analyst at the RAND Corporation, points out that Ukraine’s struggle against a full-scale Russian invasion is “more detrimental to the post-Cold War international order than even the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the controversial U.S. invasion of Iraq that ultimately followed”⁵⁵. Ukraine’s struggle can prevent Russian President Vladimir Putin from rejecting the fundamental principle of the post-World War II order - that international borders cannot be changed by force alone. Even before the full-scale aggression in Ukraine, he had sharply criticized the post-Cold War arrangements and made it clear that he wanted to revise or even overturn the existing order. Putin foreshadowed his willingness to upend the global order in 2007 during a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, when he declared, “I believe that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable, but impossible in today’s world. The model itself is flawed” because, in his view, “on its basis there are and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization.”⁵⁶

Conclusions

Ukraine’s struggle against Russian aggression is undoubtedly a deep geopolitical and security crisis in the post-Cold War world. Thus, we can notice that this event has already produced many consequences for the whole contemporary society. One of them is the competition between the U.S. and its allies to extend the “Pax Americana” and the Global South (China and Russia, and to a lesser

54 Andrew Scobell, Lucy Stevenson-Yang, *China Is Not Russia. Taiwan Is Not Ukraine*, United States Institute of Peace, March 4, 2022, online <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/china-not-russia-taiwan-not-ukraine>

55 Ashley J. Tellis, *The Ukraine War and Global Cleavages*, Hal Brands, ed., *cit. work*, p. 205.

56 *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, (Feb. 10, 2007), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/24034>

extent India, South Africa and Brazil), which opposes such a unipolar world. The Global South advocates building a world concert of multipolarity, which is an alternative to the American global construct. Under these circumstances, Ukraine has become a battleground for the Atlantic and Eurasian archetypes of world order and international security. There is a reason to believe that the defeat of Ukraine in its struggle with Russian imperialism will lead to the destruction of the mechanisms of checks and balances and the rise of a precedent for changing borders, which will lead to conflicts in the contemporary international environment. On the other hand, for the authoritarian regimes, Ukraine is perceived more as a kind of “experimental” area of geopolitics. Russia, with an imperial nostalgia, tries to keep the former Soviet republics and the so-called “Russian world” under its influence, despite the minimal chances of winning in the competition with the West. Thus, Ukraine became a huge geopolitical stake.

In the following page: In The “Peace Book” on Ukraine, No. 50 of the series prepared for the British delegates to the Paris Peace Conference. The series was prepared under the direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office headed by the historian Sir George Walther Prothero (1848-1922) and published by the H. M. Stationery Office in 1920.

HANDBOOKS PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE.—No. 52

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THE UKRAINE

LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY H. M. STATIONERY OFFICE.

1920



The Island Factor and Technological Change

Three examples; Gotland off Sweden,
Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, and Taiwan

BY ULF SUNDBERG

SUMMARY. I. INTRODUCTION. II. GOTLAND – 1. Introduction. 2. Gotland in the age of sail. 3. Gotland in the age of steam. 4. Gotland in the age of aircraft. *World War II. The Cold War*. 5. Gotland in the age of long-range missiles. III. GUADALCANAL – 6. Introduction. 7. Guadalcanal in the age of aircraft. *The first moves. The American Invasion – August 7, 1942. November 1942 – A New Battleship Attack. After the Battle of Guadalcanal*. 8. Guadalcanal in the age of long-range missiles. *Breaking with Taiwan. Strategic Concerns*. IV. TAIWAN. 9. Introduction. 10. Taiwan in the age of the sail. 11. Taiwan in the age of steam. 12. Taiwan in the age of aircraft. 13. Taiwan in the age of long-range missiles. 14. Strategic Concerns. V. THE ISLAND FACTOR TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE. VI. LITERATURE.

I INTRODUCTION

By definition, an island is surrounded by water. This fact can have significant geopolitical consequences. A land area that would otherwise be of minor significance can gain utmost importance if it forms an island. Geopolitics often focuses on landmass, but being surrounded by water can provide geopolitical leverage. In geopolitics, “...understood as a politics present in spatial terms and explained through it.”¹, islands can play a role that is out of proportion to their area.

The first military characteristic of islands is that the attacker must control the waterways to conquer an island and resupply their forces there. Mere army forces are insufficient to capture an island. The defender can make an invasion of an island impossible by controlling the waterways.

1 Jeremy Black, “Geopolitics: Into the Future”, in *Pandemos*, No 1 (University of Cagliari, Italy 2023), p. 2 <https://ojs.unica.it/index.php/pandemos/article/view/5901/5677> . Read May 15, 2024.

Additionally, the defender has the option to maintain army forces on the island strong enough to defeat an invasion. It is worth noting that control of the waterways is not crucial to the defense of an island in the short term. However, in the long run, an island under constant attack would need to be resupplied. Malta during World War II serves as an example. Thus, compared to regular land warfare, the island factor immediately creates a more complicated situation.

An important question regarding any island is: How can it be used? This discussion encompasses various aspects but can be distilled to the matter of establishing bases for various instruments of war. For an island to become strategically interesting, it must be situated in a location where having bases would be meaningful. Saipan, situated 2,350 kilometers east of Tokyo, serves as an obvious World War II example. Once this island was captured, American B-29 Superfortress bombers could reach Japan.

Different aspects need to be considered. First, the defender's interests in maintaining bases on a strategically important island, and of denying the attacker the opportunity to establish bases there. Conversely, the attacker would seek to deny the defender a base area for various operations, and to establish his own bases there.

Once an important island is lost by a defender, the matter of reconquest arises. The rules are then reversed. The attacker, holding the island, does not depend on control of the waterways in the short term, but the nation trying to recapture an island would need control of the waterways and land forces superior to the occupying forces. It should be noted here that the weaker party in a conflict will find it difficult to reconquer an island, even a small one. Reconquest calls for local air superiority, transports, fighting ships to protect the operation and other resources which would be scarce for the weaker side.

There is an alternative to reconquest, suppressing the enemy on the island through methods such as bombing, naval bombardment, or naval blockade. These techniques would consume vast naval or aerial resources, which are normally short in supply. Malta again serves as an example where German fighter aircraft attempted to suppress the offensive power of the island, though it was not entirely successful.

The geopolitical importance of an island varies with the overall geopolitical situation. If there is no conflict in the area, the island will have no geopolitical significance. The importance also fluctuates with technological advancements. New technologies, such as aircraft and long-range missiles, seem to have increased the importance of certain islands.

History provides numerous examples. However, this article focuses on three islands: Gotland, off the coast of Sweden, Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and Taiwan off mainland China. These islands have played important roles in military history and planning, roles that have evolved alongside technological progress.

II GOTLAND

1. Introduction

Gotland, a Swedish island, is located in the southern part of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea is divided into a northern and a southern part by the Åland islands. Historically, the northern part has held little military significance. In addition to Gotland, there are several other large islands in the southern part of the Baltic Sea: Saaremaa (Swedish: Ösel) and Hiiumaa (Swedish: Dagö) just off the Estonian coast; Danish Bornholm in the far south; and Öland, situated right off the Swedish coast. While all these islands are important, Gotland has played the major regional role.²

The importance of Gotland has fluctuated with the political conditions around the Baltic Sea. As Nordic nations began to form in the 9th century, Sweden soon gained control over most of the western coast. During the early medieval period, Sweden absorbed present-day Finland, including Åland, effectively turning the northern part of the Baltic Sea into a Swedish lake. Notably, medieval times in Sweden spanned from the end of the Viking era (around 1040) to 1520 when Danish king Christian II ascended the Swedish throne and ruled for a short time.

In the east, Novgorod thrived as a strong trading nation until it was conquered by Moscow in 1478. Meanwhile, during the 13th century, the Teutonic Order expanded in what are today's Baltic States, creating their own states. To the south, Poland and Lithuania grew in power, alongside influential German cities that formed the core of the Hanseatic League. Just south of Sweden, Denmark emerged as Sweden's primary adversary during most of the medieval and early modern periods. Gotland, strategically positioned in the heart of the Baltic Sea, served as a valuable trading post during peacetime and a potential asset or a liability in times of war.

2 Compare Lars Ericson [Wolke], "Gotlands läge jämfört med andra Östersjööars", in Bo Kjellander (ed.) *Gotlands nationalbeväring och regemente, Band I, Historik, befästningar, Visborgsslätt, verksamhet, regementets särart* (Stockholm 2005), p. 18–28. In the literature list, Swedish titles in footnotes are translated.



Gotland and the nations around the Baltic Sea. (Map: Chino, Wikimedia Commons.
Modified. This work is covered by a valid free license.)

Gotland itself is 125 kilometers in length and about 50 kilometers at its widest point. The total area is 3,000 km², out of Sweden's total land area of 450,000 km². The main city is Visby, situated on the western coast.

The distance from Visby to the Swedish mainland is 100 kilometers, to Stockholm 200 kilometers, to Ventspils in present-day Latvia 200 kilometers, and to Gdansk in northern Poland 370 kilometers.

Gotland is surrounded by a few smaller islands. Fårö ("Sheep Island"), just

northeast of Gotland, is the most important. The sound (Swedish: “sund”) between Fårö and mainland Gotland has historically been the best location for anchoring ships. There is another, quite narrow, harbor at Slite. The Visby harbor was not very good for a long time, but it has been improved in modern times. Gotland offers many places suitable for amphibious landings. The ground is firm and open, allowing for the fast construction of airfields. It is worth noting that the second-largest Swedish island, Öland, lacks deep harbors. This is likely why it is sparsely represented in Swedish military history.

2. *Gotland in the Age of Sail*

When nations began to take shape, Gotland was loosely connected to the Swedish crown. Its ideal location for Baltic Sea trade contributed to its prosperity. Establishing military bases on the island made little sense to the powers along the Baltic shores. Gotland's island status worked to its advantage, protected by water, which also facilitated trade. However, with each passing century, ships became larger and stronger and national navies were organized.

In 1361, life on Gotland changed for the worse. Danish King Valdemar IV assembled a fleet, pillaged the island, and then departed. The challenges of defending an island using local resources became evident. The Danish invasion marked the beginning of Gotland's economic decline. Throughout medieval times, Gotland's history was turbulent. Until 1525, no single nation gained firm control, then the island fell to Denmark. Swedish monarchs asserted their claim to Gotland but saw no strategic or economic incentive to wage war for the island.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Sweden gained control of present-day Estonia and Latvia. Danish-controlled Gotland found itself sandwiched between two Swedish shores, and its days as Danish territory were numbered. In 1643, Sweden launched an attack on the Danish mainland. The subsequent peace treaty of 1645 resulted in several Danish provinces, including Gotland, becoming part of Sweden.

During the following decade, Gotland's strategic importance began to emerge. Swedish General Quartermaster Johan Wärnschöld proposed fortifying the Slite harbor. He feared that the Dutch, who were heavily involved in Baltic Sea trade, might use the harbor as a base. However, these fortification plans never materialized, nor did the threat³.

The Great Northern War led to Sweden losing Estonia and Latvia to Russia,

3 Bengt Hammarhjelm, *Gotländsk krigshistoria: från Gutasagan till 1814* (Visby 1998), p. 214.

leaving Gotland with a hostile coast to the east. Despite this, Gotland remained relatively untouched by subsequent Swedish conflicts. In 1741, during the Russo-Swedish war of 1741–1743, the Swedish government feared that Russia might occupy Gotland and use the island as a naval base against mainland Sweden. They were undoubtedly influenced by the example set by the British at Gibraltar in 1713⁴. These fears did not materialize.

The third partition of Poland in 1795 altered Gotland's strategic position for the worse. Libau (now Liepāja) became a Russian naval base, situated right across the Baltic Sea, 210 kilometers from Visby. This change made it even more challenging for Sweden to defend Gotland. In 1806, King Gustav IV Adolf of Sweden offered Gotland as a gift to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which had recently lost control of Malta. The order declined the gift.⁵ Handling a defense problem by giving it to someone else is of course a viable but unusual strategy. This time, however, it did not prove effective.

In February 1808, Russia invaded Swedish Finland, and in April, a Russian force of 1,200 men landed on a nearly defenseless Gotland. One goal was to prevent any potential British use of the island as a base against Russia. Swift action was necessary, and a Swedish force of 2,000 men was dispatched from the mainland. They successfully forced the Russians to surrender and withdraw.

The ensuing peace treaty of 1809 resulted in Sweden losing Finland and Åland to Russia. Had the Swedish forces not dislodged the Russians from Gotland, the possibility of Sweden being forced to cede Gotland as well is obvious.⁶ The geopolitical landscape around the Baltic Sea would, in that case, have undergone an even more dramatic transformation.⁷

3. *Gotland in the Age of Steam*

In March 1854, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Russia, and the Crimean War began. The Baltic Sea became a crucial theater of conflict. Several warships were now equipped with steam engines, which facilitated war-

4 Bengt Hammarhjelm, *Gotländsk krigshistoria: från Gutasagan till 1814* (Visby 1998), p. 314.

5 Nils V. Söderberg, *Gotländskt försvar* (Visby 1961), p. 99.

6 Lars Ericson [Wolke], "Gotlands läge jämfört med andra Östersjööars", in Bo Kjellander (ed.), *Gotlands nationalbeväring och regemente, Band I, Historik, befästningar, Visborgsslätt, verksamhet, regementets särart* (Stockholm 2005), p. 20.

7 This chapter is based on Bengt Hammarhjelm, *Gotländsk krigshistoria: från Gutasagan till 1814* (Visby 1998) and Ulf Sundberg, *Svenska krig*, Volumes 1–5 (s.l. 2010).

fare in the narrow coastal waters of the Baltic. However, this also necessitated coaling stations. All Baltic nations hesitated to open their harbors to Allied ships.

At the time, Sweden's defense strategy focused on a "central defense", allowing enemy forces to land but aiming to defeat them as they moved inland. Gotland did not fit into this strategy and was left largely undefended. In April 1854, the worst-case scenario for Sweden unfolded. On the 8th, a British steamer conducted soundings in Fårösund, and six days later, Allied ships entered the sound and established a base. Later in April, five British ships delivered the first coal to Fårösund, with plans to expand stocks to several thousand tons. A ship of the line could load fifty tons of coal and burn forty-five tons in twenty-four hours.⁸ Johan Wärnschöld's fears from the 17th century had now become a reality. In Russia, the establishment of an Allied base at Fårösund was not viewed favorably. Meanwhile, the focus of the Crimean War shifted to Crimea, but Allied vessels remained stationed at Fårösund throughout the conflict.

Gotland had now become important as a coaling station, and a complicated geopolitical situation had arisen. Any future conflict around the Baltic Sea would pose a threat to Swedish neutrality, necessitating action. The strategy of sea control was unfeasible for small-state Sweden. Instead, Gotland was to be protected through local defense, effectively raising "the price of Gotland". By 1914, Swedish defense planners estimated that an attacker would require 10,000 soldiers in the first wave and a similar number in a second to capture Gotland.⁹

4. *Gotland in the Age of Aircraft*

World War I underscored the need to consider air power. An awareness of Gotland's potential as an air base gradually increased, especially since Stockholm is only 200 kilometers away from Visby. Small-state Sweden had already abandoned the idea of sea control and the prospects for air superiority did not appear much better.

The fact that Poland, Finland, Estonia and Latvia became independent after World War I somewhat changed Gotland's geopolitical role. The island was no longer directly exposed to a potentially hostile Russia.

8 Nils Modig, *Brittiska flottan i Östersjön* (Malmö 2021), p. 248–249.

9 Bengt Hammarhjelm, *Beredskap på Gotland 175 år: 1811–1986 jämte Komplement till 2000* (Visby 1999), p. 104.

4.1 World War II

Between the wars, the Swedish military establishment underwent reductions, and by the end of the 1920s, it was estimated that Swedish troops on Gotland could only withstand an invasion force of 4,000 soldiers¹⁰. The fundamental concept, however, remained unchanged: Gotland was to be defended by ground troops.

At the outbreak of World War II, Swedish defense planners feared that a Soviet-German conflict would turn Gotland into a pawn. However, when it became apparent that Germany and the Soviet Union were allies, this fear disappeared. Nevertheless, an attack on Sweden by either of these powers would have been extremely challenging to handle. After the Soviet reoccupation of the Baltic States in 1939, the Swedish military establishment estimated that there were 100,000 Soviet troops and 200 aircraft in Estonia and Latvia, with those numbers rising. With a reduced army, an outdated fleet, and an obsolete air force, Sweden could only hope for the best.

The successful German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940 had catastrophic strategic implications for Sweden. However, one consequence was the diminished value of Gotland as an air base. The Germans now had several other air bases from which they could reach all of Sweden. The German airborne invasion of Crete at the end of May 1941 still left a strong impression on Swedish military planners.

The German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, could have increased Gotland's value as a base, but the rapid German advance into Soviet territory soon eliminated that risk. Throughout the war, Swedish military planners remained concerned about potential landings on Gotland, although the assumed reasons for these landings varied. As World War II concluded, Sweden faced a new geopolitical reality. Most of the eastern Baltic Sea coastline was under Soviet control, and Gotland once again became an outpost in the east.

4.2 The Cold War

During the Cold War, Sweden pursued a policy of armed neutrality. Naval forces and attack aircraft would reduce a Soviet invasion fleet, while strong coastal defense batteries and a sizable army were intended to confront any enemy forces attempting to land on Swedish soil. Although the Swedish defense strategy appeared sound, Gotland posed challenges. Neither air superiority nor control of the sea was realistically achievable. Consequently, Sweden adhered

10 Hammarhjelm (1999), p. 104.

to old defense concepts for Gotland. When fully mobilized, Swedish army forces on the island numbered 20,000 soldiers, equipped with ample armor and artillery. With support from air force and navy units, repelling a Soviet invasion might have seemed feasible, given time for proper preparations.

However, there were cracks in this picture. Some army personnel earmarked for Gotland did not reside on the island and had to be transferred there by ship. In times of war or crisis, this operation would have posed significant challenges. In 2014, Swedish Major General Karlis Neretnieks described any attempt to deploy larger units to Gotland during an open conflict as foolhardy.¹¹ Neretnieks pointed out the problems of the weaker party in a conflict attempting to sustain an island under siege.

The primary concern, however, revolved around the basing of Soviet aircraft on the island. While no hard facts exist on this matter, as a junior officer in the 1980s, one could perceive the idea that an attacker in possession of Gotland could triple the number of daily aerial attacks on the Swedish mainland¹². Such an aerial onslaught would seriously undermine Sweden's overall defense effort. The island factor played a crucial role.

Once lost, recapturing Gotland would be extremely difficult. As a junior officer at the time, one understood that the question of whether to defend Gotland or not was high on the Swedish strategic agenda. Most likely, various opinions existed within the Swedish defense leadership. Discussions sometimes referred to the defense of Fort St. Elmo during the siege of Malta in 1565, where Ottoman forces were reduced and delayed by the continuous reinforcement of an outlying castle. In the Soviet Union, the question of whether to capture Gotland was probably much easier to answer.

During the Cold War, Gotland was undeniably a liability in Swedish defense planning. An attacker capturing Gotland would gain immense advantages, while Sweden would have to allocate resources to a battle with an uncertain outcome. Gotland presented a significant planning challenge without an obvious solution, likely consuming considerable intellectual effort.

By the end of the Cold War in 1990s, Sweden began disarming¹³. At the same time, the geopolitical situation changed drastically once again. The Baltic States

11 Karlis Neretnieks, "Försvara Gotland – Varför och Hur", kkrva.se, March 10, 2014. <https://kkrva.se/forsvara-gotland-varfor-och-hur/> (Foolhardy: Swedish: "dumdristigt") Read May 16, 2024.

12 The author in conversations with various officers during the 1980s.

13 Compare: Wilhelm Agrell, *Fredens Illusioner - Det svenska nationella försvarets nedgång och fall 1988–2009* (Stockholm 2010).

became independent and joined NATO in 2004. Poland and East Germany were no longer part of the Russian military system. Russia retained only St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad as naval bases in the Baltic. Gotland, once an outpost in the east, lost that status but still maintained a central position in the Baltic Sea.

5. Gotland in the Age of Long-Range Missiles

The German V-1 and V-2 rockets triggered a development felt worldwide, but they were blunt instruments. By the 2000s, significant changes had occurred. Starting in 2013, Russian forces in the Kaliningrad area received Iskander missiles to replace the OTR-21 Tochka. The Iskander has a range of 400 kilometers, while the Tochka only reached 120 kilometers¹⁴. The Russian anti-aircraft system S-400 also has a range of 400 kilometers.¹⁵ To put these figures into perspective, coastal artillery and Harpoon missiles have ranges of thirty to one hundred kilometers.

In 2014, Major General Neretnieks highlighted the implications of this new technology. He emphasized that a nation capable of deploying these modern systems on Gotland could severely hinder an enemy's operations in the Baltic Sea – from Bornholm to Åland.

Furthermore, if Sweden or any allied power had long-range missiles on Gotland, Russian operations against Sweden would become exceedingly complex. These complications might create a situation where any Russian operation against Sweden would necessitate the conquest of Gotland. Neretnieks also warned that in a high-tension environment, a race for Gotland could trigger an armed conflict.¹⁶

As of 2024, Gotland is defended by a force of 400 officers and soldiers. However, there are no permanently based long-range missiles on the island and coastal artillery is absent.¹⁷ A discussion on the implications of the modern missile systems will follow at the end of this article, after a reflection on the second example, that of Guadalcanal.

14 <https://weaponsystems.net/system/907-9K79+Tochka>. Read May 16, 2024.

15 Jörgen Elfving, *Putin rustar Ryssland: Den ryska björnen vaknar till liv* (s.l. 2014), p. 56 and 96–97 and <https://weaponsystems.net/system/907-9K79+Tochka>.

16 Karlis Neretnieks, "Försvara Gotland – Varför och Hur", kkrva.se, March 10, 2014. <https://kkrva.se/forsvara-gotland-varfor-och-hur/> Read May 16, 2024.

17 <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/var-verksamhet/forsvarsmakten-i-sverige/sakerhetslaget-i-naromradet/> Read May 16, 2024.

III GUADALCANAL

6. *Introduction*

Guadalcanal is an island of about 5,000 km², with a length of 120 km and a width of 40 km. In some places, the coastline is open, but most of Guadalcanal is covered by dense tropical rainforest.

The hinterland is mountainous. In a broader context, the island of Guadalcanal is situated in the Pacific nation of the Solomon Islands, as one of the larger islands among the approximately one thousand islands in the nation. Other islands include Choiseul, Munda, Malaita and Tulagi. The island of Tulagi sits right next to Guadalcanal.

The Solomon Islands are located east of New Guinea and northeast of Australia. The closest distance from New Guinea to Australia is approximately 150 kilometers. The distance from Guadalcanal to the eastern tip of New Guinea is about 1,000 kilometers.

The Coral Sea separates the Solomon Islands from Australia in the southwest. A string of islands, including the New Hebrides, Fiji, and Samoa, is situated southeast of Guadalcanal. On the island of Truk, approximately 2,000 kilometers north of Guadalcanal, the Japanese had established a major naval base known as “the Gibraltar of the Pacific”.

Guadalcanal has been inhabited for more than 6,000 years, but it was first charted in 1568. A Spanish expedition from Peru, led by Álvaro de Mendaña, explored the area and gave it its present name. During the 18th and 19th centuries, a trickle of settlers, whalers, and missionaries from Europe began to arrive. Guadalcanal became a British protectorate in 1899. Economic activities on the island were, to say the least, modest. Up until this point, Guadalcanal held very little geopolitical significance.

7. *Guadalcanal in the Age of Aircraft*

The Japanese attacks on European and American territories in the Pacific Ocean, which began on December 7, 1941, soon brought Guadalcanal into the spotlight. By January 1942, Japanese expansion had reached the island of New Ireland, just north of New Guinea, leading to a violent battle for control of New Guinea.

The general strategic situation dictated that the side with air bases in the Solomon Islands would have a major advantage in the upcoming struggle. These islands could serve as a firm base for further Japanese expansion, or as a launching

point for an Allied counteroffensive. In the short run, having bases in the Solomon Islands would facilitate a Japanese victory in the battle for New Guinea. Additionally, from the Solomon Islands, the Japanese could potentially attack the New Hebrides, Fiji, and Samoa, threatening American communications with Australia. Given that the islands were almost undefended, the outcome of the race for Guadalcanal would depend on who got there first, with sufficient force.

7.1 The first moves

On May 3, 1942, a small Japanese force established a seaplane base on the island of Tulagi. Two weeks later, Captain Shigetoshi Miyazaki, commander of the air unit at Tulagi, reported that the ground conditions on Guadalcanal were favorable for airfield construction. These conditions were rare in the Solomon Islands and gave Guadalcanal a geopolitical importance disproportionate to its size.

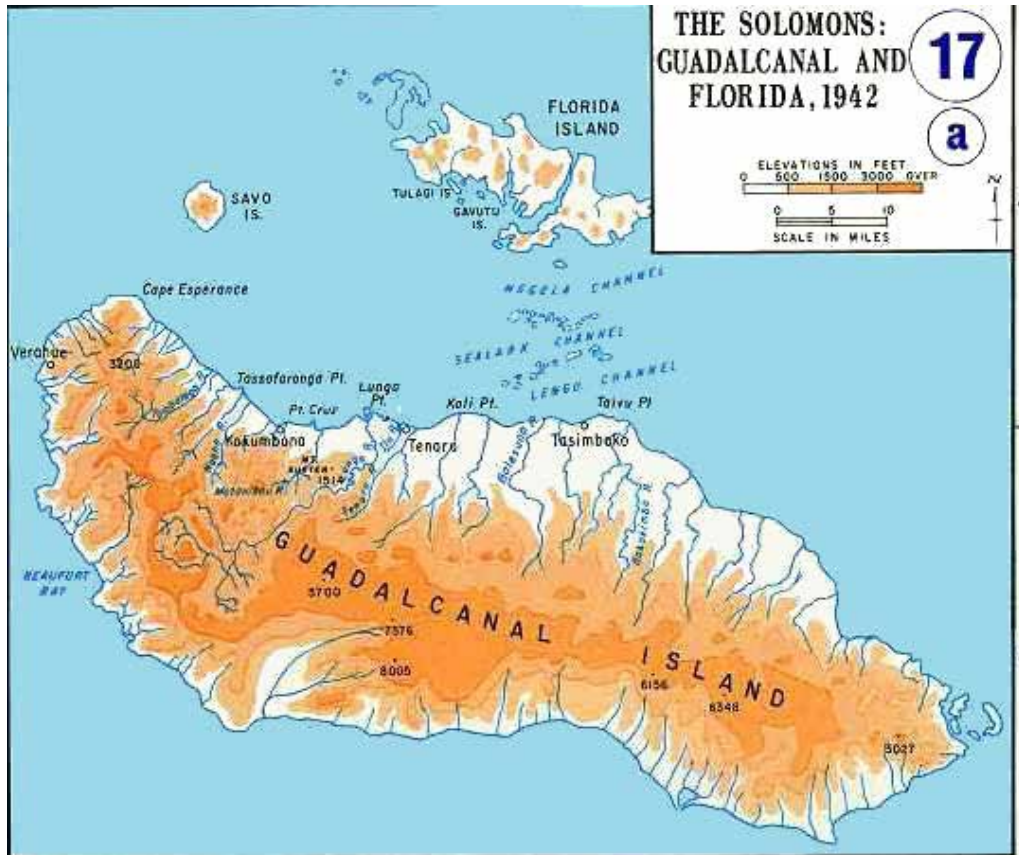
On July 6, the Japanese landed construction workers and a small military force on Guadalcanal, initiating the construction of an airfield. The die was now cast. The leaders of the Allied war effort in the South Pacific – Admirals Ernest J. King and Chester W. Nimitz – recognized the immense danger of the situation and decided to act swiftly. As in the case of Gotland in 1808, organizations tend to move rapidly when central interests are threatened.

7.2 The American Invasion– August 7, 1942

On August 7, 1942, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps launched *Operation Watchtower*, landing 16,000 men, mostly Marines, under Marine Corps Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift on Guadalcanal. The approach of the landing force had been covered by bad weather, and the Japanese were completely surprised. American forces established a bridgehead in the middle of Guadalcanal, on the northern coast, right where the Japanese were building their airfield. The smaller island of Tulagi was also captured. However, most of the island remained vulnerable to Japanese landings, and the Japanese maintained control of the north-western part.

In modern times, there has been no armed conflict centered on Gotland, but for the next six months, Guadalcanal would provide an example of a struggle for an island.

The Japanese immediately recognized the threat, and Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto ordered a “decisive counterattack”. Subsequent air raids launched from New Ireland were, however, not decisive. This marked the beginning of an in-



Guadalcanal, and Florida, in 1942. The small island of Tulagi sits south of the upper part of the Florida Island. (Map: From the University of Texas, Wikimedia Commons. This U.S. work is covered by a valid free license.)

tense but inconclusive aerial battle over Guadalcanal. Japanese naval assets in New Ireland were limited to four heavy cruisers and escorts. These ships sank several Allied cruisers on the night of August 8–9, but they did not attack the not-yet-fully-unloaded transports. The initial Japanese counterstrikes were thus too weak and ultimately unsuccessful. The Japanese were unaware of the American strength on Guadalcanal and sent army units in small groups to the island, which were consistently defeated.

The almost-completed airfield, now named Henderson Field, became operational on August 20, 1942 and the first American fighter aircraft and dive bombers arrived. Later in August, the Japanese attempted to send substantial

army reinforcements to Guadalcanal using three transports (freighters). However, the Japanese failed to suppress American airpower on Guadalcanal, and on the morning of August 25, the convoy was subjected to air attacks. Two of the three transports were lost, and the third turned back.

It was now obvious to the Japanese that no slow transports could be brought to Guadalcanal as long as Henderson Field was operational. The utmost importance of airpower in winning the battle for an island had been demonstrated. Japanese reinforcements and supplies would have to be brought to Guadalcanal by fast ships that could enter, unload and depart during the dark hours. Only destroyers would suffice, although they were in short supply.

In early September 1942, the “Tokyo Express”, operated by destroyers, began running at night. The “Express” delivered a steady flow of reinforcements and supplies.

The Americans could use regular transports and were able to build up their strength faster than the Japanese. The American forces soon numbered 50,000 soldiers, while the Japanese forces on the island never exceeded 20,000. New attempts by the Japanese to assault the American bridgehead always ended in failure.

From the outset of the battle, the Japanese had bombarded the American bridgehead from the sea, using destroyers and cruisers. However, these bombardments had been far from decisive.

On October 13, the Japanese refined this tactic. The battleships *Kongō* and *Haruna* ventured down from Truk and bombarded Henderson Field during the night. The effect was devastating – the American capacity for aerial attacks was almost wiped out in a bombardment lasting less than two hours.

The Japanese battleships had to be out of reach of American dive bombers well before dawn, which is why the bombardment was relatively short. This bombardment marked the lowest point for the American forces on Guadalcanal, but losses could be replaced, and the situation returned to a stalemate. The Japanese had, however, discovered a very effective way to fight.

7.3 November 1942 – A New Battleship Attack

In early November, the Japanese planned to repeat their successful bombardment strategy, this time combined with sending eleven transports carrying reinforcements to Guadalcanal. The idea was that if the Japanese battleships could neutralize American air power, it would be safe to send slower transports. Vice Admiral Hiroaki Abe led the battleships *Hiei* and *Kirishima* for this operation. However, they encountered heavy resistance from American cruisers and

destroyers in the early hours of November 13, leading to a withdrawal of the Japanese battleships, with the *Hiei* badly damaged. The battleships had not been able to bombard Guadalcanal.

Undeterred, Admiral Abe ordered the *Kirishima* to return the following night. In response, Admiral William Halsey, in charge of the American main naval task force, sent the battleships *Washington* and *South Dakota* to engage the *Kirishima*. In the narrow waters, a fierce battle ensued on the night of November 14–15, resulting in the sinking of the *Kirishima* and damage to the *South Dakota*. Once again, there was no battleship bombardment of Guadalcanal.

Due to the Japanese plan misfiring, the transports were subsequently attacked by American dive bombers. Only four of the eleven transports managed to reach Guadalcanal, and they were in a damaged state. The supplies brought in were minimal, and the Japanese army faced starvation. These naval battles from November 13 to 15 highlight the challenges of suppressing an island. Successful naval bombardment requires control of the sea, which the Japanese lacked.

Additionally, there is the replenishment factor. If the defending side is able to replace losses, as the Americans were, attempts to suppress an island are likely to fail. Without control of the air, the Japanese also struggled to control the sea. They soon found it difficult to send reinforcements and supplies to Guadalcanal by sea. Lack of troops and supplies made it impossible to defeat the American forces on land. The Japanese were stuck in a situation where lack of air control would eventually lead to defeat. The battleships-at-night tactic was, however, potentially dangerous to the Americans. At that time, the threat could only be countered by American ships of equal strength.

Effective suppression of American air power on Guadalcanal could have seen the Japanese victorious in the hitherto inconclusive air battle over the island. With air superiority, the Japanese could have made American resupply operations impossible and their position on Guadalcanal untenable.

Since the Japanese could not suppress American air power, their supply situation grew worse by the day. The Japanese resorted to more and more desperate means to resupply their Guadalcanal army, but with limited success. There was now little hope for the Japanese. In January 1943, they decided to evacuate the island and by February 9, 1943, all organized Japanese resistance on Guadalcanal had ceased. The Japanese failure to neutralize Henderson Field had ultimately decided the outcome of the Battle of Guadalcanal.¹⁸

18 This chapter is based on Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (London 1992), David Horner, "General MacArthur's War: The South and Southwest Pacific campaigns 1942–45", in Daniel Marston (ed.), *The Pacific War: From Pearl*

7.4 *After the Battle of Guadalcanal*

It should be noted that during the parallel struggle on New Guinea, Japanese forces on the New Guinea mainland were soon defeated. Their base area around the New Ireland Island, centered in the town of Rabaul on the adjacent island of New Britain, would however remain unconquered by Allied forces until the end of the war.¹⁹

After Allied forces secured victory in the Battle of Guadalcanal in February 1943, the island served as a forward base for further offensives. As Allied forces moved further west, the base became less crucial. With the end of World War II, Guadalcanal returned to a state of very little geopolitical importance.

8. *Guadalcanal in the Age of Long-Range Missiles*

After World War II, Guadalcanal and the other Solomon Islands remained under British rule. In 1976, the islands, which by then had around 800,000 inhabitants, achieved self-governance and two years later, they became independent. Since gaining independence, civil wars and political unrest have been common. However, the geopolitical significance of the islands remained low. The United States neglected the region to the point that they closed their embassy in the Solomon Islands in 1993.

Breaking with Taiwan

A significant shift occurred on September 16, 2019 when the Solomon Islands' parliament voted to switch its recognition from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare played a key role in this political shift.

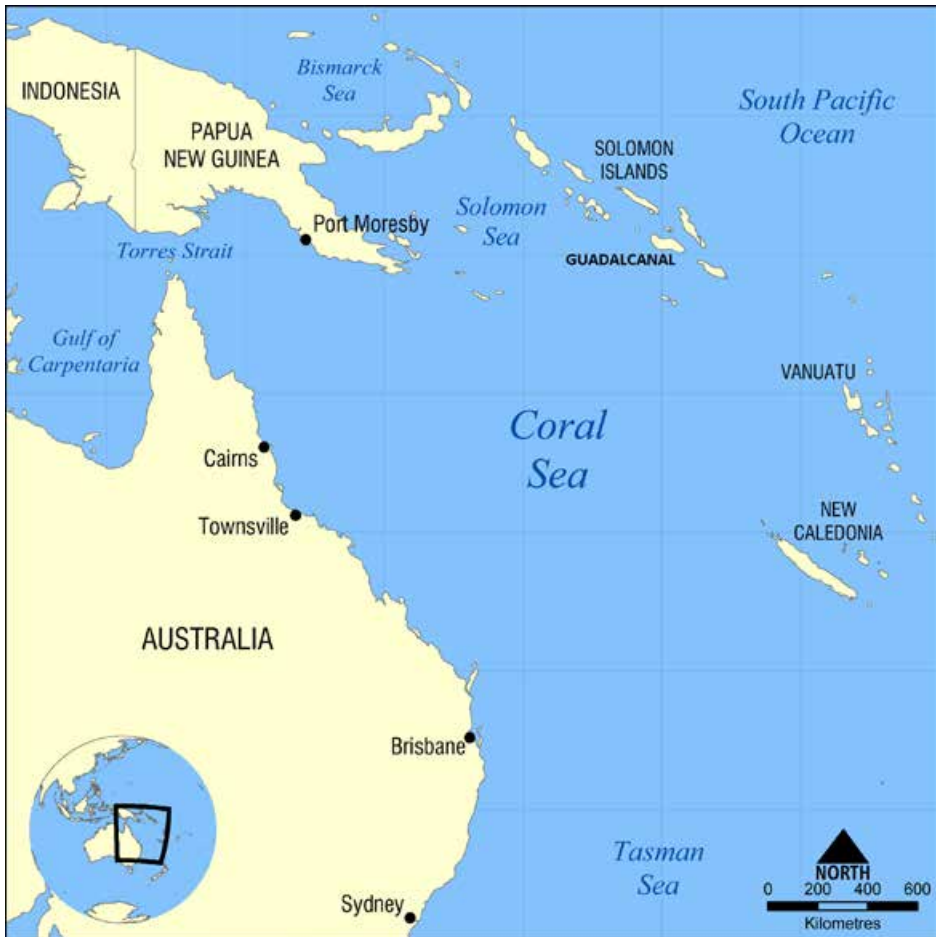
Then, on April 19, 2022, China announced that it had signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands. The United States and Australia made futile attempts to prevent the pact from being signed.²⁰ Initially, the actual content of the pact was not made public.²¹

Harbor to Hiroshima (Oxford 2005) and Jürgen Rohwer, *Chronology of the War at Sea 1939–1945* (London 2005).

19 Compare Lida Mayo, *Bloody Buna: The Campaign that Halted the Japanese Invasion of Australia* (s. l. 1977).

20 Amy Gunia, "An Archipelago in the South Pacific Is Becoming the Newest Scene of Tensions between China and the U. S.", *time.com*, April 20, 2022 6:33 AM EDT. [Read June 28, 2024.](#)

21 AFP, "China says it has signed security pact with Solomon Islands", *france24.com*, April 19, 2023 – 12:32. [Read June 28, 2024.](#)



The map above shows the Solomon Islands' siting in relation to the Coral Sea and Australia. (Map: From the University of Texas, Wikimedia Commons. This U.S. work is covered by a valid free license.)

Detailed information about the pact was released on July 11, 2023. It was then explained that, according to the pact, the PRC and the Solomon Islands had agreed to: “Enhance cooperation on law enforcement and security matters. The Chinese side will continue to provide support and help to Solomon Islands as needed in strengthening Solomon Islands’ police law enforcement capacity.”²²

22 AP, “China signs pact with Solomon Islands to boost cooperation on “law enforcement and security matters”, apnews.com, July 11, 2023, 9:18 AM CEST. [Read June 28, 2024.](#)

The pact is seemingly quite unspecific, and soon after the signing, a U.S. National Security Council spokesperson commented to Reuters that the agreement "... follows a pattern of China offering shadowy, vague deals with little regional consultation in fishing, resources management, development assistance and now security practices."²³

After the 2024 elections, Sogavare's party remained in power as the stronger part of a coalition. It seems that China's position in the Solomon Islands, albeit being vague, is at least reasonably stable. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command comprises approximately 375,000 personnel, 2,500 aircraft, and 200 naval vessels, including five carrier strike groups. Under the Joe Biden administration, the United States has prioritized building bases in Guam and Australia.²⁴

Strategic Concerns

Looking back at World War II in the Pacific, one can get the sense of history coming alive. Some names need to be changed. The aggressor is now the People's Republic of China (PRC) rather than Japan. The attacker's main target is Taiwan, not the wider Pacific area – at least not initially. It should be noted that Taiwan is another excellent example of the island factor.

Just like the Japanese prior to World War II, the Chinese military must of course try to find a general strategy for winning a war against the United States. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command might at first glance look impressive, but then, the Pacific is a large area, and the U.S. Navy cannot be strong in every place. By copying the former Japanese strategy of threatening Australia and the communication links to Australia via the New Hebrides, Fiji, and Samoa Islands, China could gain significant advantages.

As seen in the Gotland case, major technological advancements have elevated the strategic importance of the island. During the era of piston-engine aircraft, the Solomon Islands and Guadalcanal became focal points. The old Henderson Field has now been transformed into a modern airport with a two-kilometer runway, and an alternative airfield at Munda boasts similar capacity. Additionally, there are several smaller airfields scattered across the Solomon Islands.

The distances involved constitute a major difference between Gotland and

23 Amy Gunia, "An Archipelago in the South Pacific Is Becoming the Newest Scene of Tensions between China and the U. S.", *time.com*, April 20, 2022 6:33 AM EDT. [Read June 28, 2024.](#)

24 Zoungyeon Zoe Liu, "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the U.S. and South Pacific", (Council on Foreign Relations, CFR), *cfr.org* May 4, 2022, 5:33 PM EST. [Read June 28, 2024.](#)

the Solomon Islands. For instance, a distance of 370 kilometers – such as from Visby, Gotland, to Gdansk in Poland, is considered substantial in the Baltic Sea. In contrast, the distance from Guadalcanal to Townsville, Australia, spans approximately 1,750 kilometers across the Coral Sea.

Here, range becomes important. An upgraded version of the PRC's standard bomber, the H-6K (a Chinese version of the Russian Tu-16 "Badger"), has an estimated combat range of 3,500 kilometers²⁵. The air superiority fighter Shenyang J-11 has a combat range of 1,500 kilometers.²⁶

The Dongfeng 21 surface-to-surface missile reaches up to 2,150 kilometers, depending on the version²⁷. It then becomes obvious that several Chinese weapons systems, if based on Guadalcanal, could operate against the Coral Sea and also Australia.

Chinese forces in the Solomon Islands would be seriously exposed to an Allied counter attack, but such a counter attack would draw considerable American resources away from a struggle for Taiwan. To the Chinese, the value of building forces in the Solomon Islands prior to a conflict would be immense, especially as totalitarian regimes are inclined to accept heavy losses. Without Chinese military assets on the islands, the Solomons would be of very little value to the Allies in itself.

The island factor, islands being difficult to gain but equally difficult to regain, serves to give the Solomon Islands a geopolitical significance that is out of proportion to their area. As in the case of Gotland, any increase in tensions might set off a "run for the island".

If the Chinese can establish themselves in the Solomon Islands, Allied military leaderships will face a new problem that they cannot disregard. Thus, the events in the Solomon Islands since 2019 have created "a cuckoo chick in the nest" problem for Allied military planners. Gotland has long posed a similar challenge to Swedish military planners. Matters that must be solved, but for which there is no obvious solution, tend to consume a significant amount of energy.

Therefore, the geopolitical consequences of the Solomon Islands' switch of allegiance should not be underestimated. Australian journalist Edward Acton

25 "H-6K Air Striking Platform", in <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/h-6k.htm>. Read June 28, 2024. Combat range is a difficult concept since there are many variables. In-flight refueling can further increase range. The use of cruise missiles would further increase the reach of a bomber aircraft.

26 "J-11 [Su-27 FLANKER]", <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/j-11.htm> Read June 24, 2024.

27 "DF-21 at a glance", <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/df-21/> Read June 24, 2024.

Cavanaugh asserted in an interview that “It has given Manasseh Sogavare extraordinary leverage over traditional partners and seen Solomon Islands issues taken seriously by leaders as senior as U.S. President Joe Biden.”

Cavanaugh further stated that “The Solomons’ switch became one of the most important geopolitical events in the Pacific for decades. It fundamentally reshaped the region’s geopolitics.”

At the end of the interview, he emphasized: “Small countries matter, even if we don’t [sic] pay attention to them. Sometimes they’re [sic] in the driver’s seat in ways we underestimate.”²⁸

While there is little to argue against Cavanaugh’s reasoning, a few additional points could be made. For a small nation to truly matter, it must be situated at the intersection of great power interests. Its territory must be suitable for base construction, and the island factor is crucial. A small nation that cannot meet these requirements will not be more important than, for example, Liechtenstein.

IV TAIWAN

9. Introduction

Taiwan, the third example of the island factor, differs importantly from previous cases due to its proximity to a potentially hostile coast. The importance of this fact seems to have increased with developments in technology.

Taiwan is now a nation of 36,000 km² with twenty-three million inhabitants. The island spans roughly 160 by 400 kilometers, with its eastern and central regions, making up two-thirds of the land, dominated by mountainous terrain. In contrast, the western region is open and fertile. The capital, Taipei, is located in the northeast, while another key city, Keelung, lies on the northern coast. In the southwest, Tainan serves as the major urban center.

The strait between Taiwan and the mainland is only 160 kilometers wide. From Taiwan’s northern tip to Kyushu, Japan’s southernmost main island, the distance is roughly 1,000 kilometers. This gap is bridged by the Ryukyu Islands, of which Okinawa is perhaps the most well-known. The Ryukyu Islands extend to within 140 kilometers northeast of Taiwan.

The distance from Taiwan’s southern tip to the northern tip of Luzon in the

28 Catherine Putz, “Solomon Islands and the China Switch: Big Politics in Small Places An interview with journalist Edward Acton Cavanaugh on the domestic dynamics driving Solomon Islands to geopolitical prominence.”, in *The Diplomat on-line*, April 29, 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/solomon-islands-and-the-china-switch-big-politics-in-small-places/> Read June 28, 2024.

Philippines is approximately 450 kilometers. Between them lie several islands including Batan Island.

Chinese ships sailing west of the Philippines and south must pass Indonesia and Malaysia before reaching the Pacific or the Indian Oceans. The requirement for Chinese naval forces to navigate potentially hostile coastlines to access the Pacific Ocean is regarded as a significant challenge to China's ambitions as a maritime power.²⁹

The Penghu Islands, also known in western nations as the Pescadores, span 140 km² and are situated about 50 kilometers off Taiwan's western coast. Among the approximately ninety islands, there are many good anchorages. Taiwan also controls two island groups near the Chinese mainland: Quemoy, covering about 150 km², and Matsu, just ten km². Taiwan claims sovereignty over several coral reef archipelagos in the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands.

10. Taiwan in the Age of the Sail

Taiwan was populated long before it drew significant attention from mainland China. In 230 and 607 A.D., expeditions from the mainland were sent to Taiwan, though no colonization attempt

followed. By the 13th century, around 1,500 Chinese had settled on the Penghu Islands, fostering a thriving trade. In 1292, an expedition of 6,000 Chinese troops was dispatched to pacify Taiwan, but it ended in failure.

For centuries, Taiwan experienced relative peace, aside from occasional disturbances around Penghu and sporadic attacks by Japanese pirates. In 1615, Japan sent thirteen ships to conquer Taiwan, but twelve foundered in a typhoon, causing the expedition to fail. In 1624, Dutch traders began to establish settlements on Taiwan, and they would soon control most of the island.

The next major event occurred in 1661. The Ming dynasty, ruling China since 1368, was under attack from the Manchu Qing dynasty. Zheng Chenggong, later known as Koxinga, was a loyal supporter of the Ming dynasty. When the Ming were losing to the Qing, he moved his forces to Taiwan, where he defeated the Dutch and established his own kingdom on the island, which endured until 1683.

In 1683, the Qing Emperor ordered an invasion of Taiwan, appointing Shi Lang to lead a substantial naval force to conquer the island. On July 7, Shi Lang defeated the Taiwanese fleet at the Battle of Penghu, bringing Taiwan under the

29 Compare Zhiguo Kong, *The Making of a Maritime Power: China's Challenges and Policy Responses* (Singapore 2017), p. 31–32.

Chinese Empire. Although there were periodic rebellions against Chinese rule, none succeeded. The fortifications of Keelung were significantly strengthened. The Chinese faced formidable pirate fleets, which they ultimately subdued in September 1809. The First Opium War (1839–1842) and the Second Opium War (1856–1860) involved only minor skirmishes around Taiwan.³⁰

11. Taiwan in the Age of Steam

During the age of steam, Taiwan attracted little attention from the outside world. In the 1850s, the American Commissioner in China, Peter Parker, highlighted the potential benefits of establishing an American coaling station on the island. Washington, however, showed no interest in Parker's proposal.

During the Sino-French War of 1884–1885, Taiwan became more directly involved in the conflict. A French squadron under Rear Admiral Sébastien Lespès managed to destroy the fortifications at Keelung with artillery but failed to capture them with infantry. Other French attempts to establish a foothold on the island were similarly unsuccessful, prompting the French commander, Vice Admiral Amédée Courbet, to impose a naval blockade. The French occupied the Penghu Islands, leaving the Chinese military position on Taiwan increasingly vulnerable without supplies or reinforcements. However, the war concluded before the situation could escalate further.

After 1885, the defenses of Taiwan were strengthened, and soon there were five strong fortifications. To counteract the threat of naval blockades, a modern arsenal was constructed in Taipei, capable of producing both rifle bullets and artillery shells.

China's next major conflict, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, did not bring combat to Taiwan. The fighting took place further north, with China suffering a decisive defeat in the naval Battle of the Yalu River in September 1894. Taiwan's fate emerged as a topic only at the start of peace negotiations at Shimonoseki, where Japan's demand for the island caught China by surprise. Having lost the war, China was compelled to cede Taiwan on 17 April 1895.

Following the announcement of Taiwan's cession, the independent Republic of Taiwan was declared. Japanese forces soon landed on the island. The new republic was defeated within twelve days, though resistance to Japanese rule persisted for years. The last battles were fought in 1915. The Republic of Taiwan made history by becoming the first republic in Asia.

³⁰ This and the two following paragraphs are based on Chien-Chao Hung, *A history of Taiwan* (Rimini 2000).

12. Taiwan in the Age of Aircraft

Under Japanese rule, Taiwan prospered, despite calls for reform. The island was not affected by World War I. As Japanese territory, Taiwan felt little impact from the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1912, which established the Republic of China (ROC), or the Chinese Civil War, which began in 1927. Initially, Japan's expansion into China, starting with the Mukden Incident in 1931 and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, also had minimal effect on Taiwan.

The Japanese soon recognized Taiwan's potential as a strategic base for operations against China. Harbors and airfields were upgraded, particularly in Keelung, Taipei and Tainan. On December 8, 1941, these efforts proved successful when Japanese aircraft from Taiwan launched an assault on American airfields in the Philippines, severely crippling American air resources.

Initially, Taiwan was largely unaffected by the Pacific War. In 1944, this began to change. The Allied command debated an invasion of either Taiwan or the Philippines, with General Douglas MacArthur strongly favoring the latter. In the end, MacArthur's view prevailed. Despite this, Taiwan faced heavy Allied air attacks aimed at neutralizing Japanese airpower and was blockaded by American submarines. While the blockade was effective, Allied forces could never fully suppress Japanese airpower on the island. Following Japan's surrender in September 1945, Taiwan was ceded, and in October 1945, ROC troops began their occupation of the island.

The next major event originated from the Chinese mainland. In 1947, Mao Zedong and his army made significant progress in the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek and his ROC forces. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was formally established in October 1949, and the Chiang Kai-shek government moved to Taipei in December of that year. ROC forces withdrew to Taiwan, but PRC forces made no immediate attempts to invade the main island.

In October 1949, 17,000 PRC troops landed on the island of Quemoy, crossing the narrow strait in small boats, junks and rafts. After 56 hours of fighting, the PRC forces suffered heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw.

13. Taiwan in the Age of Long-range Missiles

U.S. interest in Taiwan had long been primarily commercial. However, with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the situation changed. U.S. President Harry S. Truman ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to prevent any attack on Taiwan.³¹

31 Chien-Chao Hung, *A history of Taiwan* (Rimini 2000), p. 269.

In 1954, tensions around Taiwan intensified as the First Taiwan Crisis unfolded. Taiwanese F-86 Sabres shot down PRC aircraft, a minor naval battle took place, and the islands of Quemoy and Matsu came under attack. During the crisis, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower threatened to use nuclear weapons against Chinese military targets in mainland China.³² At that time, the first U.S. submarine armed with the Regulus missile – a cruise missile carrying a nuclear warhead – had just become operational. After the U.S. threats, the crisis de-escalated. The PRC carried out its first nuclear weapons test in 1964³³. From then on, the issue of Taiwan's future would always have nuclear weapons in the background.

The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996 centered on the PRC's testing of Dongfeng 15 missiles which landed in the waters around Taiwan. The United States responded by sending aircraft carrier groups to the vicinity of Taiwan. Some of the ships sailed through the Taiwan Strait.

Following this crisis, the PRC began to modernize their armed forces. By 2014, the PRC had deployed between a thousand and two thousand short-range ballistic missiles in provinces opposite Taiwan.³⁴ Taiwan countered with its Hsiung Feng, a cruise missile with a maximum range of 600 kilometers³⁵.

In a military conflict over Taiwan without U.S. involvement, the PRC would likely face several problems but would ultimately have a high chance of prevailing. The stance of the United States, however, would be decisive. Here, four *Ohio*-class strategic submarines, converted to cruise missile boats between 2002 to 2008, could play a critical role. Each boat carries 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles, which would allow for a powerful but still conventional involvement in the defense of Taiwan. Additionally, the U.S. Indo-Pacific fleet's 2,500 aircraft, some stationed at Okinawa and mainland Japan, would also be a significant factor.

32 Bruce A. Elleman, *Taiwan Straits: Crisis in Asia and the Role of the U.S. Navy* (Lanham, MD 2015), p. 41.

33 Kimie Hara, *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia-Pacific: Divided territories in the San Francisco System* (Abingdon 2007), p. 181.

34 Yves-Heng Lim, *China's Naval Power: An Offensive Realist Approach* (Farnham, Surrey 2014), p. 105.

35 Strategy Page, "Attrition: The Incredibly Shrinking Taiwan Military". https://www.strategypage.com/htmwtatrit/articles/20090320.aspx#gsc.tab=0?utm_content=cmp-true Retrieved October 20, 2024.

14. Strategic Concerns

Throughout history, the island factor has worked to the advantage of Taiwan and its inhabitants, allowing for long periods of independence. On two separate occasions, Taiwan has also served as a place of refuge for the losing sides in civil wars.

When Taiwan has changed hands, defenders have generally failed to maintain maritime supremacy. In the 1894–1895 conflict, control of the sea was lost not near Taiwan itself but off Korea in the Battle of the Yalu River. Once control of surrounding waters is lost, defending the island with ground forces becomes a nearly impossible task. Without sea control, a numerically superior adversary could land at a place of his choosing, and an efficient defense of the entire coastline would have been problematic. These historical events underscore the strategic considerations of Taiwan's current defense situation.

From a PRC perspective, controlling Taiwan is crucial to unlocking access routes to the Pacific Ocean. In a major conflict with the United States, PRC naval forces would be hampered by the geopolitical situation. In a defensive scenario, any force attacking the PRC's eastern coast would have a clear advantage in possessing Taiwan. Such an attack does, however, seem less likely. Beyond strategic and tactical factors, the PRC's prestige is also impacted by its lack of control over Taiwan. The Chinese (PRC) writer Zhiguo Kong commented that "More importantly, it [a reunification with Taiwan] will significantly improve China's status in the geopolitical structure of Asia."³⁶

Given the PRC's substantial motives for annexing Taiwan and Taiwan's continued resistance

to such an annexation, the key issue is whether the PRC could successfully invade Taiwan. The PRC military has millions of soldiers, while Taiwanese has around 200,000. Without the strategic advantage provided by Taiwan's island geography, the odds of maintaining independence from the PRC would be slim. The outcome now depends on the PRC's ability to transport sufficient forces across 160 kilometers of water to execute a successful invasion.

A potential PRC attack on a U.S.-supported Taiwan presents a highly complex scenario.³⁷ Before the advent of the aircraft, the outcome would have large-

³⁶ Zhiguo Kong, *The Making of a Maritime Power: China's Challenges and Policy Responses* (Singapore 2017), p. 31.

³⁷ Compare Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (New York, NY 2015). Cliff presented a detailed scenario for a future Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

ly depended on the number of ships that each side could deploy to the Taiwan Strait. The introduction of combat aircraft brought in the critical element of maintaining air supremacy over the strait. Today, long-range missiles add further layers of complexity.

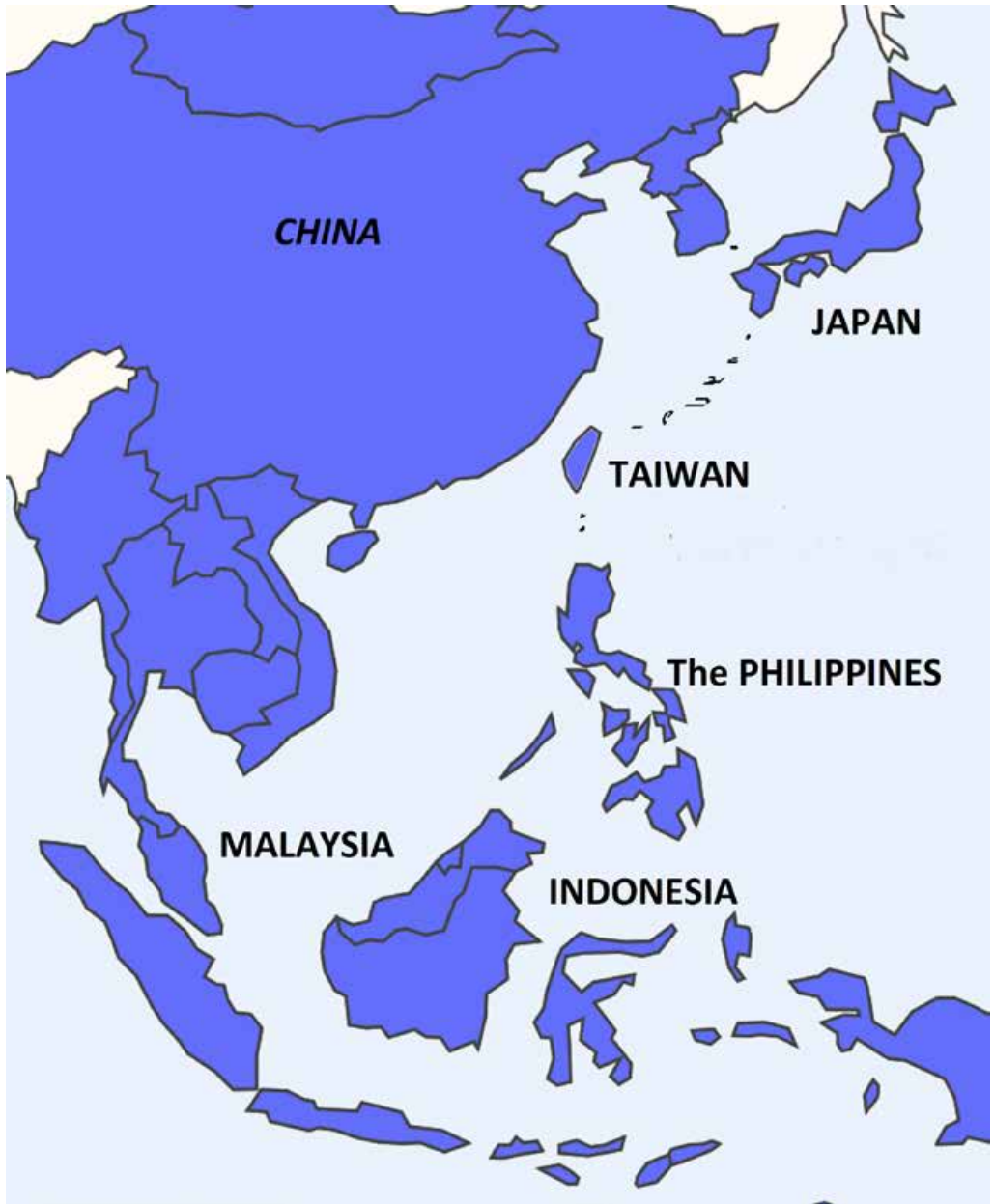
Taiwan's proximity to the PRC mainland is a significant factor. The PRC would need to assemble a large invasion fleet within range of potential enemy fire, posing a substantial risk. In 1954, U.S. President Eisenhower threatened to use nuclear arms against mainland China, a move that would have effectively dashed any PRC hopes of a successful invasion.

Most nations would, however, hesitate to use nuclear arms. In this scenario, the role of converted *Ohio*-class submarines becomes significant. Even if the PRC were able to achieve both naval and air supremacy in the Taiwan Strait, they would remain vulnerable to a devastating Tomahawk missile strike from *Ohio*-class submarines. In this context, the Taiwanese Hsiung Feng cruise missiles could also be considered. Cruise missiles have the capability to not only devastate enemy ships but also target troop concentrations and communications centers on the Chinese mainland, thus making a PRC invasion of Taiwan an impossible undertaking.

Overall, the island factor still works to Taiwan's advantage. The essential strategy is to maintain a robust military presence on the island, sufficient to counter a surprise attack, while making preparations for any large-scale invasion a hazardous endeavor. In the ages of sail, steam and aircraft, the second part would have been more difficult to ensure. In the age of the long-range missiles, the risks of concentrating troops and ships are considerable, whether the missiles are nuclear or conventional.

Taiwanese independence holds both strategic and tactical significance, as well as immense political importance. When the PRC attacked the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in 1954, Great Britain suggested that the USA should persuade Chiang Kai-shek to cede the islands, but U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles replied that it "would smell of Munich".³⁸ One might also consider Zhiguo Kong's comment on Taiwan's significance for the PRC's status in Asia. Thus, for strategic as well as for political reasons, Taiwan's geopolitical importance remains vastly disproportionate to its size.

38 Chien-Chao Hung, p. 279.



The map above shows how Taiwan is blocking the PRC's naval access to the Pacific Ocean. (Map: Guillaume (WMF), Wikimedia Commons. Modified. This work is covered by a valid free license.)

V. THE ISLAND FACTOR TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

The value of the island factor today can certainly be debated. In 2013, former U.S. Air Force Colonel Bruce Acker argued that: "... Gotland can also be described as an aircraft carrier that has run aground, underneath Russian air defenses, and within range of missiles placed in Kaliningrad."

Acker proceeded by pointing out that missiles can be depleted or overwhelmed, and that Gotland's strategic significance must be judged from a dynamic perspective.³⁹ Two years later, in 2015, Acker claimed that Russia had no interest in Gotland itself. Their primary concern was that the island should not be used by their "most likely enemy". Thus, Russia would be satisfied as long as Sweden prevented other nations from utilizing Gotland.⁴⁰

In a 2016 publication by the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences (Kungliga Krigsvetenskapsakademien), a different view was presented. The authors assumed that Gotland would be crucial in a conflict where Russia attacked the Baltic States – NATO members since 2004. Like Acker, they believed that Russia would seek to prevent NATO from utilizing the island.

However, Russia would also be interested in reducing its dependence on Kaliningrad by establishing Gotland as a missile base. An occupation of Gotland would also expand the Russian air defense zone. The authors emphasized that relocating air bases by one hundred kilometers would add fifteen minutes to an aircraft's endurance over the target – an increment that might seem insignificant but holds significance in this context. Finally, the authors suggested that by invading mainland Sweden, the Russians would gain further advantages. Such an operation would, however, involve more complications and risks than occupying Gotland.⁴¹

When Sweden joined NATO in March 2024, Russian hopes of a neutral Gotland vanished, and the core question – regarding the value of Gotland and the island factor – came to the fore.

Acker was initially optimistic about Russia's ability to suppress Gotland in the era of long-range missiles, but later he modified his stance. The Academy

39 Bruce Acker, "Gotland's strategic significance", 2013-10-04, <https://folkochforsvar.se/content/gotland-strategic-significance/> Read May 16, 2024.

40 Bruce Acker, "Rysslands sak är Sveriges", di.se, 11/12 maj 2015, 21.00/06:56, <https://www.di.se/artiklar/2015/5/11/debatt-rysslands-sak-ar-sveriges/> Read May 16, 2024.

41 Karlis Neretnieks (ed.), *Angrepp mot Sverige: Varför och hur*, Kungl. Krigsvetenskapsakademien (the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences) (Stockholm 2016), p. 69–70. The book is a collective effort by authors David Berman & Anders Carell & Frederick Fooy & Lars Helmrich & Karlis Neretnieks & Johan Sigholm & Marco Smedberg & Niklas Wiklund.

publication highlighted significant advantages for the Russians in possessing Gotland. It also implicitly underlined the island factor by pointing out the increased risks for Russia in attacking the Swedish mainland.

In the event of a conflict in the Baltic area, Russia might well recall the experiences of 1854–1855. A long-range missile struggle could resemble the aerial battles over Guadalcanal in 1942–1943, where the Japanese failed to resolve the matter through aircraft. Additionally, the dynamics of a future war in the Baltic area are far from clear. For instance, the Baltic States or Kaliningrad could change hands during the conflict.

The relevance of the island factor today is not entirely clear, although it seems unlikely that technology has advanced to the point where any military planner would accept enemy long-range missiles or aircraft on a strategically positioned island within their theater of operations. In this context, both Gotland and Guadalcanal likely still hold a geopolitical significance that is out of proportion to their area.

In the example of Taiwan, the island factor is likely the only factor keeping Taiwan independent of the PRC. Taiwan is also blocking the PRC's naval ambitions, complicating its access to the Pacific Ocean. These factors are unlikely to change in the near future. As long as long-range missiles remain central to modern warfare, the probability of a PRC conquest of Taiwan will be low. In the foreseeable future, Taiwan will probably continue to play a geopolitical role that is out of proportion to its size.

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Conclusion

BY JEREMY BLACK

Typical of modern usage, is the op-ed piece in the (London) Times on 11 June 2024: ‘North Korea itself seems to be itching to turn its bomb-making capacity into geopolitical clout.’¹ Looking to the future, geopolitics as a term appears to be a good bet because, like strategy, it lacks any unwelcome precision, and, more particularly, is of value as it bestrides, or rather shuffles between, the descriptive and the rhetorical, with the admonitory in particular to the fore. The last has been very much seen with the developing international crisis of the 2020s.

This situation will affect the use of geopolitics by military historians, and, as a related matter that has causal significance, the public reception of this usage. As such, there will be a continuation of the slippage in meaning seen for example with the ready use as ‘signifiers’ of terms such as Appeasement or Vietnam.

Scholars will prefer to focus on the analytical use of the term geopolitics, one linked to strategy and strategic geography but designed to provide more geographical heft than these formulations. The analytical use of the term may well come to depend on how far it can be seen as permissive rather than deterministic. Separately, the extent to which the world is not an isotropic surface, but, instead, geographically more complex, will definitely encourage interest in spatial factors in causation as well as description. The prevalence of environmentalism will encourage this. So also with the extent to which there is a human geography dimension to geopolitics as well as the physical geography one that tends to be far more pronounced in popular discussion, and can be seen in military usage at tactical, operational and strategic levels.

A form of social geopolitics will certainly be pertinent when most of the world lives in cities and when sectarian and ethnic issues are significant as causes and contexts of conflict. Looking back, it will be asked how far the geopolitical factors that contextualised conflict helped cause it. The latter tends to be the aspect that most attracts attention, in the concept of geopolitical drives, notably

1 R. Boyes, ‘Clock is ticking on Putin’s nuclear gamble,’ Times, 11 June 2024.

those for expansion and or security. This is not necessarily a helpful discussion, as it may well throw more light on international relations than on warfare. Yet, goals are significant, notably in framing the prioritisation that is crucial to strategy and in helping ensure a determination to keep going and to accept casualties accordingly. This element may be given a wider perspective if the public is encompassed in the goals and means of élite policymaking, with military morale a consequence of this synergy.

Irrespective of that point, geopolitical goals are not solely a matter of the background to conflict but also develop during it. This dimension repays consideration because, all-too-often, the literature ceases with the causes of a war, and thus underplays the situation during it. In practice, the latter is greatly affected, both by events and by the dynamics of wartime diplomacy. This interplay can be seen in the Russo-Ukraine war, for, alongside the apparent fixity of Putin's geopolitical ambition, comes the results of initial failure in 2022 and the pressures arising from relations with China and America, of changes and anticipated changes in both and of the impact of developments elsewhere notably the Syrian crisis of late 2024.

That, far from being destiny, geopolitics changes in its application which increases its value to the assessment of strategy as a means of discussing conflict. So also with competition and war as key elements in the understanding and presentation of geopolitical considerations. As this volume shows, the synergy is a very valuable one.



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The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 29 June 1919,
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ISBN: 9791298507746