

# Innovation and Historical Continuity in Great Power Competition

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**Abstract:** Even in this age of remarkable changes, the character of warfare and the continuities of geography and politics are weighty and instructive. Politicians and strategists often relearn the most fundamental lessons about these continuities. It is thus no surprise that the current security establishment in China is infatuated with the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the American naval power theorist who died in 1914.

**Keywords:** patterns, strategy, geography, nature of warfare, character of warfare, naval, China

In 2005, years before the Pentagon would declare this an era of great power competition, two experts on maritime power published a remarkable article in the journal *Comparative Strategy*. It declared in effect that Chinese strategists have become obsessed with Alfred Thayer Mahan.<sup>1</sup> Those authors, Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, then released a lengthy study, *Red Star over the Pacific*, that evidenced widespread enthusiasm in top security circles in the People's Republic of China (PRC) for a seapower theorist the Communists had long criticized, the American "imperialist" A. T. Mahan, whose line of important books appeared in the years before World War I.<sup>2</sup> In their second edition in 2018, Holmes and Yoshihara held to their position. This reaching Chinese

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interest in the American historical figure Mahan is very sensible, given what China is today and what it wishes to become.

New interest in one theorist may be read as part of an ongoing flood of data on China's economic expansion, growing foreign commerce, and warship construction. Certainly, China has been transitioning from a continental power to a new self-understanding as a mixed power with expansive maritime interests. And this Chinese appreciation for Mahan's work is also a reminder—which is needed on occasion amid our hyper-technological world—of the many things that do *not* change about security and war. Military history, wisdom about politics, and patterns in strategies may age, to be sure, but that which is old may well be more valuable than ever. Yet, another line of thought is sparked by the news of the Chinese study of old American military theories: the United States should be more deeply in thought on these matters of great power rivalry. How well does the United States know its own classics?

A. T. Mahan was no celebrated author among his American compatriots initially, as he began to publish profound books and essays. He became a celebrity in England, where people had studied seapower longer and more seriously than the Americans had. He was famous “over there” first, and the United States soon saw why. Paradoxically, today it is Americans that may need a reminder of how power is created and defended. Washington should waste no time resenting the skill the Chinese government is showing in quietly acquiring anchorages, resource bases, and communications sites abroad. Some such business is legal, and most of it is simply smart.<sup>3</sup> For the United States, the challenge is to outthink and outperform this increasingly confident rival.

In that spirit, no member of our Senate or staffer-officer in our Department of Defense can think they are wasting the few hours or days given over to a book by Mahan. In a notable turn of events, we could say that for public servants living in Washington, DC, rereading Mahan and “looking outward” may qualify these days as “opposition research.”

This article argues, in a line A. T. Mahan might appreciate, that the nature of warfare is unchanging and that:

Essential works of theory may come into renewed validity.

Patterns in strategy are not numerous and thus have a way of coming back in some form or another.<sup>4</sup>

Grand strategy—and military strategies—involve both art and science, and as such must be studied and practiced.

On this, world history is a storehouse of intellectual wealth.

Geography sets fundamental boundaries that must be understood and used well.

All of the above are among the fundamentals that each new age neglects, reconsiders, or confronts. They are always there, no matter if the year is 1910 or 2020. As the United States asks what is new in this epoch of great power competition, Americans would do well to grapple closely with the fundamentals and not be too distracted by the newest weapon, the strangest event, or the most recent experiment in space.

## **Geography and Strategic Culture**

Like human nature, geography is a foundation for fresh thinking about national needs and strategic options. Mahan's book *The Problem of Asia* was published in 1900, but it thinks through some of the same questions that would face Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Barack H. Obama when they indicated a "rebalance" toward Asia.<sup>5</sup> The weight of population, the extent of territory for Russia and China, the promise of commercial markets, and the prospects of threats from Asia all were of close interest to our seminal theorist of seapower. Mahan lobbied for, and almost lived long enough to see, a completed Panama Canal. The new canal significantly enhanced access to Asian markets, improved the geographical position of the United States, and opened new possibilities in American defense planning.

In world history, the rare cases of slicing through an isthmus to alter something as immutable as geography can make a difference in war. Crises punctuated the years leading into 1914, but Germany's top admiral, Alfred von Tirpitz, did not want to begin a war until Germany had completed the widening of the Kiel Canal, allowing its High Seas Fleet to pass more safely between the North and Baltic Seas at any convenient time.<sup>6</sup> This emphasized the importance of geography in national defense. Mahan had already seen that in peace (not only war), national strategy would be beautifully served by the opening of a Central American canal. Today, of course, he would grind his teeth at how the United States chose to give up control thereof.

Now, as Merchant Marine expert Larry Cosgriff observes, China has been slowly accumulating judicious purchases and long-term leases on both oceanfronts served by the Panama Canal.<sup>7</sup> The business interests and permanent installations mean intelligence collection. They also facilitate a great increase in the kinds of trade that serve a mercantile economy, such as China. Trade power can pay for military power, as Mahan taught, and the mainland Chinese have moved quickly and smoothly along those two parallel paths. These acquisitions in the canal zone are a local illustration, within our hemisphere, of Beijing's world-spanning effort to cinch together a belt of roads, trading posts, and harbors.

## Geopolitics

Geopolitics and strategic culture are phenomena closely related to the hard lines of physical geography. The first had its birth with thinkers about land and power, such as England's Halford J. Mackinder and with Germans in the nineteenth-century school of "world politics." In the post-1918 era (when Germans would have done best to advance their genius for science, music, and liberal arts), a newer school of geopolitics led by Dr. Karl Haushofer of Bavaria pointed ahead to Germanic expansion. The "place in the sun" demanded at the dawn of the twentieth century and leading directly into the First World War of 1914–18 was again demanded by voices much louder and cruder than Professor Haushofer's.<sup>8</sup> Ruinously associated with two world wars and unspeakable genocide, the term *geopolitics* almost vanished from use except as a kind of slur for most people in the decade after 1945.

But reality did not recede. And with time, a new and calm school of thoughtful academics have again come to the study of geopolitics and the proper use of it within other security studies. Colin S. Gray of the United Kingdom; the late Cold War scholar Harold W. Rood; and the younger American student of both, Professor C. Dale Walton, are among those to mix new ideas with old to produce things worthy of the strategist.<sup>9</sup>

## Strategic Culture

*Strategic culture* is a newer term and a kinder enterprise. Some find it a gentler way to talk about geopolitics, and others see it as opening up war studies to useful ancillaries such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and other concepts currently favored in graduate schools, such as studies in women, peace, and security. Those taking the pathway of strategic culture usually carry little with them of the work of the earliest geopoliticians, but they may offer much about power politics and how countries choose war or perform once in a war. At its worst, strategic culture is a maddeningly elusive phrase and part of an argument that certain outlooks on violence or approaches to security are attached to a given group (e.g., American Confederate generals in the Civil War, Han Chinese officialdom, or Pakistan's powerful bureaucrats in the Inter-Services Intelligence). Most advocates for the phrase keep their observations general, lest they sound simplistic or even racist, yet that makes them imprecise. They also drift in one direction: a China expert may write about three or four continuities as being expressions of a strong strategic culture, but this never seems to answer an obvious question. How is that one society, within little more than half a century, had its armies controlled by four men of wildly different outlooks? Consider a Qing emperor indebted to Confucius; democratic reformer Sun Yat Sen; the Marxist-Leninist atheist Mao Tse Tung with his highly original protracted war theory (which Sun Tzu would have condemned); and then the near-anti-Maoist

Deng Xiaoping, who produced another kind of military revolution. Can any declared strategic culture in China encompass all of these variations?

Perhaps a strategic culture advocate would rejoin that some important continuities can indeed help us understand the China of 2019. Mao praised much that could be found in the ancient book *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, and both these Chinese authors matter as much as ever. Additionally, there are current official Chinese publications on defense that show many historical allusions and deceased strategists' names, Western as well as Eastern—doubtless with good reason. Our drive to understand a rival's strategic culture is a worthy one, a natural part of the assessment process intelligence experts, general staff officers, and social scientists are rightly taught to perform.

Innovations, more so than continuities, are also visible in the ancient rivalries. When Rome made war on the empire of Carthage, the latter's power prevailed over most of the Mediterranean Sea. In the Second Punic War, Hannibal invaded Italy proper. But it was the special insight of the Roman general Fabius (Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus in full) to see that: (a) Hannibal could become bewildered if his Roman opponents declined to meet him, month after month, in possible battles on their own home ground, and (b) that the Roman administrative system across Italy was stable and steady enough to take a pummeling by an invader and survive without breaking. Hannibal, undefeated, broke off and returned to Carthage—only to be beaten on his home ground by another Roman general, Scipio Africanus, whose legions arrived via the sea. The Punic Wars thus witnessed major Roman innovations in strategy and saw dramatic enhancement of the range of Roman abilities. This Italian land power came onto the sea not just in moving legions but in fighting great naval battles. The rivals' third war confirmed the ruination of Carthage, its loss of both land and seapower, and the ascendancy of a Roman empire.<sup>10</sup>

## Ideologies

Ideology is often more explicit, more plainspoken, and sometimes more brutal than are our modern ideas of strategic culture. The French Revolution of the late eighteenth century was internationalist in its character and arguably dictated that violence would be exported to conservative autocratic zones of Europe beyond the borders of France.<sup>11</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte's special and devious ability was to inherit a mass popular movement and to despotically direct political and social powers into transnational advances and conquest. Other internationalist ideologies followed—anarchism and Leninism—which also came with certain tendencies: a global vision, ideological agents abroad, and readiness for fighting abroad.

Nationalism is no less important. There is almost no way to understand the German Third Reich—in expansiveness, in depredations against non-

Germanic populations, or in its Axis alliance with Italy—unless one comes to grips with the ideology of National Socialism. Adolf Hitler understood his school of thought to be a revolutionary ideology, not just another normal political formation. He knew, as did many professional officers in Austria and Germany, that this new mid-twentieth-century program of thought and action directed by the National Socialist German Workers' Party and glorifying force had constituent parts that defied a thousand years of German culture, even as they also built on martial strengths garnered in the three wars of Bismarck from 1862 to 1870.

## Coalitions

Battle studies have immense value, especially for the education of military officers. Such investigations and dramas may teach and also dazzle: focus on the great captain Napoleon's battles shaped much of the Western world's military education for an eon. But maturing officers and other students of strategic matters come to take as much interest in coalitions. The Third German Reich was destroyed by 1945 in the same way as the First French Empire in 1815—by massive coalitions. Otto von Bismarck, whose wars helped define the intervening era, understood that power may be intoxicating but that it also yields counteraction by neighbors, near or far. An opposing coalition (a *balancer* against the would-be hegemon, to use the term of political science), may not really cohere for years, as against Napoleon. Or, it may come together with swiftness, as with the U.S.–UK alliance formed in 1940 and 1941, even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. When great coalitions do form, all earlier balancing of powers may become obsolete. By the time World War II ended, only a handful of states in the world had *not* taken a side. This successful Allied grand strategy was crucial. By contrast, Hitler appeared brilliant in 1936 or 1939 only to break with consuls of common sense by making war on two fronts—just as he broke with history's lessons against marching upon Moscow. Faring badly, he doubled the gamble and went to war with all the world.

Not many enemies make such blunders. Some in command consider well the lessons of past coalition wars. As a rising state, China explicitly takes notice that the unipolar world of 1990 has been vanishing. China thinks of its pre-nineteenth century greatness as the true norm, vis-à-vis any period of American preeminence in the Pacific. The disquieting skills of China in the twenty-first century go beyond technical successes in copying advanced Russian and American weapons or building more supercomputers than any other state. Americans disturbed with how China acquires U.S. laboratory research results should pay as much attention to how China is buying or borrowing our allies. Fortunately, Vietnam is still wary and remembers the PRC invading in 1979. Australians were not swayed by a visit of three PRC warships in Sydney Harbor

in June 2019. But the Republic of the Philippines has been dislodged from its former coalitions, disoriented in ways to be noticed by students of Sun Tzu. Manila is adrift, and the shift is toward Beijing at the expense of seven decades of formal alliance with the United States. This has happened at the same historical moment when a Permanent Court of Arbitration agreed with Manila's lawyers that China is wrongfully encroaching on Filipino maritime rights.<sup>12</sup> It is also happening when whole sectors of Filipino opinion makers worry about foreign narcotics, most of it from China or the product of precursors from China. Washington and Manila must account for the shadow over their alliance, and legislators should be suggesting what the two capitols could be doing.

Other regional actors, such as Thailand and Malaysia, could suffer the same fate of seeking out new coalitions. Will they become like Burma, which is cleaved in tribal and political parts by low-intensity conflicts, perpetrated in some respects by China, and seemingly without good leadership?<sup>13</sup> Such tendencies could be surmounted if America improved its alliances, but few believe the United States is doing so. Gratitude is due to Japan, a superb ally and a powerful security partner. Yet, consider how one U.S. president bulldozed Japan into joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership and then the next made the United States defect from that same trade agreement.<sup>14</sup> This is indicative of the uncertainty that may lead some allies to reconsider how reliable the United States is. Meanwhile, two U.S. security allies, Japan and South Korea, quarrel and have decided to not renew an important partnership in the exchange of military information.<sup>15</sup>

## **Regional Alliances and Arrangements**

The study of geopolitics helps account for such changes in alliances and also the rise of new regional arrangements and regional alliances. As America wore uncomfortably—and could not keep—the cloak of unipolar hegemony, big powers such as Russia and China may create new problems for themselves as they push outward assertively, breaking political and geographical barriers. In this vision, President Vladimir Putin's investments in Venezuela at the moment may garner him some prestige, but Russia does not need anything Venezuela produces, including oil, that it could not already enjoy—if at slightly higher prices. China's bullying of small democracies may attain short-term gains but lose out in the long run. If these small nation-states are supported well by the United States and others, they may rally against Beijing or other international great power rivals, as Vietnam already has against Beijing.

Other causes will yield new alliances, and Washington must move with the opportunities instead of watching opportunities lost. There is no reason to accept a "tripolar world" of great powers if the accepted troika is Russia, China, and the United States; this excludes approximately 200 more countries, which

may not wish to see Moscow and Beijing pushing for more global influence. The “balancing” that fascinates observers may be as assured as any other continuity of international relations. One should welcome the slowly strengthening role of the African Union in peacekeeping missions attending to African hot spots. A much stronger and more partisan Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is sadly unlikely yet would be welcomed by democracies everywhere, and one might say the same of the Organization of American States (OAS). Fortunately, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the globe’s leading example of longevity for an active alliance, a significant achievement that inspires envy in many national capitals. Russia and China may have taken account of the expansion of NATO when they formed their new Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 (then consisting of six states). A tendency toward new or refreshed regional alliances may also be encouraged by the new authoritarians so often in the world press. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, Viktor Orban of Hungary, and Recep T. Erdogan of Turkey offer examples of leaders who have their own views and can choose a third way. Just as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping are now friendly to each other at summits, leaders of medium-size powers may find or forge new regional or transnational relations to offset larger trends that disturb them, such as great power acquisitiveness or commercial domination.

### **New Forms of Power**

The above fundamentals remain, even as students of great power rivalry identify industrial and technical revolutions that at times open new windows into military opportunities or cause strategic shifts. At the same time, the complexity of judgments about what kinds of power are important have been increasing. Our earliest chronicles of war emphasize land power, including the genius of commanders such as Julius Caesar of Rome and Alexander the Great of Macedonia; these accounts will never lose power to teach. Such men did not just win battles—they used those battles to implement sweeping political changes on the face of the Earth to create empires where there had been smaller states and cities. Mahan and his gifted English counterpart Julian Corbett became the late nineteenth century seapower theorists and, in effect, advisors to senators, ministers, and kings. *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was translated into German and placed on every German warship before 1914.<sup>16</sup> Industry and logistics have their own domains in war and security. Failings in those paired aspects of power have cost nations wars. In this realm, it is clear that states must perform thoughtfully and thoroughly during peacetime; if they wait until war starts, it is too late. Logistics and martial industry are central to why grand strategy is as important as campaign or battle strategies.

Airpower has emerged proudly in the past hundred years. Italian theorist

Giulio Douhet is thought to have overstated the case for bombing in the pre-World War II era but others with more balanced hopes for aerial weaponry have seen remarkable successes. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) colonels who wrote *Unrestricted Warfare* in 1999 showed the closest interest in the Coalition's swift 1991 victory over Iraq; the authors were simply agape at the results.<sup>17</sup> Few readers noticed how they heaped praise on the military helicopter as a new king of battle—one of many indicators of the changes flitting across the old face of war.

The militarization of space was emerging as a question late in the United States-USSR rivalry, with published discussion of satellite killers, space-based lasers, as well as the launching of spy and reconnaissance satellites by both countries. Russia and China today are adapting to this new realm, prompting the White House to create a Space Force. There is the new and emerging threat of using cyber powers against adversaries. Massive well-planned attacks have offset computer systems, industry, and civic infrastructure in Georgia, Iran, Ukraine, and other countries. It is obvious that this new realm must be addressed when a state as small as the rogue North Korea can stun an American corporation and is purportedly behind the massive WannaCry attack, and when another as small as Estonia has determinedly made itself a master of cyber defense, much to the advantage of NATO.

Any astute observer cannot ignore soft power. To the well-known forms of “prestige” or “good will” are now added all manner of subtleties, from influencing foreign populations' elections as Russia has been doing, to shaping a (relatively new) public diplomacy apparatus within the U.S. Department of State as the Americans have tried. There are good reasons for the smiles of China's president Xi Jinping on various global stages in these past few years. The calm grins reflect his country's increasing influence, and they also reflect satisfaction taken in the ambitious plans, expensive investments, immense labors, and patient outreach that lie behind those Chinese gains below the level of open conflict. China has successfully combined soft power and economics in enterprises abroad.

Thus, the duo of PLA colonels (Liang and Xiangsui) have argued that warfare is now “unrestricted” in three main ways. First, the diameter of the mouth of one's cannons is less likely than ever to be decisive. We see a relatively new cluster of means of competing, fighting, or both. These include trade wars, currency manipulation, international terrorism, and information warfare. The two authors assert that, really, there is nothing that *cannot* be a weapon of war. Second, what will be most novel are unusual combinations of these tools by the civilians and military officers making war. Before, one had to study the remarkable skill and timing of Robert E. Lee's combined cavalry with infantry on a given field; now, a government is likely to strike with an electromagnetic pulse

(EMP) and a disabling blow to several satellites in concert with an amphibious landing, etc., all within the first hours of conflict. We have not even mentioned nuclear weapons, which, intriguingly, the book *Unrestricted Warfare* touches on only in the category of less likely to be used.<sup>18</sup> China is among the many powers that has nuclear weapons. Rivals to China, Russia, and other regimes will find a continued need of their own deterrent forces.

## Future Wars

To peer into the future as one would “through a glass and darkly” is a task as worthy as it is difficult. One set of results, in such an inquiry, might come as “alternative futures.” The first of those may well be akin to *Unrestricted Warfare*, which deserves a closer analysis. Coauthor Qiao Liang graduated into the flag ranks and still serves; coauthor Wang Xiangsui is now with a Chinese think tank. Their book seems too original and compelling to be dismissed as some kind of deception aimed at geopolitical rivals. It is a worthy prompt to our own thinking within the space granted by peacetime to work on questions of grand strategy, military strategy, and procurement. This vision, if we may adumbrate it here, pays no heed to known rules of warfare or international law. It speaks of “increased global disorder”—also the concern of the 2018 U.S. *National Defense Strategy*—not as something to be worried over and resisted but as a natural condition, almost to be embraced. It anticipates semi-chaos and the timely maneuvers of clever states within such disorder. And should real war come, the two authors seem to anticipate speedy, devastating conclusions without saying so directly. The whole concept is a direct challenge to our age-old “just war” views and Westphalian ideas of a hard difference between war and peace and our surety that when war comes it is only a loathsome interval to be managed victoriously so as to return to peace and order.

Perennial low-intensity conflict, a sort of expected violence short of outright organized war, is a related but differing alternative future for the world. In this vision, elements such as organized crime, insurgency, and terrorism erode the power and legal sovereignty of established states. All states, large and small, are affected. It is the Philippines, nowhere near to collapse but plagued by Islamic State fighters, Moro gunmen, old resentments, and the Maoist New People’s Army, which just reached 50 years of age. It is a once-promising Myanmar that, despite efforts by a few noble democrats, cannot drag itself out of ethnic violence and into the twenty-first century. Visits there by President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton are forgotten, while military authorities mix their old authoritarianism with new Buddhist revivalism to encourage violence against the Burmese Muslim minority. India, a stunning success story, is dogged by fighting in the North Eastern Region and Maoists in the central eastern “red belt.” In this universe, great powers may not wish to risk all in a major conven-

tional war. Instead they compete, harbor their powers, and carry on proxy wars in borderlands or the cockpit of the Middle East or Afghanistan, while adhering to unwritten rules about nonescalation with major rivals. Private armies and mercenaries may attain unusual power in such a world.<sup>19</sup> There is a grinding, gritty realism about this vision, but it overlooks two dangers. One is that a substate group can arm itself with a weapon of mass destruction. If a terrorist attack on New York's Manhattan led to major international conflict in the fall of 2001, could not something as world altering occur in 2021 if any great capitol were voided for years to come by a biological weapon? The second danger is that widespread anarchism and chaos lead directly to dictatorships who allege they can clean it up.

A third alternative view is that major state war is highly possible and even probable. Winston Churchill's magisterial six-volume history of World War I has an early passage evoking images of British statesmen floating, as if on a gentle sea cruise, through a calm, palmy world, unable to imagine a globe that is *not* dominated by the queen's reach. Here was a fine time of unparalleled wealth, a large middle class in the West, telegraph-enhanced communications, and growing trade, travel, and literacy linking different peoples in ways almost unforeseen. War seemed impossible to politicians who missed multiple opportunities to prevent world war. Churchill concluded his long, rosy description of how globalization in his day seemed to banish all nightmares, but then he added a sentence of eight short words: "It would be a pity to be wrong."<sup>20</sup> August 1914 staggered states and burned the reigning popular consciousness. Some say the world never did recover; others say it did, only to have a second world war dwarf the first.

This worldview in which major war must be considered likely utterly rejects *The New Rules of War* by Sean McFate as decisively as it rejected the 1990 model by Martin van Creveld with the (errant) title *The Transformation of War*.<sup>21</sup> Real war has not vanished. Real wars with tanks, aircraft, battleships, and armored amphibious vehicles were fought and won by powerful belligerents such as the United States in Iraq in 1991 and 2003. And the United States has needed masses of equipment and very large professional forces to make important local wars in Vietnam, Panama, Grenada, and Bosnia. China and Pakistan have both battled India since 1947, and now all three countries have nuclear weapons and at times mutually loathe one another. Crime bosses, intifadas, and al-Qaeda terrorists remain with us yet have not replaced state governments in this world. If Yugoslavia can disintegrate into a theater war of civilizations, one may also see future situations where a coalition of well-organized outside "Clausewitzian" state powers storm into a fracturing nation-state to restore order. If Middle Eastern states such as Syria and Iraq can seem to disintegrate under the Islamic State's revolution, then again the system of states has struck back and

reasserted sovereignty. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has not merely reorganized and tightened its Russian Federation; it is thrusting itself back into the affairs of adjoining nation-states in a fashion many in the Kremlin formerly practiced adeptly.<sup>22</sup> Today's "gray zone activity" is no more a geopolitical novelty than it was in the 1980s, another era when many members of Congress, executives, and parliaments were grappling with such things. For example, anti-Communist insurgencies and proxy wars of the 1980s were often responses to the earlier Communist wars and subversions sponsored by Moscow and Beijing, which plagued the decades after 1945.

## Conclusion

Decisive and wise leaders may work through, for, or against these trends in international affairs. No one is the master of the United States, and while our choices are sometimes bewildering, they are ours to make. Fate ordains neither global war nor slippage of U.S. power. But good politicians have much to do. Good military leaders, skilled in both the science and art of war, have their own say in the high councils and their own leadership to perform. It is the recommendation of the author that history, prudence, and patterns in past strategies all suggest something important (and occasionally brutal to those who neglect it): despite the swirl of changes always buffeting the world, there are fundamentals and continuities that never vanish and always demand renewed attention. This is the nature of warfare that Clausewitz described so well as against something he also understood and experienced: the varied "character" of a given war that is so visible, present, and demanding.

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## Notes

1. James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Influence of Mahan upon China's Maritime Strategy," *Comparative Strategy* 24, no. 1 (2005): 23–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495930590929663>. Consider pp. 24–25: "Mahan's influence on Chinese strategic thought was palpable, for instance, at a symposium on 'sea-lane security' held in Beijing in the spring of 2004. Scholar after scholar quoted Mahan at the symposium, attesting to his influence. And, almost without exception, they quoted the most bellicose-sounding of Mahan's precepts." The author's own studies in translated Chinese sources can confirm such interest, as in an official 2013 reference to that "outstanding" treatise by A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1890). As someone who began in the late 1980s to collect all of A. T. Mahan's books, the author recommends (to today's reader interested in China) not just his 1890 study and its introductory essays and six "elements of sea power" but also A. T. Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1900).
2. Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), and the revised 2d edition, 2018. On Mahan, see especially pp. 16–18 of the first edition of *Red Star*.
3. These sentences refer to long-term leases, Chinese foreign aid in maritime matters, etc.; they do not refer to intellectual property theft or that fiction the "9-Dash Line."

- The latter is a Chinese maritime claim reaching eastward to all but capture the South China Sea, leaving mere littorals for the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Formalized by the PRC in a 1951 assertion, it is not deemed credible by outsiders and was recently rejected by a world court of arbitration.
4. A few such patterns were explored in the author's chapter "On Strategic Thinking: Patterns in Modern History," in *Statecraft and Power: Essays in Honor of Harold W. Rood*, ed. Christopher C. Harmon and David Tucker (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 55–86. Others who have written better on this theme of strategic "patterns" include Williamson Murray and Eliot A. Cohen. See, for example, the latter's fine essay on "The Historical Mind and Military Strategy," *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2005.07.002>.
  5. White House, "FACT SHEET: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific," press release, 16 November 2015.
  6. There is a related comment in memoirs of Sir Sydney R. Fremantle. The deputy chief of naval staff of Great Britain noted that "the strategical advantages possessed by the enemy in the existence of the Kiel Canal, which enabled him to move his Battle Fleet at will . . . to the North Sea or the Baltic." Quoted by Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Ashfield Press, 1987), 257.
  7. Larry Cosgriff (Merchant Marine expert), interview with author, Washington, DC, 3 June 2019. According to Cosgriff, "The largest projects China has undertaken in Panama for their own account are marine terminal concessions on both ends of the canal. Hutchison Whampoa built and operates container terminals at both ends of the canal under long-term concessions with the Government of Panama . . . China is building a bridge across the canal FOR the Government of Panama, but will not have any ownership of same. . . . Huawei actually operates one of its largest distribution centers from inside the Colón Free Trade Zone. Finally, China was also contracted to build a large passenger cruise terminal on Perico Island off Panama [but the status is unclear]."
  8. In a 1901 speech, the ambitious young Kaiser Wilhelm II spoke of how Germany had conquered for itself "a place in the sun" and went on to make clear that he aspired for that nation's place to be enlarged. The phrase thus appears in many histories, for example, Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, trans. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967). In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Professor Karl Haushofer was known as a well-educated officer of dignity, according to Charles Robert Harmon, an American historian who later studied papers and diaries at the family home near Munich. This was forgotten—and became almost irrelevant—given the unmistakable linkage of some of Haushofer's geopolitical ideas to fascist aggression and the taking of "living space." See Derwent Whittlesey, "Haushofer: The Geopoliticians," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Meade Earle, with Craig Gordon A. and Gilbert Felix (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), chap. 16.
  9. Dr. Gray and Dr. Rood have each lectured at Marine Corps University. Dr. Walton is the author of several books, including *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: Multipolarity and the Revolution in Strategic Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
  10. Mahan devoted a short preface to the Roman-Carthaginian contest; see *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*.
  11. Among those who would indeed argue the point are Steven T. Ross, who deprecates the idea that this revolution was "exported" by the French. Steven T. Ross, *European Diplomatic History, 1789–1815: France Against Europe* (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger, 1969). The author was able to confirm the professor's view, some 20 years after his book appeared, when both served on the strategy faculty of the Naval War College.
  12. Thomas A. Mensah et al., *In the Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration before an Arbitral Tribunal Constituted under Annex VII to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China*, PCA Case No. 2013-19 (The Hague, Netherlands: Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016).

13. Bertil Lintner, "Myanmar's Wa Hold the Key to War and Peace," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), 6 September 2019.
14. Don Lee, "Trump's Withdrawal from TPP Trade Deal Is Hurting U.S. Exports to Japan," *Los Angeles (CA) Times*, 25 April 2019.
15. Cheng Xiaohu, "Demise of GSOMIA Deals a Blow to U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Global Times* (Beijing), 1 September 2019.
16. Holger H. Herwig, *"Luxury" Fleet: The Imperial German Navy, 1888–1918* (London: Ashfield Press, 1987), 20, 40.
17. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, trans. and published as the Pan American Edition, with introduction by Al Santoli (Dehradun, India: Natraj Publishers, 2007).
18. Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 44, 123.
19. See, for example, the chapters "There Is No Such Thing as War or Peace—Both Co-exist, Always" and "Mercenaries Will Return," in Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (New York: William Morrow, 2019).
20. Apart from those eight words, these sentences are the author's paraphrase of passages in Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, vol. 1, 1911–1914, 3d ed. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1924), 49. Now neglected, even by historians, this six-volume work written after the First World War is, among other things, an important treatment of geopolitics and great power rivalries.
21. McFate, *The New Rules of War*; and Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz* (New York: Free Press, 1991). In the late twentieth century, there was much valuable conversation in security studies about whether war's very nature had been "transformed," especially due to increased power of substate groups, and the influence of terrorism. The present author rejects that view. With Christopher Bassford and many others, the author tends to the view of Carl von Clausewitz that while the character of wars (or even a given war) may well vary, there is below a fundamental nature of war that is unchanging and must therefore be deeply appreciated. Perhaps our focus, now in the early twenty-first century, on "great powers" underscores this wisdom of Clausewitz.
22. It is valuable to look back at the article by Kevin D. Smith, "The Soviet Re-Union," *Strategic Review* (Fall 1995): 71–75. The article drew little attention, and even the journal has lapsed, yet both were excellent.