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THE CONFLICT OF LAND AND SEA IN GEOPOLITICS COMPARINGTHE GEOPOLITICAL THINKING OF HALFORD MACKINDER AND ALFRED MAHAN (1890-1914)

Benjamin FELLEGI

MA International Relations student at the Corvinus University of Budapest

Email: bfellegi98@gmail.com **ORCID**: 0000-0003-1526-2751

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E-mail: dergi@tuicakademi.org

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Abstract

Geopolitical thought goes back to many centuries, as it is rooted in both history and geography. Its modern formulation, however, began in the latter part of the 19th century. This was the time when the British Empire was still a hegemon, although its relative power was in decline. The newcomers, however, were rising fast. Tsarist Russia, the young German Empire, Imperial Japan, and the American colossus of the Western Hemisphere all slowly but surely ate away the dominance of Britain. This situation was reflected by a transformation of the international order, great power rivalry, and vivid geopolitical opining. This paper focuses on the latter. More precisely, the geopolitical thought of the American naval officer and historian Alfred Mahan, and that of British geographer, historian, and politician, Halford Mackinder. Their clashing views signified the antagonism between land and sea powers, a theoretical manifestation of the real opposition between the naval powers and land-based powers of both their era and history. This framework would go on to have a great impact upon strategic thinking and exert influence on geopolitics up until today.

Keywords: A.T. Mahan, H.J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, Sea Power, Land Power

Özet

Jeopolitik düşüncenin kökleri hem tarihe hem de coğrafyaya dayandığı için yüzyıllar öncesine uzanmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, modern formülasyonu 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında başlamıştır. Bu, göreli gücünün düşüşte olmasına rağmen, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun hâlâ bir hegemon olduğu zamandı. Ancak yeni gelenler hızla yükseliyordu. Çarlık Rusyası, genç Alman İmparatorluğu, İmparatorluk Japonya ve Batı Yarımküre'deki Amerikan devleri, Britanya'nın egemenliğini yavaş ama emin adımlarla yiyip bitirdiler. Bu durum, uluslararası düzenin dönüşümü, büyük güç rekabeti ve canlı jeopolitik görüş tarafından yansıtıldı. Bu makale ikincisine odaklanmaktadır. Daha doğrusu, Amerikan deniz subayı ve tarihçi Alfred Mahan'ın ve İngiliz coğrafyacı, tarihçi ve politikacı Halford Mackinder'ın jeopolitik düşüncelerine. Çatışan görüşleri, kara ve deniz güçleri arasındaki karşıtlığı, hem dönemlerinin hem de tarihlerinin deniz güçleri ile karada yerleşik güçler arasındaki gerçek karşıtlığın teorik bir tezahürü anlamına geliyordu. Bu çerçeve bugüne kadar stratejik düşünce ve jeopolitik üzerinde etki yaratmaya devam edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: A.T. Mahan, H.J. Mackinder, Jeopolitik, Deniz Gücü, Kara Gücü

I. Introduction

As the desperate struggle of the Peloponnesian War unfolded, Pericles gave a speech to the Athenian public. In this, he stated: "*I can tell you that of the two elements open to man's exploitation, the land, and the sea, you are the absolute masters of the whole of one of them*" (Thucydides: 2, 62). In this distinction between land and sea, he meant the latter, for Athenian fleet was as dominant on the Aegean Sea as the Spartan hoplites on the battlefields of Hellas. The main point here is that the juxtaposition of land power and sea power is a deeply historical idea. Although it was formulated most clearly by Alfred Mahan and Halford Mackinder, its origin precedes classical geopolitics and even that of the birth of Christ. Emphasizing examples such as the above is important because Mahan and Mackinder themselves were thinking from historical perspectives. So, to understand them, we need to do the same. My inquiry, however, is narrowed to the period between 1890 and 1914. This is practical because the two men's lives only partially overlapped. This asynchrony can be overcome by focusing on the time when both of them were alive and active. In this way, it is rather fortunate that Mahan started publishing relatively late in his life, at the time of Mackinder's coming to prominence. This almost quarter century long period, therefore,

provides much needed boundaries for a paper with limited ambitions, such as this one. The main question in this research is what are the key differences and underlying attitudes between the theses of Mahan and Mackinder?

I focused not just on the comparative analysis of the theories, but also on the intellectual background which inculcated them. I found this to be important epistemologically, as I deal mainly with ideas closely linked to people's points of view in this research. Hence, for sufficient comprehension the reconstruction of the intellectual context is needed.

But before diving into the analysis of this unique chapter in the history of geopolitics, some things should be noted about the subject in general (intentionally non-exhaustively, as this subject warrants a paper wholly dedicated to it). Geopolitics, as defined by Raymond Aron (2003: 191), combines the analysis of diplomacy, geographical features, and economic resources. This kind of thinking appeared in the 18th-19th centuries on a scientific level, centering around the intricate link between the human being and the environment he occupies. Montesquieu (*De l'esprit des lois*, 1748), Thomas Malthus (*An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society...*, 1798), and Alexander von Humboldt (*Kosmos*, 1845) are worth mentioning as founders of this academic practice. This tradition developed later in the 19th century into a distinct approach towards international relations, focusing on conflict and its spatial aspects. The name of Friedrich Ratzel should be mentioned here, as he was "*the central figure in the development of geographical thought in the late nineteenth century*" (Cahnman, 1944: 456). His main work (*Der Lebensraum: Eine Biogeographische Studie*, 1901) put forward the idea, based on Malthusian and Darwinian notions, that the expansive nature of life and confined nature of physical space result in a struggle for survival (Cahnman, 1944: 456). It is important to stress that in this epoch (that is before the advent of flight) military conflict as a geographical phenomenon was necessarily divided into the dualism of land and sea. This dualism, as noted above, holds an inherent antagonism. "*There is every reason to regard as fundamental, throughout history, the opposition of land and sea, of continental power and seafaring power*" – writes Aron (2003: 193). This mode of thinking has both a long past and a long future because it is based on the permanent factors of geography. And these factors should never be neglected, for Nicholas Spykman (1938: 236) famously wrote: "*geography does not argue. It simply is*".

II. Intellectual Context

As the subjects of this paper are people and their ideas, it is practical to briefly look at how they came to think what they thought. They were, in a large part, products of the Zeitgeist of

the 19th century. It is also important to see that this period brought fundamental changes in international politics. The Pax Britannica, which lasted since the Congress of Vienna, was fading, giving way to a new world order. This will be addressed later in more detail. It is worth mentioning, however, that this changing international system provides a contextual framework without which attempts to understand Mahan and Mackinder are futile. Now, let us turn towards the intellectual background of the two men.

A. Alfred T. Mahan

As an influential Russian official noted about 19th century America, the Monroe Doctrine and the "*dogma of Manifest Destiny*" enter "*more and more into the veins of the people*", in fact, "*the latest generation imbibes it with its mother's milk and inhales it with the air*" (LaFeber etal., 1993: 12). Mahan himself belonged to this generation. He was born in 1840 in West Point,New York, as the first son of Dennis Hart Mahan. His father taught at the military academy; his students included many of the civil war's key figures. For example, when Union commander Sherman reached Savannah in 1864 and met young Alfred he yelled: "*What, the son of old Dennis*!" (Puleston, 1939: 39). "Old Dennis" greatly influenced his son. Among others, he bequeathed to him his love and respect for military science and the army. Surely, this upbringing explains why he became not only a man of the pen but the sword as well. Mahan joined the navy shortly before the war and had his baptism of fire in naval attacks against Confederate fortifications (Puleston, 1939: 40). After the war, he travelled the world, gaining insight into the state of many countries (for example Japan during the Meiji Restoration). Eventually, Mahan, like his father, settled in education (by which time he was promoted to captain). His lectures at the Naval War College (of which he became president) formed the core of what would later become his magnum opus (Taylor, 1920: 39).

Mahan was devoutly religious, in fact, militantly so. His mother was key in installing this fervor, but the whole family was deeply pious (Puleston, 1939: 15). This religious sentiment was prevalent in many aspects of his life. For example, in his autobiography, the captain claimed that his theory of sea power was a result of illumination. About this inspiration, he wrote: "*the light dawned first on my inner consciousness; I owed it to no other man*" (Mahan, 1906: 224). Although it is evident that he read Theodor Mommsen's works on the Roman Empire with exceptional care: "*It suddenly struck me, whether by some chance phrase of the author* [Mommsen] *I do not know, how different things might have been could Hannibal have invaded Italy by sea*" (Mahan, 1906: 225). Later, religion would serve as a godly legitimization of his expansionist thesis. In his understanding, empire as a phenomenon was not only a

manifestation of divine will but a downright Christian duty (Crowl, 1986: 468). In the "*unwilling acquisition*" (quite a cynical phrase) of the Philippines, he remarks the "*preparation made for us, rather than by us*", which "*is so obvious as to embolden even the least presumptuous to see in it the hand of Providence*" (Mahan, 1900: 175). Like many protestants of his time, he saw God's hand in raising the United States to world power (interestingly, in this religious view also mixed Social Darwinism, which was also common) (McDougall, 1997: 104-105). His personal mission was to give voice to this providence, that is, to get the US out of its isolation.

B. Halford J. Mackinder

Mackinder was born in 1861, in Gainsborough, England. His father was a doctor, from whom he inherited his strong biological orientation. In addition to this, he later studied under the hands of Henry Nottage Moseley, a close associate of Darwin and Huxley, at Oxford (Blouet, 2004: 322). Apart from zoology, he gained extensive knowledge in geography and history. He gave his first lecture at the Royal Geographical Society at the tender age of twenty-five. The success of this is highlighted by the fact that during the following discussion Francis Galton said Mackinder "*was destined to leave his mark on geographical education*"(Gilbert, 1961: 27). Galton was correct, as Mackinder indeed left a lasting legacy not just in geopolitics, but in academic geography as well.

In his early works, we can already see his biological approach: "*A wealthy civilised community is a region tempting to the conqueror. Now conquerors are of two kinds – land-wolves and sea-wolves*" (Mackinder, 1887: 158). The biological similes and analogies projected to history and politics are apparent throughout his writings. This is no accident, as Mackinder was a Social Darwinist. He believed that natural selection applies to human societies. That human societies and races permanently fight for survival, the result of which is the annihilation of the 'weak' (Kearns, 2009: 69). In this, he differed from original Darwinism which put forward the fight of individuals for survival and not entire groups. If the Russian official warned that the new American generation was inhaling Manifest Destiny with the air, then the same is true for late 19th century scientists with Social Darwinism. Mackinder studied and socialized in a time when radical concepts like the eugenics movement were tremendously popular (from Germany to the US) (Weikart, 2003: 279). This influenced him at least as much as the fundamental religious atmosphere influenced Captain Mahan. It was also the fear of existential threat, the annihilation in the fight for survival, that led him to the quixotic enterprise of building the cohesion of the British Empire.

III. Mahan and Mackinder – Fundamental Ideas

A. Sea Power According to Mahan

Walter Raleigh famously said that "*whosoever commands the sea, commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world and consequently the world itself*" (Connery, 2010: 686). Even though Mahan was quite an original thinker, his position on this issue was very similar. What he did was to construct a historical and articulate geopolitical framework that explained this aphorism.

Upon retiring from active service, Mahan became president of the Naval War College at Newport. It was here he wrote his first book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, which soon catapulted him to world fame. The naval historian set out to prove that the rise and fall of great powers rested on their sea power (or in the latter case their lack of). "*The history of Sea Power is largely, though by no means solely, a narrative of contests between nations, of mutual rivalries, of violence frequently culminating in war. The profound influence of sea commerce upon the wealth and strength of countries was clearly seen long before the true principles which governed its growth and prosperity were detected*" - can be read on the first page of *The Influence* (Mahan, 1890: 1). The historical dimension of this is especially important for Mahan, as he wanted to create a strategy from the building blocks of authentic examples and conclusions. Alexander the Great, Hannibal, or Caesar had no knowledge of gun powder, yet Napoleon Bonaparte, the founder of modern warfare, spent an innumerable amount of hours studying their campaigns - wrote Mahan (1890: 2). It is obvious, that ancient and modern era warfare are incomparable. What Mahan points out is that certain tactics can be elevated to the level of general principles, something he called strategy. For example, marching on foot was replaced by railways, consequently allowing armies to move previously unimaginable distances in a greatly reduced time. These, however, are only quantitative changes. The generality of an army moving from point A to point B is that it has to concentrate on a certain position and attack the enemy - these do not change, regardless of any technological advance (Mahan, 1890: 8). As these strategies were established in land warfare, Mahan was convinced he could do the same regarding sea warfare. For this, however, he had to determine what sea power was.

Interestingly, such a central idea in his thinking was never precisely explained. He dedicated only the introductory and closing chapters of his book to formulate a somewhat concise notion of sea power. There were two main maxims: first, command of the sea through the strength of a navy, and second, the combination of maritime trade, colonial possessions, and access to foreign markets (Crowl, 1986: 486). In Mahan's (1890: 28) words: "*In these three*

things – production, with the necessity of exchanging products, shipping, whereby the exchange is carried on, and colonies, which facilitate and enlarge the operations of shipping (…) *– is to be found the key to much of the history, as well as of the policy, of nations bordering upon the sea*". In this sense, colonization, industry, trade, and shipping are inherently connected. This approach is not accidental, as the principal focus of Mahan's historical inquiry was the 17th and 18th centuries, when overseas expansion, grand conflicts, and mercantilism made up large sections of politics. These were also the centuries when Western Europe laid the foundations of its mastery of the world through the conquest of the vast oceans (Braudel, 1992: 402). This domination reached its peak at the time Mahan was publishing his works, which he and his converts saw as living proof of the superiority of sea power.

Mahan also paid close attention to geographical conditions that affect the sea power of states. In this, he created six categories: "*I. Geographical Position. II. Physical Conformation, including, as connected therewith, natural productions and climate. III. Extent of Territory. IV. Number of Population. V. Character of the People. VI. Character of the Government, including therein the national institutions*" (Mahan, 1890: 28-29). He elaborated on these in great detail on the following pages, which I will summarize shortly. The geographical conditions that determine sea power tend to overwrite specificities, for example, the ambitions and plans of a given leader. The island nation of England, therefore, had a natural advantage in sea power over the Dutch and French. No matter how much Louis XIV or Napoleon wanted to break England's naval superiority, they had to divert most of the resources to maintain huge armies, disabling them the possibility of naval domination. But geographical position also has significant economic implications. English control of the Channel and Spanish control of the entrance to the Mediterranean proved to be very lucrative. Regarding the territorial structure of a country, it is not the sheer extent or demography that matters. Rather, the importance lies in the number of people living in the proximity of the coasts and the number of accessible harbors. For a sea power to exist, its population must be involved in commerce. The Spanish and Portuguese, for example, could not become primary naval powers, because they focused on the exploitation of Latin America instead of commercial activities. And finally, the national institutions and form of government also influence the nature of sea power. Government in this sense has to be aligned with the inclinations of the governed: "*It would seem probable that a government in full accord with the natural bias of its people would most successfully advance its growth in every respect; and, in the matter of sea power, the most brilliant successes have followed where there has been intelligent direction by a government fully imbued with the spirit of the people*" (Mahan, 1890: 58).

B. Sea Power in History

Mahan embedded in history his view of the geopolitical superiority of sea power. He dedicated his books to provide factual examples and proofs of this notion. Be it the War of the League of Augsburg at the closing of the 17th century or the Napoleonic Wars, sea power consistently provided the means to the victors. Because of this, Great Britain naturally got most of Mahan's praise, while France received criticism. Who emerged as the clear winner of the War of Spanish Succession, for example? "*Was it with these* [France, Spain, Austria, etc.], *who had waged war more and more exclusively by land, and set their eyes more and more on gains on the land*" or was it Great Britain, who in the meantime "*was building up her navy, strengthening, extending, and protecting her commerce, seizing maritime positions* (…) *founding and rearing her sea power upon the ruins of that of her rivals, friend and foe alike*" (Mahan, 1890: 223)? Naturally, Mahan's answer is the latter. But the captain did not always put Britain on the pedestal (there is an exception to every rule). Considering the War of American Independence, he lengthily quoted the letters of George Washington, to show that the General himself viewed naval superiority as the key to victory (Mahan, 1890: 397-400). This superiority by the otherwise dominant Britain was temporarily lost, which led to the capitulation of Cornwallis and the main British army at Yorktown after the French fleet cut their supply lines (Keegan, 2004: 348). Accordingly, this only proved that had France concentrated on her navy more often, she would have secured more victories against her arch enemy on the other side of the Channel. In Mahan's analysis, the final test of the clash between sea and land powers came with the riseof Napoleon. The captain dealt with this subject in a separate book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, published three years after his original work. As it turned out, all the might of the Grande Armée and Napoleon's domination over continental Europe were not enough to force Britain on her knees. The naval blockade set up after Trafalgar compelled the emperor to engage in similar countermeasures (the Continental System from 1806). This, however, was so costly that Tzar Alexander I chose to open the ports of Russia, facing open war with the rest of French-controlled Europe (Crowl, 1986: 452). As a response, Napoleon marched as far as Moscow, to his demise, in 1812. The victory of Nelson rendered the invasion of the British Isles impossible, which in the long run caused the death of continental hegemony. As Mahan (1893: 184-185) noted: "*that noiseless pressure upon the vitals of France, that compulsion, whose silence, when once noted, becomes to the observer the most striking and awful mark of the working of Sea Power. Under it, the resources of the Continent wasted more and more with each succeeding year; and Napoleon, amid all the*

splendor of his imperial position, was ever needy (...) *To borrow his own vigorous words, in the address to the nation issued before he joined the army,"To live without commerce, without shipping, without colonies, subjected to the unjust will of our enemies, is to live as Frenchmen should not." Yet so had France to live throughout his reign, by the will of the one enemy never conquered*". In conclusion, this is to be learned from the history of the struggle between land and sea powers, and this is to be applied to the future. Control of Ocean trade routes and the strategic positions along with them by a superior navy is the key to world domination. With these, one could eventually paralyze even the strongest yet existing land power, which otherwise found no match on the battlefields of Europe.

1. Land Power According to Mackinder

A few months before the signing of the French-British entente, the English geographer Halford Mackinder surprised his audience with a thesis that contradicted Mahan's doctrines. His lecture (*The Geographical Pivot of History*) was soon published, opening a new chapter in geopolitical thinking. Mackinder's approach was a holistic one that saw land and sea as part of the same world system, rejecting the dichotomy put forward by Mahan (Freedman, 2013: 117). Although he also put much emphasis on the permanent factors of geography, the Englishman had a very different historical understanding relating to them.

At the heart of the Mackinderian geopolitical analysis was always Eurasia, the supercontinent. Even at the end of the 19th century, it was clear that this was the epicenter of great power competition. For good reason too: China, India, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the states of continental Europe were all encompassed on this "world island". To be fair, Mahan also noted the geopolitical importance of a vast region stretching from Asia Minor to the Korean Peninsula (Mahan, 1900: 21). However, Mackinder, opposite to Mahan, did not think in a Eurocentric way: "*I ask you* (…) *to look upon Europe and European history as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history*" (Mackinder, 1904: 169). Of course, this did not mean that he thought of Europe as morally inferior too.

He divided the world into three parts: "Pivot Area", "Inner Crescent" and "Outer Crescent". The first refers to a small area west of the Urals and the much larger Siberia and Central Asia. The second refers to continental Europe, the Middle East, the British Raj, China, and South-East Asia. The last one refers to the Americas, Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the British and Japanese islands. But how is it that of all the listed regions, it is the Central Asian steppes that constitute the most important? Mackinder's answer lies in geography. If one looks at the Pivot Area and the projection of the continental river drainage of Eurasia, one will

see the same map. This is very important, as all the navigable rivers of this region "*have been practically useless for purposes of human communication with the outer world*" (Mackinder, 1904: 177). In other words: the Pivot Area is and has always been fully protected from the power projection of sea powers by the iron law of geography. Also, as Mackinder adds: "*We have in this immense area all the conditions for the maintenance of a sparse, but in the aggregate considerable, population*" (Mackinder, 1904: 177). This means that we have a huge territory that is capable of feeding a great number of people, who never have to worry about a naval invasion, but themselves can always attack in almost any direction (the radius of action depends on the efficiency of their mobility). This considered, Mackinder (1904: 184) puts forward his question: "*Is not the pivot region of the world's politics that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships, but in antiquity lay open to the horse-riding nomads, and is today about to be covered with a network of railways*?".

2. Land Power in History

When it comes to the historical outline of land power, Mackinder significantly widens his perspective, compared to Mahan. The captain saw as the embodiment of land-sea conflict the struggle between England and France. Mackinder, on the contrary, identified the constant pressure weighing on the Inner Crescent by the Pivot Area as the historical manifestation of the land-sea conflict (Kruszewski, 1954: 393). As noted above, this was made possible and unchangeable by geographical factors. Capitalizing on this advantage "*all the settled margins of the Old World* [Inner Crescent] *sooner or later felt the expansive force of mobile power originating in the steppe*" (Mackinder, 1904: 178). What was the potential of this mobile force, one may ask? Mackinder looked to the Mongol Empire, which 'out-conquered' every previous empire, occupying a landmass hitherto unthinkable. This gigantic territory could not be held together for long under 13th century conditions. However, things rapidly changed in the 19th century. The world "*shrank*" with the advent of railways, steamships, and the telegraph (Ferguson, 2004: 140). This meant new possibilities, especially for the state occupying the Pivot Area: the Russian Empire. The centuries-long expansion of the tzars resulted in the complete integration of the pivotal region, which enabled them to attack in any direction while being protected from the naval powers. This is one of the most important historical processes according to Mackinder. As he notes: "*The Russian army in Manchuria is as significant evidence of mobile land-power as the British army in South Africa was of sea-power*", which led him to conclude that "*Russia replaces the Mongol Empire*", as the "*full development of her modern railway mobility is merely a matter of time*" (Mackinder, 1904: 184). The combination

of this mobility and the geographical advantages of the Pivot Area implies absolute supremacy for the land power against any sea powers.

IV. Fundamental Differences

A. Offense and Defense

Based on the historical context, I propose that the key difference between the geopolitical thinking of Mahan and Mackinder came from their divergent attitudes toward the future. These mindsets can be characterized as offensive and defensive. For Mahan, the future was something to look forward to with great optimism, therefore, he thought offensively. Mackinder, however, was full of concerns, which is reflected in his rather defensive thinking. Take this piece in the Salt Lake Tribune, conceptualized in the spirit of Mahan, as an example: "*The Republic, triumphant, magnificent, bearing the olive branch of peace in one hand and the rod of castigation in the other, standing for humanity and justice throughout the world, will be the world's arbiter in time, and largely so from henceforth*" (Hull, 1909: 85). There is a glaring contrast between this buoyancy and Mackinder's dreary statement: "*Other empires have had their day, and so may that of Britain*" (Mackinder, 1902: 350).

It is not an accident that Mahan became known as someone largely responsible for American imperialism and overseas expansion. One has to look at transcripts of debates in the Congress of the 1890s to easily observe that his influence was abundant (Congressional Record: 1844-1849). Indeed, the following question he asked his students is very telling: "*All the world knows gentlemen that we are building a new navy* (…) *Well, when we get our navy, what are we going to do with it?*" (Mahan, 1908: 229).

Though the captain studied the mercantilist empires of the 17th-18th centuries, he did not base his expansionism on them. He did see, however, that the US was an industrial complex producing a surplus even at the time, which was to grow significantly soon (LaFeber, 1962: 677). Following Mahan's logic, the natural corollary was the need for a merchant navy, warships protecting this navy, and colonies - all classic tenets of mercantilism. In his own words: "*Whether they will or no, Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it. An increasing volume of public sentiment demands it*" (Mahan, 1917: 21). This looking outward was, again, pressed in his autobiography: "*I am frankly an imperialist, in the sense that I believe that no nation, certainly no great nation, should henceforth maintain the policy of isolation which fitted our early history*" (Mahan, 1906: 263). As noted above, however, Mahan did not prefer for the US to be a mercantilist empire. He thought tariffs were passive, too defensive, therefore, he supported the tariff lowering policy of President McKinley (LaFeber, 1962: 683). He also approved of the Open-

Door Policy regarding China (territorial integrity, free and equal trade).

Mahan was on a quest to convince the American public and leadership: the only way forward is overseas expansion. This was impossible without becoming a dominant sea power. Much to his dismay, however, the opposite had happened before the 1890s. As a result of the Western expansion, the Atlantic coast was no longer the center, as in the time of the 13 colonies. Compared to the Mississippi basin, the coastal regions were out of focus, lacked investment, and the people inhabiting those areas were not attracted to the sea. For this to change, the US had to develop a navy (merchant and battlefleet) and the related industry proportionate to her coastline, population, and immense natural resources (Mahan, 1890: 49). His strategy, with which he answered the question on the use of the navy, was aggressive, dynamic, and outward-looking. Recognizing the fading of the traditional colonizers, the capacity of American industry, and the danger of idleness, he proposed a new Manifest Destiny. According to this, the US should gain influence in her proximity (not just the areas traditionally covered by the Monroe Doctrine, but the Pacific and China too) equal to her capability and interests.

At the time Mahan 'evangelized' sea power and overseas expansion, Mackinder was occupied with a different problem. How could the hegemony of Britain be preserved in this new, hostile environment? He found the answer in the scheme of imperial federation, originally proposed by the historian J. A. Froude in the 1870s and later by John Seeley, another historian, in the 1880s. The loss of the empire's status in the world and the consequent "*new pessimism*" convinced many to seek change (Hyam, 2002: 203). Supporters of imperial federalism hoped that the close integration of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa would secure the economic, demographic, and military means necessary for great power competition in the 20th century. This was, however, clearly a defensive mentality, unlike that of Mahan. As Hyam (2002: 203-204) put it: "*Foreign competition forced a defensive role upon Britain* (...) *the government did not, in a dynamic, optimistic way, move at all to create new areas of enterprise.* (...) *The British approach lacked a really positive dimension*". Mackinder's grim prognosis about the new 'Mongol' Empire reflects this pessimism: "*In the presence of vast Powers, broad-based on the resources of half continents, Britain could not again become mistress of the seas. Much depends on the maintenance of a lead won under earlier conditions*"(Mackinder, 1902: 358). Indeed, London's world influence was founded alongside a non- existent Germany, an isolated Japan, a backward Russia, and a US that had barely discovered the Pacific Ocean. By the end of the century, however, things changed severely. Both of the two thinkers viewed the industrial revolution as the start of a completely new relationship between man and his natural environment: they talked of a

"*collapse of space*" (Deudney, 2001: 191). For Mackinder, advances in communication and transportation allowed the land powers to rival sea powers in mobility. These technological changes, however, also gave hope. The American federalist system as political innovation, along with technology, showed that democratic rule in a gigantic spatial structure is possible (Deudney, 2001: 195). This was something to copy for imperial federalists. The geopolitical reality of the empire, namely that its dominions were oceans apart, was to be overcome by a blend of technology and a two-level government. It was Seeley (1883: 18) who wrote that "*England may prove able to do what the United States does so easily, that is, hold together in a federal union country very remote from each other*". Mackinder echoed this sentiment later. The empire, as he made the case, should be administered locally and centrally. This way, each part "*shall contribute to the strength of the whole, and the strength of the whole shall, in turn, be brought to bear for the defence and defence of the parts*" (Mackinder, 1914: 255).

B. The Problem of Asia

The conflict of land and sea powers manifests itself in the approach of the two men towards Asia. As I noted above, Mackinder's thinking centered around Eurasia, especially it's inner part, which he saw as the seat of land power. Mahan also recognized that Russia was the primary land power of the world (and therefore of Eurasia), however, he did not take into consideration the implications of a new 'Mongol Empire'. According to the captain, Russia was in "*a disadvantageous position for the accumulation of wealth*" because of her "*hopelessly adverse*" geographical conditions (Mahan, 1900: 43-44). That is not to say that the 'Russian Bear' was no threat (keeping in mind that by annexing the Philippines the US became an Asian power too, the same time as Russia occupied present day Vladivostok). He even proposed a coalition to be formed by Germany, Britain, Japan, and the US to contain Russian expansion (Crowl, 1986: 466) This idea was echoed by Mackinder. However, Mahan's sight focused more on Beijing, rather than St. Petersburg. The extensive coastline and the river system that penetrates deep into the mainland made China a natural sea power. About the Yangtze River, Mahan (1900: 177) writes: "*this valley is the decisive field where commerce, the energizer of material civilization, can work to the greatest advantage, and can most certainly receive the support of the military arm of sea power*". Clearly, this is the very opposite of Russia's situation. In fact, he issued a stark warning that is still echoing today: "*Far as the result lies beyond our present horizon, it is difficult to contemplate with equanimity such a vast mass as the four hundred millions of China concentrated into one effective political organization, equipped with modern appliances, and cooped within a territory already narrow for it*"

(Mahan, 1900: 88). In terms of demographics the Russian Empire, which dwarfed any European state, seemed puny in contrast to China. Interestingly, present-day Russia has only a dozen or so million more people, while China's population grew by a billion. The astonishingly quick modernization of Japan served as a good example of what China could do if stepping on the same path.

Mackinder, on the other hand, looked at China from the prism of the Heartland. This is no accident, as he was deeply influenced by the Russia-centered ('Great Game') foreign policy tradition of Britain, rooted in the fear for the security of India. "*A vague kind of Russophobia was endemic among Victorian policy-makers for most of the century*", writes Hyam (2002: 33). Seeley (1883: 353) pointed out that Britain acquired India "*at the expense of a perpetual dread of Russia*". Mackinder briefly mentioned that if China annexed the Heartland, it would be an even more formidable foe than Russia, but he did not see this happening. The conventional wisdom at the turn of the century anticipated the very collapse of China, as shown by prime minister Rosebery's concern: "*it might result in an Armageddon between the European Powers struggling for the ruins of the Chinese Empire*" (Otte, 2007: 1). In the decade leading up to Mackinder's famous lecture, Russian influence over Asia grew irresistibly, tilting the 'Great Game' in Peterburg's favor (Otte, 2007: 3). In this situation, Mackinder could not imagine any other Asian superpower than the possessor of the Heartland.

IV. Conclusion

As geographical factors are permanent, they play the most consistent role in the formation of foreign policy, wrote Spykman (1944: 41). Geopolitics, therefore, has been a significant factor in the history of international relations. The two men addressed in this paper had a lasting impact in this regard. Both of them developed concepts that originated in the past, however, had not been elaborated on systematically. Mahan has "*done more than write the best book that has ever been written upon naval history* (…) *for he has written a book which* (…) *may be regarded as founding a new school of naval historical writing*" - wrote Theodor Roosevelt (1894: 171), who became US president a few years later. Mackinder too, exerted great influence, especially following the Second World War and during the Cold War (Dugan, 1962: 242-244). Their work was also a reaction to the circumstances that unfolded at the time. Captain Mahan represented the United States which was at the forefront of world power. Mackinder, on the other side of the Ocean, presented the sight of a declining power, anxious about the rise of her rivals.

In this paper, I strove to analyze the different interpretations of geopolitical conflict by

the two prominent thinkers. My goal was to lay out the major theories, showing them side by side, Plutarch having been of great inspiration. This enabled the formation of a structure which served as a basis of comparison. As I dealt with two men who lived and worked more than a century ago, I had to embed their thoughts in a historical context too. This way, the research not only outlined the basic theories, but also added a human side to them. And since history is made by humans, this is the only way of real understanding. *Wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*.

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