

# Makers of Modern Strategy

Military Thought  
from Machiavelli to Hitler



EDITED BY  
EDWARD MEAD EARLE

WITH THE COLLABORATION OF  
GORDON A. CRAIG AND  
FELIX GILBERT

PRINCETON  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

1943

## CHAPTER 17. Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power

BY MARGARET TUTTLE SPROUT

NO OTHER single person has so directly and profoundly influenced the theory of sea power and naval strategy as Alfred Thayer Mahan. He precipitated and guided a long-pending revolution in American naval policy, provided a theoretical foundation for Britain's determination to remain the dominant sea power, and gave impetus to German naval development under William II and Admiral Tirpitz. In one way or another his writings affected the character of naval thought in France, Italy, Russia, Japan, and lesser powers. He was a historian of distinction and, at the same time, a propagandist for the late nineteenth century revival of imperialism. By direct influence and through the political power of his friends, Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, he played a leading role in persuading the United States to pursue a larger destiny overseas during the opening years of the twentieth century.

Mahan's epoch-making book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, published in 1890, appeared at a uniquely propitious time. The following decade was crowded with international events of great moment in naval history: the decision of Germany to construct a modern fleet, the rise of the Japanese navy, the Spanish-American War and the consequent emergence of the United States as a world power. Furthermore, naval architecture and naval technology were then passing through the later stages of the industrial revolution: sails had given way to steam, wooden hulls to iron sides and armor plate, smoothbores to rifled guns. New weapons were looming on the horizon, and specialized types of naval vessels were being designed for specialized naval functions.

But naval thought lagged behind naval technology, especially in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Indeed American naval doctrine in the 1880's showed little advance over revolutionary and post-revolutionary days. We still seemed to be obsessed with the twin theories of coastal defense and commerce raiding. When, as in 1776 and 1812, we were faced with vastly superior naval forces and could accept fleet action only at dire peril, there was both wisdom and caution in a purely defensive strategy. But our naval officers and statesmen seemed to forget that when occasion permitted—that is, when we engaged a weaker naval power—we had gained command of the sea and throttled enemy commerce. Under Jefferson we carried offensive war to the Mediterranean and blockaded the ports of the Barbary pirates. In the Mexican War we controlled the waters of the Gulf and thereby enabled an American army to land on Mexican shores. The Union's command of the overseas and river communications of the South

<sup>1</sup>For detailed discussion of American naval policy see H. & M. Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power* (rev. ed., Princeton, 1942). On naval technology see Bernard Brodie, *Sea Power in the Machine Age* (Princeton, 1941).

undoubtedly was a major factor in the downfall of the Confederacy. Despite these significant experiences, however, the popular conception of the navy at the time of the Spanish war was that it was designed for defense of the American coast.

Coast defense and commerce raiding—the *guerre de course*, as the French called the latter—as theories of naval power seriously hindered the development of American naval strategy and naval technology. But conservatism could not long be controlling in such matters, especially as during the 1880's a new navy was in course of construction and a new consciousness was abroad in the land that the navy was an important instrument of national policy. Advances in technology were natural enough in an industrial nation like the United States, and the writings and teachings of Mahan provided the bases for a new naval strategy.

# I

In 1884 Admiral Stephen B. Luce, president of the recently established Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, invited Captain Mahan to become lecturer on naval history and tactics, thus providing him with a platform from which he was to rise to world fame.<sup>2</sup> By training and temperament Mahan was well qualified for the post at the Naval War College, which he accepted with eagerness.

Alfred Thayer Mahan was the son of Dennis Hart Mahan, a professor at the United States Military Academy who had shown great interest in the art of war and had written extensively on military engineering. The younger Mahan therefore grew up not only in the military atmosphere of West Point but in the distinctly intellectual atmosphere of his own home. He entered Columbia College in New York but, much against his father's wishes, transferred to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, from which he graduated with the class of 1859. After serving in the Union Navy during the Civil War, he was sent in 1867 on a two-year cruise in Asiatic waters. It was during this particular tour of duty that he began the systematic study of history which was to be a lifelong habit. He returned from the Far East by way of Europe, which he saw not merely as a tourist but as a student of commerce and naval affairs. Beginning in November, 1872, Commander Mahan served three active years on the South Atlantic station. Later, he made determined efforts to reform the Boston Navy Yard, without much success.<sup>3</sup>

In 1878 Mahan's first published work, an essay on "Naval Education for Officers and Men," won third prize in a competition of the United States Naval Institute. By this time scholarship was his constant avocation, and he habitually employed his leisure reading the best military literature of the time, including the foreign professional journals. Napier's *Peninsular War* aroused his interest because of its emphasis upon "the military sequences of cause and effect,"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Capt. W. D. Puleston, *The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan* (New Haven, 1939), chap. XI.

<sup>3</sup> For Mahan's early life and career, see *ibid.*, chaps. I-X.

matter to which he gave some attention in his first book, *The Gulf and Inland Waters*, published in 1883.<sup>4</sup> At about this time, also, Mahan began to give serious thought to the influence of the projected isthmian canal on the international position of the United States. It is of interest to note that during the earlier years of his life Mahan was an outspoken anti-imperialist. Thus, while in command of a sloop off the west coast of South America in 1883-1884, he was thankful that he did not have to land sailors to protect American interests during the Peruvian revolution.<sup>5</sup> While he was stationed off Callao in 1884, he received the invitation to lecture at the War College, and a new life was opened up to him.

During the following two years Mahan prepared assiduously for his new duties, principally by acquiring the historical background which he considered essential to his work. He began with Mommsen's *History of Rome*. Mommsen's discussion of Hannibal's reasons for selecting the overland rather than the sea route to Italy led Mahan to wonder what the result of Hannibal's campaign might have been had he made the opposite choice. Pondering this question, he concluded that "control of the sea was an historic factor which had never been systematically appreciated and expounded."<sup>6</sup> As a result, Mahan proceeded to make a systematic study of the naval and military history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which provided ample material for analysis of the factors which affect the rise and decline of nations. It also presented opportunities for studying "the analogy between land and naval warfare" from which he hoped to derive a theory of naval tactics. For his lectures at the War College he decided to examine "the general history of Europe and America with particular reference to the effect of sea power."<sup>7</sup> In this manner Mahan prepared and wrote his three works: *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, which appeared in 1890, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (1892), and *Sea Power in its Relation to the War of 1812* (1905). These volumes, considered together, are an entity in which successive maritime events are strung upon a slender "thread of general history," with frequent digressions into "questions of naval policy, strategy, and tactics."<sup>8</sup> To these monumental studies, Mahan added a steady stream of articles and books dealing with naval strategy and international affairs.<sup>9</sup>

Mahan's principal books and essays are history written with the focus of interest on sea power. His discussions of national policy, naval policy, naval strategy, and tactics therefore are not presented separately but are interwoven,

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 59-65.

<sup>5</sup> For his early views, see *ibid.*, chap. XI; and A. T. Mahan, "The Growth of our National Feeling," in *World's Work*, III (February 1902), pp. 1763, 1764.

<sup>6</sup> For Mahan's preparation, and the origins of his ideas, see Puleston, *Mahan*, pp. 66-73, 74-80, 93 ff. Quotation is on p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75. See also A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (1890), p. iii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>9</sup> See bibliographical essay in appendix. For an even more complete list of the volumes of essays, with subtitles, see Puleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-364.

largely at random, into a chronological narrative. A systematic appraisal of Mahan's place in the history of military thought requires the disentangling of many separate strands and their rearrangement in orderly manner. From such reappraisal and rearrangement the following emerge as Mahan's great contributions to modern strategy: first, he developed a philosophy of sea power which won recognition and acceptance far outside professional naval circles and found its way into the councils of state throughout the world; second, he formulated a new theory of naval strategy; finally, he was a critical student of naval tactics.

Naval strategy and sea power were conditioned, in his judgment, by certain fundamental natural phenomena (such as a nation's insular or continental situation) and by national policies related to navies, the merchant marine, and overseas bases. Naval tactics, on the other hand, are concerned with operations after the beginning of actual combat. Tactics, being the art of using weapons which have been forged by man, may change as weapons themselves change. But the principles of naval strategy, having a broader foundation, "remain, as though laid upon a rock" and operate in time of peace as well as in time of war.<sup>10</sup>

This clear distinction between strategy and tactics was one of the things which raised Mahan above the level of earlier writers, who had considered naval forces as little more than a branch of the military establishment, designed principally to protect merchant shipping and to help repel invasion. Mahan's studies convinced him that sea power, conceived on a broader scale, would constitute for the United States, as it had constituted for Great Britain, an instrument of policy serving to enhance the nation's power and prestige.<sup>11</sup>

The main theme of the three volumes dealing with the influence of sea power upon history is, then, the supreme importance of sea power in the shaping of national destinies. Mommsen, whose work had first aroused Mahan's interest in military history, had demonstrated that the outcome of the Punic Wars was due to "naval power." But Mahan's interest in sea power was much broader, as is indicated by his choice of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—an era of mercantilistic imperialism during which sea power was transcendent—as a period for special study, a kind of laboratory of naval strategy.<sup>12</sup>

## II

From his basic hypothesis that sea power was vital to national growth, prosperity, and security, Mahan proceeded to an examination of the elements of sea power, naming six fundamental factors which affect its development: geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, population, national character, governmental institutions.<sup>13</sup> His conclusions may be roughly paraphrased in the following manner.

<sup>10</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 8, 20, 23, 28, 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. I, especially p. 2, and pp. 287-288.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. iii-vi, and Puleston, *Mahan*, pp. 70 ff. For mercantilistic influence, see H. & M. Sprout, *Toward a New Order of Sea Power* (rev. ed. 1943), pp. 9 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, chap. I.

Geographical position as a factor in sea power is best appreciated by examination of the insular position of Great Britain as compared with her chief rivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France and Holland. The security of the homeland relieved the British government of the necessity or temptation of maintaining and using a large army, with its attendant drain on the national wealth. The British Isles were near enough to the continent of Europe to be within striking distance of potential enemies, but far enough away to be relatively safe from invasion. Operating from its strategically located home base, the British fleet could be concentrated and yet used simultaneously for defense or for the blockading of continental ports. France, on the contrary, had to divide her navy between the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines. The almost unique geographical situation of the British Isles, furthermore, made it feasible for Britain to control the shipping lanes to and from northern Europe. By the acquisition of important islands and other strategic bases like Gibraltar, Britain also was in a position to maintain a large measure of control in the Mediterranean, which has "played a greater part in the history of the world, both in a commercial and a military point of view, than any other sheet of water of the same size."<sup>14</sup>

Physical configuration of the national domain determines in large measure the disposition of a people to seek and achieve sea power. The character of the coastline governs accessibility to the sea; good harbors imply potential strength; the character of the soil may win people away from the sea or drive them to it for a livelihood. The Dutch were driven to the sea, but their almost complete dependence upon it was a source of weakness. The fertility of French soil made it unnecessary for the French to turn to the sea unless they so desired. Insular or peninsular nations like Britain, Spain, and Italy must of necessity be strong upon the sea if their pretensions to power are to be made effective. To any nation with a coastline the sea is a frontier, and national power will largely be determined by the manner in which it extends that frontier.

Extent of territory may be a weakness rather than a strength, depending upon the degree to which the land itself is supported by population, resources, and other factors of power. If vast stretches of territory are cut up by rivers and estuaries, the latter will constitute an additional source of weakness. The South during the Civil War is cited by Mahan as an instance of a nation with too much land in proportion to its population and resources, and too much coastline and too many inland waterways in relation to its inherent strength.

Size and character of population must both be considered in the measurement of sea power. A seagoing nation like England must not only have substantial numbers of men, but must have a large proportion of them engaged directly or indirectly in maritime occupations. A nation's peacetime commerce is an index of its "staying power" in naval war. There must be a large reserve, among the population as a whole, of those skills which are essential to the maintenance of ships both in time of peace and in time of war. England, for example, was not only a seagoing nation, but a shipbuilding and trading nation,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and hence had the human and technical resources so essential to success in naval war. The existing "shield of defensive power," however, must always be maintained. "If time be . . . a supreme factor in war, it behooves countries whose genius is essentially not military, whose people, like all free people, object to pay for large military establishments, to see to it that they are at least strong enough to gain the time necessary to turn the spirit and capacity of their subjects into the new activities which war calls for. If the existing force by land or sea is strong enough so to hold out, even though at a disadvantage, the country may rely upon its natural resources and strength coming into play. . . ." In this manner Mahan emphasized the lesson which democratic peoples so often need to be taught, that potential power and actual power are not the same and must be kept in rational balance.<sup>15</sup>

National character and aptitudes are an essential factor in the success of a seafaring people. The desire to trade, and the ability to produce the commodities which enter into trade, together constitute "the national characteristic most important to the development of sea power. Granting it and a good seaboard, it is not likely that the dangers of the sea, or any aversion to it, will deter a people from seeking wealth by the paths of ocean commerce." If a people have an aptitude and liking for commercial pursuits, they are almost certain to develop an extensive peacetime commerce, which is one of the very first prerequisites to sea power. It was the union of a large maritime commerce and a great naval establishment which made Britain the predominant sea power of the world. Closely related to commercial pursuits is, of course, the planting of colonies which, when firmly bound to the mother country, offer markets and "nurseries for commerce and shipping." It is not surprising, therefore, that Britain was the foremost colonizing power as well as the foremost commercial and naval power.

The character of government is of vital importance in the achievement of sea power. The "most brilliant successes" have ensued when a government has intelligently and persistently fostered and directed a national interest in, and an aptitude for, the sea. British policy since the reign of James I has been determined to assert and maintain colonial, commercial, and naval supremacy and to adopt all measures necessary thereto. This adherence to a single line of policy was easier, Mahan believed, because the government of Britain lay in the hands of a single class—the landed aristocracy.<sup>16</sup> He expressed some doubt concerning its continuance under the more democratic government of his own day, for he believed that democracies were unwilling to pay the price of continued naval power and had not the foresight to ensure adequate military preparedness. The French under Colbert had attempted to become a great sea power, but the policy did not long survive Colbert's tenure of office and was, in any event, inadequately supported by commerce and a prosperous colonial empire.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> More recent research would cast doubt upon Mahan's historical generalizations concerning the influence of the landed aristocracy and would place more emphasis upon the rising commercial classes.

The efficiency, intelligence, and determination of a government will be determining factors in the development of sea power. The government controls the size of the navy, the quality of the naval establishment, the capacity of the naval organization to expand quickly in time of war, the spirit of its men, and its effectiveness in combat. Furthermore, the strategical doctrines of a government may well be crucial in relation to the actual power of the nation on the seas. The French government, for example, had for years insisted that its admirals keep the sea as long as possible, while avoiding action which might entail the loss of ships—a strategy which prevented the French navy from taking decisive action and which precluded the very possibility of conclusive victories over the British fleet. (As Mr. Kiralfy points out in Chapter 19, considerations of the same sort seem to have influenced Japanese naval thought and may prove to be a factor of major importance in the present war.)

In analyzing the factors which enter into sea power Mahan came to view imperialism through spectacles somewhat different from those of his earlier days. Then, as we have seen, he was an anti-imperialist. Now he began to see the relation between colonies and sea power. In establishing colonies a naval power "won a foothold in a foreign land, seeking a new outlet for what it had to sell, a new sphere for its shipping, more employment for its people, more comfort and wealth for itself.

"The needs of commerce, however, were not all provided for when safety had been secured at the far end of the road. The voyages were long and dangerous, the seas often beset with enemies. . . . Thus arose the demand for stations along the road, like the Cape of Good Hope, St. Helena and Mauritius, not primarily for trade, but for defence and war; the demand for the possession of posts like Gibraltar, Malta, Louisburg, at the entrance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence—posts whose value was chiefly strategic, though not necessarily wholly so. Colonies and colonial posts were sometimes commercial, sometimes military in their character," and no territorial acquisition could be judged without keeping these basic facts in mind.<sup>17</sup> The government's decision as to whether and where to secure naval bases would have a vital bearing on the nation's power on the seas. The ships of a nation which, like the United States, were without adequate overseas bases were like "land birds, unable to fly far from their shores."

It is clear from Mahan's analysis of the factors conditioning sea power that Britain's predominant position rested not only on the greater material strength and the superior strategic doctrines of the British navy but also on the control of the "narrow seas." These narrow seas, which play so large a role in modern naval history, may be defined, roughly, as those bodies of water—such as the English Channel, the straits of Gibraltar, the Sicilian narrows, the Dardanelles and Bosphorus—which may be controlled with relative ease from either shore. Britain had succeeded in acquiring a substantial number of the outposts of sea power which, in combination with her battle fleet, gave her virtually undisputed control after Trafalgar of the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.



And as there were no great naval powers outside Europe in 1890, when Mahan published the first of his books on sea power, control of European waters meant control of all the oceans of the world. It was only with the rise of non-European powers that Britain's world-wide command of the seas was threatened. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, British naval supremacy was such that the principal sea routes of the world were, in effect, the internal communications of the British Empire.<sup>18</sup>

### III

Mahan doubted whether Britain would continue indefinitely to maintain her position as the world's greatest sea power. The broad basis of that power, he wrote, "still remains in a great trade, large mechanical industries, and an extensive colonial system." But, "whether a democratic government will have the foresight, the keen sensitiveness to national position and credit, the willingness to insure its prosperity by adequate outpouring of money in times of peace, all of which are necessary for military preparation, is yet an open question."<sup>19</sup> Actually, however, the alterations in the naval balance of power which were to come during the twentieth century were the result of developments over which Great Britain had little control. They were the rise of new naval powers, the vastly increased strength of land power vis-à-vis sea power in Europe, and certain technological developments which made sea blockade a less deadly weapon than it had previously been.<sup>20</sup> It is doubtful if Mahan grasped the significance of these world-wide changes or, indeed, if anyone could have appraised them except in the perspective of a later time.

The rise of Japanese naval power undermined England's strategic dominance in Europe as well as in the Far East. Through one of the ironies of history, Englishmen themselves contributed materially to this result. British shipyards in the 1880's and 1890's built one warship after another for Japan. And British naval officers were loaned to the Mikado's government to teach the elements of naval science and administration. It could be argued, of course, that someone else would have built the ships and given the advice if England had refused. It could also be argued that Great Britain needed a counterpoise to Russian imperialism which was at that time encroaching on British preserves in Asia. But such reasoning does not alter the fact that a modern Japanese fleet in Asiatic waters fundamentally altered the strategic situation to the disadvantage of Great Britain; that British squadrons guarding the English Channel, the North Sea, and the Mediterranean no longer *ipso facto* dominated the sea communications of the Far East.

Meanwhile, parallel developments were taking place in the Western Hemi-

<sup>18</sup> See summary in Sprout, *Toward a New Order of Sea Power*, pp. 3-28. Compare Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (1892), I, pp. 10, 15 ff., and II, p. 106; "Considerations Governing the Disposition of Navies" in *The National Review*, XXXIX (July 1902), pp. 701, 709-711; *The Interest of America in International Conditions* (1910), pp. 5 ff., 61-62; and *Naval Strategy* (1911), p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 67 and *Naval Strategy*, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> For a general summary see Sprout, *Toward a New Order of Sea Power*, chap. 2. In the present chapter I have borrowed a number of sentences from this work.

sphere. Prior to the Civil War, the United States had both a navy and a naval policy. But neither affected the main currents of world politics in any large or continuing manner. Even within the Western Hemisphere, England rather than the United States was the dominant naval power. After a brief growth induced by the Civil War the American navy passed into a prolonged eclipse. Reconstruction commenced in the early 'eighties, and by 1890 was acquiring some momentum. Mahan's writings, in conjunction with other influences, accelerated the pace and changed the direction of American naval development. By 1898, the Navy of the United States had evolved from a handful of commerce-raiding cruisers into a rapidly growing fleet of first-class battleships. Control of Europe's narrow seas no longer assured naval dominance in the New World. Only by progressively strengthening its overseas squadrons could the British Admiralty have preserved even a semblance of its former primacy in American and Far Eastern waters. And whatever the desires and inclinations of British naval authorities, developments nearer home soon rendered such a course practically impossible.

Acceleration of the naval building pace in Europe, especially the very rapid growth of the German navy after 1900, threatened England's historic dominance in European waters. So instead of strengthening its overseas squadrons, the British government had progressively to deplete them in order to maintain a safe margin of superiority in the narrow seas and eastern Atlantic.

The implications of all this are clearer in retrospect, of course, than they were in prospect. With increasing difficulty the British government did manage to keep a margin of naval superiority that seemed to assure its hold on the sea approaches to Europe. There was a fair presumption that Great Britain could still cut off its continental enemies from their overseas colonies and from the foodstuffs and raw materials of the Western Hemisphere and the Far East. However, the ability to maintain such a blockade would thereafter depend not only on Britain's naval dominance in European waters but also on the attitude and policy of the transoceanic naval powers, Japan and the United States. British statesmen could still exercise a large, often a decisive, influence on world events, through commerce, finance, diplomacy, and propaganda. But they had irretrievably lost the ultimate sanction of superior force in the Western Hemisphere and in the Far East. Great Britain's world-wide command of the seas had vanished, and with it the historic balance wheel of the vast, intricate, and smoothly running machinery of that advantageous world economic community and quasi-political order which British sea power had fostered and supported during the preceding century.

It is probable that Mahan himself accelerated the forces which undermined England's world-wide command of the seas. His interpretation of history, linking sea power with national greatness and imperialism with sea power, stimulated expansionist impulses already stirring in Europe, in the Far East, and in America. His gospel of sea power strengthened the trend of political and economic events which were already encouraging the growth of navies, and these navies in turn fostered and supported the new imperialism which even

further quickened the pace of naval construction. In proportion as other navies increased in power, England's margin of supremacy declined.

Not only was England's strategic position vis-à-vis other sea powers gradually deteriorating, but scientific and mechanical developments were taking place which lessened still further the political and military importance of sea power. One of these developments was the phenomenal improvement in railway and road transportation on the continent of Europe. Another, not to be fully appreciated until the rise of Nazi Germany, was the manufacture of synthetic substitutes for strategic raw materials which formerly had to be brought to Europe from overseas.

British influence at its peak owed much to the primitive state of overland transport on the continent. A very high proportion of European commercial traffic moved by water, along rivers and canals, through coastal waters, or upon the high seas. Goods sent from northwestern to southern Germany, for example, might normally go by ship from the northern ports, through the English Channel, around Gibraltar, through the Dardanelles, and up the Danube to their destination. The construction of an elaborate and efficient system of railway transport, and subsequently of motor roads, altered this state of affairs to a certain extent and had strategic as well as commercial repercussions. Mahan recognized these new developments but contended that "transit in large quantities and for great distances" was "decisively more easy and copious" by sea than by land, and that this was the reason why command of the sea was so important. Sea routes, he insisted, were still the "inner lines of communication" which gave decisive military advantage.<sup>21</sup> In an article written in 1907 Mahan admitted that "numerous alternatives to sea transport" had become available. But to arguments that the "former efficacy" of sea transport could "no longer be predicated," he replied that "for obvious reasons of cheapness and facility, water transport still 'maintained its ascendancy.' It might grow relatively less important but 'unless we succeed in exploiting the air, water remains, and must always remain, the great medium of transportation.'"<sup>22</sup>

In 1907, despite the fact that automotive transport was still in its infancy, the shape of things to come was already discernible. In this as in other technical matters, Mahan remained conservative. Of course, he never dreamed of the mobility which land forces were to achieve in the Second World War. This new mobility of land power not only deprived sea power of its "inner lines of communication," but threatened the security of the land bases without which sea power cannot exist.

It would have been even more difficult in the early years of the century to foresee the tremendous scientific advances which would progressively relieve great continental countries of their dependence upon products brought from distant lands. Production of motor fuels from coal, manufacture of synthetic rubber, and the other miracles of applied science still lay far in the future.

<sup>21</sup> *Problem of Asia*, pp. 124 ff. For Friedrich List on the strategic significance of railways to Germany and to Britain's position in the Near East see Chap. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Some Neglected Aspects of War* (1907), pp. 174 ff., and *The Problem of Asia* (1900), pp. 125-126.

Nevertheless, their coming was one day to deprive sea blockade of some of its potency and was to prolong the time necessary to achieve its maximum effectiveness. It is conceivable that at some future time air transportation may so completely supersede sea transport that the value of sea power in international politics may be still further jeopardized. Certainly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, upon which Mahan based his theories, constituted the heyday of sea power.

Mahan believed that sea power in all its ramifications was the royal road to national wealth and prestige for all countries capable of its development. France, he pointed out, had a most favorable situation for the development of commerce and naval power. The position of France was stronger than that of any other European nation for operations against England, but the French chose to be primarily a land, rather than a sea, power. Germany suffered a severe handicap because all its sea-borne commerce had to pass through either the North Sea or the English Channel, almost literally under the guns of the British navy.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it is improbable, as Mahan pointed out, that any European nation with a land frontier to defend against powerful neighbors could ever safely divert from its army enough of its human and material resources to win primacy at sea.

#### IV

As an American naval officer, Mahan naturally emphasized the value of sea power to the United States and the steps necessary to secure it. At the time he wrote *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, however, he was unwilling to accept the program of territorial expansion which seemed to be inherent in his theories of sea power, and his views of an American naval program must be considered moderate.<sup>24</sup>

With respect to the defense of our seaports, he declared, there is "practical unanimity in theory and entire indifference in practice" that a navy is necessary. The principle that free ships make free goods seemed to make it safe for the United States to trust its commerce to neutral flags in time of war. But this rule did not hold, he pointed out, when the ship was bound toward a blockaded port. To break a blockade, or to avoid having our own ports blockaded, the United States needed a naval force strong enough to drive off the blockading forces. Events of the Civil War indicated that the great length of the American coastline would not, as some persons had argued, make such a blockade impossible. Contrary to early American theory, the enemy must be kept "not only out of our ports, but far away from our coasts." The "influence of our government should make itself felt," Mahan concluded, "to build up for the nation a navy which, if not capable of reaching distant countries, shall at least be able to keep clear the chief approaches to its own."<sup>25</sup>

Mahan saw clearly that the United States possessed the elements conducive

<sup>23</sup> *Interest of America in International Conditions*, pp. 53 ff., 192, 195 f.

<sup>24</sup> See note 6 above; *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 83-86.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-88.

to the growth of sea power to a lesser degree than England. In the first place, the geographical position of the United States was comparable to that of England only in the single feature of insularity. He believed that the opening of a trans-isthmian canal at Panama would alter the relation of the United States to the Caribbean so that it would resemble that of England to the Channel, or of England to the Mediterranean. With proper military preparations, the United States could exercise dominant sea power in this area. He failed, however, to point out one critical dissimilarity. No other great power fronts on the Caribbean. Hence American control of that waterway could give the United States no such leverage on other great powers as England exercised through control of the Channel and the Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup>

In the matter of physical conformation the United States possessed elements both of strength and of weakness. Numerous and deep harbors were dangerous if not properly defended. The "extent, delightfulness, and richness of the land" which tended to keep the French people from the sea, Mahan saw "reproduced" in this country. The situation had been different when the United States comprised only a fringe of settled land along the Atlantic Coast. The center of power now lay in the interior. But when "the day comes that shipping again pays, when the three sea frontiers find that they are not only militarily weak, but poorer for lack of national shipping, their united efforts may avail to lay again the foundations of our sea power." Until that time, Mahan believed, those who understand the importance of sea power may "mourn that their own country is being led" like France "into the same neglect of that instrument."<sup>27</sup>

Except for Alaska, the coastline of the United States presented "few points specially weak from their saliency" and all parts of the coast could be easily reached from the interior, either by water or by rail. The nation had no distant colonies essential to its existence. Thus with our "boundless" resources we could easily "live off by ourselves indefinitely" unless a new "commercial route through the Isthmus" should give us the "rude awakening of those who have abandoned their share in the common birthright of all people, the sea."<sup>28</sup> Construction of the isthmian canal would give every position in the Caribbean an "enhanced commercial and military value." The canal itself would become "a strategic centre of the most vital importance," and the nation which ruled the sea approaches to the canal would control the canal itself. Without more military and naval power than the United States possessed in 1890, Mahan feared that the opening of the canal would be "nothing but a disaster" to this country.<sup>29</sup>

From the point of view of commerce and the carrying trade, Mahan declared that the position of the United States was unique. "Facing the older worlds of the East and West," our shores are "washed by the oceans which touch the one

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34; also *Interest of America in Sea Power* (1897), pp. 104, 110, 124, 277; *Arms and Arbitration* (1912), p. 180.

<sup>27</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42; *Problem of Asia*, p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> *Interest of America in Sea Power*, pp. 12-13; *Problem of Asia*, pp. 182-184.

or the other, but which are common" to the United States alone. This position had advantages in defense also, for the "remoteness of the chief naval and military nations from our shores" would make naval operations against us difficult. The "jealousies of the European family of states"—that is to say, the balance of power—would further limit the ability of European powers to send forces against our shores.<sup>30</sup>

The extent of our territory, Mahan argued, might be the same source of weakness against a stronger power that it was for the South against the North in the Civil War. Not only did the Confederacy have no navy, but its population was not interested in the sea and was not "proportioned to the extent of the sea-coast which it had to defend." The United States must be able to exert its strength not only on one long coast, but on two.<sup>31</sup>

Mahan pointed out that the United States was like Holland in that the people would not spend money for their own defense unless danger actually stared them in the face. Consequently we had no "shield of defensive power" behind which we might develop our reserves of strength. Our seafaring population was far from adequate for possible needs, and foundations for such a class, Mahan believed, could "be laid only in a large commerce" under the American flag.<sup>32</sup> Mahan saw no reason to doubt that his compatriots possessed aptitudes for commerce, for self-government, and for independence similar to those of the English. He thought that, if "legislative hindrances" could be removed and "more remunerative fields of enterprise be filled up, sea power would soon begin to develop." The "instinct for commerce," the love of "bold enterprise in the pursuit of gain," and a "keen scent for the trails that lead to it" all existed in the American people.<sup>33</sup>

As a democracy, it seemed to Mahan that the United States was at a disadvantage. Democratic governments tended to lack foresight and willingness to keep up their military expenditures in peacetime.<sup>34</sup>

The nation was also handicapped by a lack of colonies. In 1890 we had neither colonies nor naval stations. In Mahan's view the United States then possessed only the first of the three great links of sea power: internal development and production, peaceful shipping, and colonies. "In the present condition of the navy," he continued, an attempt to blockade the ports of this country would not entail a greater effort than has been made before by great maritime nations. "The people of the United States would not starve, but they may suffer grievously." We must, therefore, have a sizable naval force to keep the enemy forces away from our coasts. Mahan regretted, at the time he was writing, the lack of a motive to stimulate American naval development, but

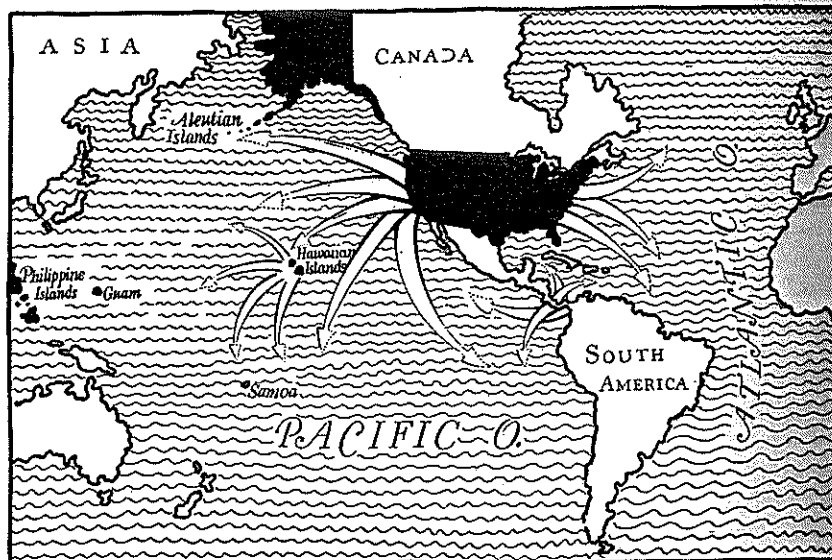
<sup>30</sup> *Interest of America in Sea Power*, pp. 6, 110, 181-182; "Current Fallacies upon Naval Subjects" in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, XCVII (June 1898), pp. 45, 49; *Naval Strategy*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 43; *Problem of Asia*, pp. 181, 198-199; also "The Panama Canal and Distribution of the Fleet" in *North American Review*, CC (September 1914), pp. 407 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58. <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.





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he suggested that such a motive might eventually be found in the opening of a trans-isthmian canal.<sup>35</sup>

Although the American navy was weak, and the position of the United States was not comparable to that of England in the essential elements of sea power, Mahan felt that the United States could make itself a great naval power, if not, indeed, the greatest of all naval powers. If the nation would adopt a policy of consistently enlarging and strengthening its navy, of acquiring suitable naval bases and overseas colonies, and of building up our merchant marine, our position upon the sea would be assured. Our central position, our relative security from attack, combined with our great industrial development, might offset our lack of other advantages.

Just as time and technology were qualifying the significance of sea power as an instrument in world politics, so they were shifting the importance of some of the factors which Mahan considered to be basic elements of sea power. Mahan saw that steam, by making ships independent of the uncertainties of wind, had already in some measure lessened the protection afforded by insularity.<sup>36</sup> Steam had also enhanced the importance of naval stations by circumscribing the fleet's radius of action. But that was only the beginning. Submarines, and later airplanes, were gradually to undermine the protective value of insularity. Mahan did not live to see German submarines set up a counter-blockade of England which actually threatened during 1917 to starve the British

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86; *Interest of America in Sea Power*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>36</sup> *Interest of America in International Conditions*, pp. 62-53; "Blockade in Relation to Naval Strategy" in *U.S. Naval Inst. Proc.*, XXI, pp. 851-866.

into surrender. Nor did he see the aerial blitz of 1940 against the industries and the ports which were the backbone of British naval power. The traditional command of the sea by great surface fleets could no longer guarantee the security of the British island base.

Furthermore the battle fleet itself was vulnerable to attack by these new weapons. Elaborate precautions must be taken at all times to protect the fleet from enemy submarines. Narrow seas or coastal waters dominated by land-based enemy aircraft became exceedingly precarious, if not untenable, for warships. The new weapons, in short, circumscribed more closely the area in which a fleet might exert its power.

Mahan reiterated many times the fact that secure bases constituted the necessary foundation for power upon the sea. He could not have foreseen that mechanized warfare was going to challenge the existence of sea power by attacking its vulnerable bases, especially from the air. The extent of a nation's territory acquired an importance far beyond that perceived by Mahan. Depth could be converted into defense, not only against the new mechanized land warfare, but against attack by any sort of aircraft. Naval bases without depth and without large sources of supply—bases like Singapore and Hongkong—could not be held by sea power in the face of determined mechanized attack by land.

In the years since 1914 warfare has become increasingly a conflict of technologies. Not only is the extent and availability of a nation's resources a critical factor in creating the new weapons, but the technical ability of a people is also essential. A government's ability to choose the middle path between undue conservatism and too hasty experimentation in technical matters may spell the difference between victory and defeat.

Most of the basic changes affecting sea power have operated, on the whole, to the advantage of the United States. In view of the development of the long-range bomber, the American home base and American war industry are less vulnerable to attack than those of any other major power. In these and in other respects Mahan's six elements of sea power need qualification, shifts in emphasis, and some reappraisal. But it is clear that his basic ideas still are sound. Position, physical conformation (including natural resources and climate), the character of the people and of the government are still the "principal conditions affecting the sea power of nations."

## V

If Mahan's first objective was to determine the influence of sea power upon the destiny of nations, his second was to derive from a study of naval warfare certain fundamental and immutable principles of naval strategy, comparable to the principles of land warfare formulated by Jomini. Although the basic theme of the three works dealing with the influence of sea power upon history was the political importance of sea power, these volumes also contain, scattered here and there, discussions of many elements of Mahan's theory of naval strategy and defense. These ideas were more completely developed in his later books and essays.

Mahan had been reading European history, especially French history, for over a year and a half when he began studying Jomini,<sup>37</sup> especially his *History of the Campaigns of the Revolution and Empire*, and *The Summary of the Art of War*. Mahan frequently acknowledged his debt to the Swiss writer, for he learned from Jomini to view the events of naval history as illustrations of "living principles." He discovered from Jomini that there was no sharp distinction "between diplomatic and military considerations," and from the same source he derived the method of critical analysis of campaigns and battles.

Jomini had formulated principles of war<sup>38</sup> which were built around fundamental ideas of position, lines, communications, and concentration of force. Mahan attempted to discover analogous principles underlying naval tactics and strategy, and he found many of Jomini's concepts equally applicable to naval warfare, although others required "modification or limitation." The principles which Mahan thus formulated became the foundation of a system of naval strategy that was to affect the plans and policies of all the leading navies.

A central position, Mahan perceived, afforded the same defensive and offensive advantages upon the sea as on the land. Such a position gave "interior lines, shorter lines, by which to attack." An interior line was, in fact, an "extension of a central position," or "a series of central positions connected with one another." The possessor of such lines could concentrate his forces on any one of several fronts more quickly than his enemy and hence utilize his forces more effectively.<sup>39</sup> Suez, for example, was an interior line as compared with the Cape of Good Hope, Panama as contrasted with the Strait of Magellan, and the Kiel Canal as compared with the Skagerrak.

The strategical value of a position, Mahan reasoned, depends not only on its relation to strategic lines, but also upon its intrinsic strength, and upon the resources of the place itself or of the surrounding country. A position such as Dover or Gibraltar which is near sea routes, or close to a crossing of several sea routes, is likely to be a central position. The value of such strategic positions is enhanced by the fact that the sea lanes in these places become very narrow, and because many ships must pass through them. The military strength of a particular site may be increased by proper fortifications but if all materiel has to be brought from a distance that position will still be inferior to another "having a rich and developed friendly region behind it."<sup>40</sup> Gibraltar, for example, is under a disadvantage in this respect.

In Mahan's system, the term "communications" refers to the "lines of movement between the force and its sources of supply." Communications, he wrote, "are the most important single element in strategy, political or military." The "eminence of sea power" lies "in its control over them." "The power, therefore, to insure these communications to one's self, and to interrupt them for an

<sup>37</sup> For the influence of Jomini on Mahan's work, see Puleston, *Mahan*, pp. 61, 69, 77 ff., 287, 295 ff.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79. See also Chap. 4, above, for a detailed account of Jomini's work.

<sup>39</sup> *Naval Strategy*, pp. 31 ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130 ff., 163. See also *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution*, I, pp. 110, 184; *Interest of America in Sea Power*, pp. 41-42; "Considerations Governing the Disposition of Navies" in *The National Review*, XXXIX (July 1902), pp. 707-709.

adversary, affects the very root of a nation's vigor. . . ." "This is the prerogative of the sea powers; and this chiefly—if not, indeed, this alone—they have to set off against the disadvantage of position and of numbers. . . ." The longer the communications, the greater the benefit conferred by sea power. A central position which affords protection to one's communications affords great advantage. Such was the position of France in her war against Spain and Austria. It was also the position of England against France. The English navy could blockade the French coast and at the same time cover British interests "from the Baltic to Egypt."<sup>41</sup>

Concentration of force, Mahan emphasized, is a fundamental principle of both sea and land warfare. The value of a central position lies in the fact that it facilitates, indeed encourages, concentration of one's forces. Should a fleet be confronted with two enemies, the proper course is to go after one first and destroy it, then if possible seek out the other.<sup>42</sup> It was this principle which President Theodore Roosevelt had in mind when he urged his successor never under any circumstances to divide the American fleet between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Mahan was convinced from his historical studies, that "battles of the past"—sea as well as land—had "succeeded or failed according as they were fought in conformity with the principles of war."<sup>43</sup> The supremacy of the British navy was attributable in no small degree to the superior British naval strategy. Over a long period of years the British had discovered that certain types of naval operations were more successful than others. In the second Anglo-Dutch War, Mahan points out, the fleet of Charles II met defeat because it was divided to meet both the Dutch and their French allies at the same time. This war, thanks to the parsimony of the English king, had been waged mainly by preying on enemy commerce, and it ended only after the Dutch occupied the mouth of the Thames—quite unlike the outcome of the campaigns of fifteen years earlier in which Cromwell's powerful fleets of ships-of-the-line had shut Dutch merchantmen within their own ports.<sup>44</sup>

Between 1689 and 1698, Mahan recalls, the French sent great fleets to dispute the command of the sea with the British, who suffered greatly as a result. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1712), however, French fleets were "practically withdrawn" from the ocean and the number of French commerce-raiding cruisers greatly increased. But despite the loss of hundreds of merchantmen, British commerce prospered increasingly while French merchantmen all but disappeared from the seas.<sup>45</sup> The *guerre de course*, therefore, was an altogether unsatisfactory substitute for fleet action.

British naval operations against France in the Seven Years War (1756-1763) show how British strategy continued to develop. Mahan points out that in this

<sup>41</sup> *Problem of Asia*, pp. 124 ff.; *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp. 95-96, 184 and II, p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> *Naval Strategy*, pp. 45 ff.

<sup>43</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 125, 131-133; *Naval Strategy*, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 133 ff.

conflict, for the first time, the British navy undertook a close blockade of Brest, to prevent either great fleets or small squadrons from getting out without fighting. This blockade helped to neutralize the enemy's only offensive weapon, his battle fleet, and to keep the French in a "state of constant inferiority in the practical handling of their ships." The British navy attacked the French coasts with small flying squadrons for the purpose of keeping French land forces divided. They stationed a fleet in the Mediterranean near Gibraltar to prevent the French Toulon fleet from getting into the Atlantic to unite with the other French forces. With the French ships thus bottled up, the British sent expeditions to seize the French colonies in the West Indies. French commerce was annihilated; English trade prospered.<sup>46</sup> By the end of this war, Mahan concludes, the English government had come to realize that control of the sea was the secret of prosperity and success. Through that means the "kingdom of Great Britain had become the British Empire."<sup>47</sup>

The French, on the other hand, failing to see the dangers of losing control of the sea, in this war and in later conflicts kept their fleets in port as much as possible. When circumstances forced the fleet out to sea, the basic French objective remained to save the ships and avoid action if possible. They considered it more important to capture than to destroy British ships. If forced to fight, French admirals habitually chose the lee-gage because it imposed on the enemy "the necessity of attacking with all consequent risks," and usually enabled the French to "cripple the enemy as he approached." The British ordinarily chose the weather-gage which enabled them to steer for their opponents. Their "steady policy was to assail and destroy their enemy."<sup>48</sup>

The differing British and French concepts of naval strategy, Mahan argues, reflected divergent views as to the "true end of naval war. If it is merely to assure one or more positions ashore, the navy becomes simply a branch of the army for a particular occasion, and subordinates its action accordingly." This was in general the French view, notwithstanding the fact that the leading French tactician of the day, Bigot de Morogues, first director of the French Académie de Marine, had declared that "at sea there is no field of battle to be held, nor places to be won." History leaves little doubt that to the French naval warfare was a "war of posts," and the "action of the fleets" was "subordinate[d] to the attack and defence of the posts."<sup>49</sup>

If, on the other hand, Mahan observes, the "true end" of naval forces "is to preponderate over the enemy's navy and so control the sea, then the enemy's ships and fleets are the true objects to be assailed on all occasions." This represents the British view. Their fleets attempted to "break up the enemy's power on the sea, cutting off his communications with the rest of his possessions, drying up the sources of his wealth in his commerce, and making possible a closure of his ports. . . ."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 296 ff.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291; also *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, I, pp. 9 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 289 ff. For explanation of the terms weather-gage and lee-gage, see *ibid.*, pp. 5-6, 5 note.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288-289, 533, 538 ff.

<sup>50</sup> *Loc. cit.*

The French concept of naval warfare as merely a branch of land warfare, and their preoccupation with expensive military campaigns on the continent, would seem to explain the French predilection for cruiser or commerce-raiding operations. This type of operation, the *guerre de course*, not only was cheaper, but also offered a method of attack on the most obvious manifestation of British power and wealth—merchant shipping. Mistaking the branch for the root, the French did not see that as a means of crushing the enemy, commerce-raiding was a dangerous delusion which presented itself, as Mahan put it, "in the fascinating garb of cheapness to the representatives of a people."<sup>51</sup> Doubtless the popularity of privateering, in France as in America, reinforced the faith of the government in this type of warfare.

The history of the conflicts between France and England, as recounted by Mahan, provide many more examples of their differing naval strategies and tactics. Even during the wars of the French Revolution, which constitute the "great and conspicuous instance of commerce-destroying, carried on over a long series of years, with a vigor and thoroughness never surpassed," that type of naval operation was not successful in bringing the British to terms. Instead, British control of the sea became more and more complete. Access to French ports became more and more dangerous. The cost of living rose in France, and sufferings on the continent became increasingly acute. Through it all British trade expanded, and British naval power increased.<sup>52</sup>

American independence, Mahan points out, was won at a moment when the British gave up their usual policy of blockading the French fleet in Brest, in favor of trying to protect their scattered colonies by dividing their forces. The French and their allies failed to seize the opportunity to secure control of the English Channel, but they did wield a temporary control of American waters, which resulted in the Franco-American capture of Cornwallis at Yorktown.<sup>53</sup>

The essence of Mahan's strategic doctrine was the necessity of controlling the sea which, he believed, could be done only by a concentration of force able to drive enemy naval and merchant ships from the seas. "It is not," Mahan concluded, "the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation; it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy's flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive; and which, by controlling the great common, closes the highways by which commerce moves to and fro from the enemy's shores. This overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies."<sup>54</sup>

If "the great end of a war fleet" was "not to chase, nor to fly, but to control the seas," the dominant characteristic required of such a fleet was not speed, but "power of offensive action." It was of no use "to get there first unless, when the enemy in turn arrives, you have . . . the greater force." This principle, Mahan believed, was even more true on the sea than on the land, because on the

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 539.

<sup>52</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution*, II, pp. 222-223, 227, 288, 343.

<sup>53</sup> See discussion in *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, chap. XIV, especially pp. 30 ff., 534 ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 138.

former lack of gun power could not be balanced, as it could sometimes be on land, by judicious choice of ground. Speed was useful, but not at the cost of gun power. The heavy ships-of-the-line—in later days, the battleship or capital ship—therefore constituted the backbone of fleet strength.<sup>55</sup>

Should a nation be so unfortunate as to have an inferior fleet, Mahan suggested that its most useful disposition would be to shut it up within an impregnable port and so impose upon the enemy the duty of constant guard to prevent its escape. This is substantially the course followed by the German fleet in World War I, and by the Italian fleet in World War II. The existence of such an inferior fleet, often called a "fleet in being," compels the enemy to restrict his operations until it shall be destroyed. Mahan discussed this concept of "fleet in being" at some length in an essay on *Lessons of the War with Spain* (1899), and concluded that the value of such a fleet has "been much overstated." The superior force will in the end run the inferior to earth.<sup>56</sup>

What was the proper role of the navy of the United States in the light of this capital-ship-command-of-the-sea doctrine? Mahan suggested that the prevalent American view that our navy was "for defense only" was widely misinterpreted because of confusion between "defense" in the political sense and "defense" in the military sense. "A navy for defense only, in the *political* sense," explains Mahan, "means a navy that will only be used in case we are forced into war; a navy for defense only, in the *military* sense, means a navy that can only await attack and defend its own, leaving the enemy at ease as regards his own interests, and at liberty to choose his own time and manner of fighting."<sup>57</sup>

Mahan's distinction between the strategic offensive and the political offensive is fundamental to any intelligent program of military preparedness. But Americans in 1890 were still interpreting a navy for defense only in the narrow military terms of preventing the sacking and shelling or occupation of the harbors up and down the coast. The navy, Mahan contended with vigor, is not "the proper instrument" for "coast defense in the narrow sense of the expression, which limits it to the defense of ports." The "passive defense" of our shores is properly the work of the army; and, if the navy undertakes such defense, it is merely using its trained men in garrisons when they could be better used elsewhere. Furthermore, "if the defense of ports, many in number, be attributed to the navy," the naval forces will be so divided that its real strength will be lost. The defensive strength of sea powers should depend on fortifications, which are not the job of the navy but in which the navy is interested because secure bases are a necessary foundation for naval power.<sup>58</sup>

"If, instead of a navy 'for defense only,'" Mahan continued, "there be one so large that the enemy must send a great many ships across the Atlantic, if he sends any, then the question whether he can spare so great a number is very

<sup>55</sup> *Lessons of the War with Spain* (1899), pp. 81 ff.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75 ff.

<sup>57</sup> "Current Fallacies upon Naval Subjects" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, XC VII (June 1898), pp. 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> *Naval Strategy*, pp. 145 ff., quoted in Allan Westcott, *Mahan on Naval Warfare* (1941), pp. 71 ff.; *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 87 note.

serious, considering the ever-critical condition of European politics." If we had twenty battleships, no European nation except England "could afford to send over here twenty-five battleships, which would be the very fewest needed, seeing the distance of their operations from home. . . ." Britain "equally cannot afford the hostility of a nation having twenty battleships, and with whom her points of difference are as inconsequential to her as they are with us." Such a navy would be defensive only in the sense that its existence protects the country from invasion, because it commands the seas.<sup>59</sup>

Even while Mahan was still writing critical minds were beginning to inquire about the effect of new technical developments upon Mahan's theory of command of the sea. In 1895 the Royal United Service Institution asked Mahan to express an opinion on the question whether the close blockade, upon which the naval strategy of the past had depended, could be maintained under conditions of steam, steel, and torpedoes. Mahan's answer was "yes." Just as wind had limited the movements of sailing vessels, modern fleets were "extremely hampered . . . by the very elements to which they owe much of their power." Torpedoes might be dangerous to the blockading force but they could be used also against the ships trying to escape. These new conditions had "simply widened the question, not changed its nature."<sup>60</sup> Sixteen years later the same question arose in connection with the submarine, the improved automotive torpedo, and wireless telegraphy. Mahan's answer was the same. The submarine and the new torpedo, he said, would place a "far greater strain on the blockaders, and compel them to keep at a much greater distance," but the principles of strategy will remain unchanged.<sup>61</sup>

When the efficacy of blockade came to be tested in the First World War, British control of coaling, docking, and other maritime facilities enabled them to devise a new system of enforcement. Neutral shipowners, applying to British commercial agents with proof that the ship's cargoes conformed to the laws of contraband, were issued certificates known as navicerts. These papers entitled the ships to immunity from capture or destruction, and to use of coaling and docking facilities without which they could not sail at all. This same system was followed in World War II. In any case, the blockade was maintained at so "much greater distance" as no longer to be a close, or coastal, blockade at all.

A real challenge to the capital-ship theory arose from the vulnerability of capital ships to attack by submarines and aircraft. The experimental bombing of several surrendered German ships after the First World War started a controversy which still rages on the subject of planes *vs.* battleships. At least two conclusions may be stated with certainty. Narrow seas within range of enemy land-based aircraft seem to have become untenable for capital ships except for short periods and with strong air protection. Upon the open sea the battle fleet must have both antisubmarine and antiaircraft weapons in great strength. No other form of military or naval power has yet appeared which can completely

<sup>59</sup> "Current Fallacies," p. 45; and Allan Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> "Blockade in Relation to Naval Strategy" in *U.S. Naval Inst. Proc.*, XXI (November 1895), pp. 851-866, esp. p. 857.

<sup>61</sup> *Naval Strategy*, pp. 2 ff.



take the place of the battle fleet with its battleships and battle cruisers, although it is true, the present war in the Pacific has brought the development of a new strategy involving the use of aircraft-carrier task forces of great speed and striking power in operations involving long distances.<sup>62</sup>

## VI

Few persons leave so deep an imprint on world events as that left by Mahan, and fewer still live to see so full a realization of their life's work. When Mahan died in December 1914 the impact of his writings had been felt in every admiralty; his views had profoundly affected civilian thinking and public policy in America, in Europe, and even in the Far East.

Mahan's influence on American naval policy became evident even before the appearance of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* in 1890. His lectures were first delivered at the War College in 1886, and in the years before 1890 many naval officers and public men, including Theodore Roosevelt, became familiar with his work.<sup>63</sup> The Secretary of the Navy, B. F. Tracy, may well have read or heard some of his lectures, for his annual report for December, 1889 bears the unmistakable imprint of Mahan's ideas. Although defense, not conquest, was the object of American policy, Tracy maintained that we required a "fighting force." Unarmored cruisers did not constitute such a force. What we needed was twenty "armored battleships" with which "to raise blockades" and to "beat off the enemy's fleet on its approach. . . ." We must have a fleet capable of diverting a hostile force from our coast "by threatening his own, for a war, though defensive in principle, may be conducted most effectively by being offensive in its operations."<sup>64</sup> Closely following Tracy's report came a still more revolutionary document, the report of the so-called Policy Board, a committee of six naval officers appointed by Tracy to study the naval requirements of the United States. This board, taking a broad view of its commission, outlined a program in terms of the large national destiny envisaged in Mahan's interpretation of history. Although admitting that we had no colonies, that our overseas commerce was mainly carried in foreign vessels, that our manufactures were competing with other nations in but few markets, that Great Britain was our only potential enemy, the board nevertheless advised building more than two hundred modern warships of all classes. Its members stated their belief that we were about to enter upon a period of commercial competition and expansion, including development of our own carrying trade, and that the opening of an isthmian canal would constitute a source of danger. The board specifically recommended a number of battleships with short cruising radius for coast defense, and a fleet of battleships with long cruising range for offensive operations.<sup>65</sup>

The report raised a storm of protest, both in and out of Congress, but it is

<sup>62</sup> For a defense of the capital ship as against air power see Bernard Brodie, *A Layman's Guide to Naval Strategy* (Princeton, 1942), chap. VIII.

<sup>63</sup> Puleston, *Mahan*, chap. XIII.

<sup>64</sup> Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power*, pp. 207-209.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209-211.

significant that the House Naval Affairs Committee provided in the next naval bill for what were termed, enigmatically, "three sea-going, coast-line battleships" with "heaviest armor and most powerful ordnance. . . ." With the passage of the Naval Act of 1890, Congress was clearly moving in the direction of the naval policy implicit in Mahan's historical analysis of sea power.<sup>66</sup> And while Congress was debating the naval needs of the country, the Navy Department was struggling to grasp and to apply the new strategy of naval defense, with the result that by 1897 the North Atlantic Squadron was developing into a fighting force which might realistically be called a fighting fleet.<sup>67</sup>

Congress continued to authorize battleships, in addition to other men of war. In November, 1893, Secretary of the Navy Herbert, inspired by Mahan's second large work, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, endorsed the capital-ship theory of naval defense in terms even stronger than those used by his predecessor. Indeed Herbert went further to justify the navy as an instrument of power with which to promote national interest abroad and to put teeth into diplomacy generally, even in time of peace. Other factors were pushing in the same direction. The naval battles of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) were widely interpreted as proving the fighting value of capital ships. The Venezuelan boundary dispute with Great Britain provided impetus for naval preparations. The beginning of the crisis which led to the war with Spain offered effective propaganda material.

Most important of all was the steadily increasing vogue of Mahan himself. The captain's name was not even mentioned in the naval debate of 1890. There is no indication that either senators or representatives had heard of his lectures or of his book. By 1895, however, Mahan's name and ideas were well known, frequently cited, and widely if not universally endorsed in congressional circles. In the naval debates of 1895 and 1896 a substantial number of senators and representatives, for the first time, displayed a fair understanding of the strategic theory implicit in all American naval legislation since 1890. The general endorsement of this theory squarely aligned the national legislature with the political executive and the service, both now thoroughly committed to the policy of seizing indisputable command of the sea throughout a wide zone extending outward from our continental seaboard. By 1897 the day was not far distant when the American navy, though still numerically inferior to those of several European powers, would hold command of all the sea approaches to the continental United States.<sup>68</sup>

The war with Spain was a historic milestone in the development of American naval thought, as it was in the rise of American naval power. The conflict was interpreted as proving the validity of the strategic principles which Mahan had reiterated in his many books and articles. The defeat of the feeble Spanish force in Manila Bay is of interest less as an example of naval strategy than for its political results. But in the Caribbean the strategic situation clearly depended upon naval command of the sea. In order to free Cuba from Spanish rule—the avowed political objective of the war—all Spanish forces must be

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-222.



driven from Cuba and Cuban waters. A naval blockade of the island might eventually starve out the garrison; military invasion might hasten its collapse. American military authorities, however, were willing to risk invasion of Cuba only after establishing command of the Caribbean and its adjoining waters. Such control could be effected only by destroying or immobilizing the naval forces of Spain, which obviously would do their best to maintain Spanish communications with Cuba.<sup>69</sup>

Viewed in retrospect, one of the most illuminating results of the war was a startling exhibition of public ignorance of the principles of naval strategy, as preached by Mahan. The civilian public in general and the daily press in particular succumbed to panic over improbable rumors of prospective naval assaults on our seaboard, and recklessly demanded protection in the form of warships for each and every coastal city. Such a division of our forces, which Mahan, cabling from Europe, "emphatically disapproved," might well have produced grave or disastrous consequences.<sup>70</sup> The Navy Department for the most part, however, resisted public demands for protection for the Atlantic seaports, and the fleet sailed for the Caribbean, where it first blockaded and then destroyed the Spanish squadron. Naval power exerted at some distance from our own shores determined the outcome at every stage, thus giving a death blow to the coast-defense theory of naval strategy.

If the war with Spain confirmed Mahan's theory of naval strategy, it also launched the United States on the expansionist career then advocated by Mahan. Naval primacy in the Caribbean had become a settled American naval objective long before the war with Spain, so that the annexation of Puerto Rico and the occupation of Cuba did little to enlarge or alter our defense problem in that region. But the war and the annexations which followed did accentuate our need for an isthmian canal, and emphasized the necessity of commanding the approaches to such a canal.<sup>71</sup>

The new insular possessions of the United States in the Pacific profoundly altered the strategical situation of the country. Mahan had long regarded the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands as a military necessity for the security of our Pacific Coast. Acquisition of the Philippines added another argument for annexing Hawaii, and was perhaps the decisive factor in bringing this about during the summer of 1898. Acquisition of part of the Samoan archipelago in 1899 completed the considerable list of new possessions. For better or for worse the United States was launched on a program of overseas expansion which constituted, according to Mahan, one of the three important links in the chain of sea power. These new outposts sustained the naval power which Mahan believed was essential to the support of American diplomacy in the Far East, but in turn the outposts themselves had to be defended. Although the strategical problems involved in their defense were difficult, they were not insoluble. But there were powerful political and emotional forces standing in

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223-232.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234-237; Puleston, *Mahan*, p. 187.

<sup>71</sup> Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power*, pp. 237-241. It took the *Oregon* sixty-eight days to steam from San Francisco to Key West by way of the Strait of Magellan, nearly 13,000 nautical miles.

the way of carrying out fully the military plans prepared by the Navy.<sup>72</sup> Although the United States had actually embarked upon the road to sea power advocated by Mahan, the people as a whole were not ready to pay the price necessary to carry out the rest of the program, or even to safeguard what they had acquired. The United States drifted along with a comfortable feeling of security until on a Sunday morning in December, 1941 a rain of bombs falling on Pearl Harbor plunged the nation into war in the Pacific.

Although the United States never put fully into practice the broader aspects of Mahan's philosophy of sea power, his doctrine of naval strategy and his belief in the necessity of preponderant naval power were eventually accepted by his own navy and by the country at large. Mahan's acquaintance with Theodore Roosevelt developed into a close and lasting friendship. Roosevelt became thoroughly conversant with Mahan's ideas, and found them singularly compatible with his own. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy just before the outbreak of the War with Spain, Roosevelt had had much to do with preparations for that conflict. The assassination of McKinley in September 1901 made Roosevelt President of the United States, thereby altering the whole course of American naval development, for Mahan's philosophy of sea power entered the White House in the person of Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>73</sup>

In the years that followed, Theodore Roosevelt dominated both the naval and foreign policies of the nation.<sup>74</sup> He had come to the presidency thoroughly committed to the building of an isthmian canal, which Mahan had been urging for years. The initiation of this undertaking was one of the notable achievements of Roosevelt's administration. Heeding Mahan's warnings that such a canal would be a strategic asset only if the United States navy held indisputable command over its approaches, he launched a campaign for the increase of our navy. Although as a matter of fact the growing German navy and the British navy tied each other to European waters, Roosevelt was absolutely convinced that the Germans would one day start trouble somewhere in this hemisphere. Only a fighting fleet second to none save Britain's, he argued, could forestall or resist such aggression and guarantee the security of the Panama Canal. Furthermore, Roosevelt utilized a crisis with Japan to harp on the need of stronger forces for the Pacific. Year after year Roosevelt continued his drive for a larger navy and by 1905 he had obtained impressive results. Ten first-class battleships, four armored cruisers and seventeen other vessels of different classes had been authorized by Congress. In the latter years of his presidency he secured four more capital ships and twenty destroyers.

Whole-hearted adoption of Mahan's strategic doctrines required more than a large number of ships. These ships, and the officers and crews who manned them, had to be organized and drilled into an efficient fighting machine. This was as great a task, if a less spectacular one, than securing the ships. The world cruise of the Atlantic Fleet which Roosevelt carried out in the face of

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 241-245.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250; Puleston, *Mahan*, chap. XXVII; *ibid.*, index: Theodore Roosevelt.

<sup>74</sup> For Roosevelt's impact on American naval policy, see Sprout, *op. cit.*, chap. XV.

congressional opposition may be said to have marked the debut of the United States as one of the world's great naval powers.

For five years after Roosevelt left the White House the navy continued a slow, uncertain growth. But the first year of the First World War foreshadowed an upward surge of navalism which carried the American naval program far beyond the standard of "a navy second only to Great Britain" which had guided policy since 1901. Had Mahan lived another year, until December, 1915, he could have heard President Wilson asking Congress for a navy "equal to the most powerful" in the world. The Naval Act of 1916 actually authorized for the United States "a navy second to none."<sup>75</sup>

## VII

Mahan's countrymen were not slow to give him the acclaim his work deserved but, as his biographer points out, "it was in England that Mahan achieved his greatest immediate popularity." *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* appeared in England at the precise psychological moment to win the greatest attention and approval.<sup>76</sup>

During the 'eighties a new imperialism was born from the intensive competition among European nations for markets and raw materials. Expanding British interests in overseas trade and shipping, in loans, concessions, and spheres of interest, inevitably came in conflict with similar interests of other nations. This clash produced a general trend toward naval rearmament. To the British, who considered their own navy a "vital necessity" but those of other noninsular nations as "mere luxuries," these growing navies "could only be intended for eventual aggression against [the British] themselves."<sup>77</sup> This jealousy of naval power other than their own is understandable if one considers the complete dependence of Britain upon sea power for her very existence as a free nation.

In 1889 the government presented to Parliament a naval expansion plan based on the principle of a navy equal to those of any two other European nations—the "two power standard." Mahan's book appeared at the right moment to provide clear and irrefutable arguments to justify this program. It also provided welcome ammunition with which to defeat the demands of British army officers and others for elaborate and costly fortifications along the entire coast of Britain.<sup>78</sup>

During the previous years the British public had begun to take a renewed interest in the navy, but Mahan's two books appearing in 1890 and in 1892 were the most important single factor in making the whole nation navy-minded. It is not difficult to understand the appeal of Mahan's ideas to the British people. He had perceived beneath the maze of events in English naval and political history the basic principles which had made Britain mistress of the seas, and he

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, chaps. XVI-XVIII.

<sup>76</sup> Puleston, *Mahan*, p. 110.

<sup>77</sup> A. J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power* (1940), chap. II, especially pp. 10-11, 13; also Puleston, *Mahan*, chap. XVI.

<sup>78</sup> Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 25; R. H. Heindel, *The American Impact on Great Britain* (1940), p. 117; Puleston, *Mahan*, pp. 106-107.

stated these principles in a form even laymen could understand. With an ancient tradition of sea power behind them, with a naval race already in progress, and a new era of imperialism in the making, it is no wonder that Englishmen at once eulogized his work.<sup>79</sup>

Mahan visited England several times in the course of a "ceremonial cruise" of European waters during 1893-1895 and was acclaimed in an almost unprecedented manner. He was "dined by the queen and by the prime minister, awarded honorary degrees by Oxford and Cambridge, and entertained as a guest of honor by the Royal Navy Club—the first foreigner to receive this honor." The staid *Times* of London eulogized him as one who had done for naval history what Copernicus had done for astronomy. A naval critic compared him with Priestley: "Sea power, of course, has influenced the world in all ages. So also has oxygen. Yet just as oxygen, but for Priestley, might have remained until this day an indefinite and undetected factor, so might sea power but for Mahan." His views were widely disseminated in the press, in the quarterlies, through the professional journals, and by such influential societies as the Royal United Service Institution. One Englishman, perhaps with a note of regret, said that it took "a Yankee to wake up this generation of Englishmen to the meaning and importance of sea power." But the navy, the government, the universities, and the general public were glad to pay him the supreme compliment of being the only foreigner who had the right "to offer them counsel upon the conduct of their affairs." Even Gladstone, the arch opponent of armaments, said Mahan's work on the French Revolution and the Empire was the "book of the age." None of these compliments was undeserved, for Mahan put the term sea power into the contemporary vocabulary of Englishmen and did more than any other single person to stimulate the interest of Britons in their own navy. For the first time, wrote Lord Sydenham of Combe, "we had a philosophy of sea power built upon history." It might be added, too, that Mahan contributed to the growing feeling on both sides of the Atlantic that control of the world's ocean highways was a matter which encouraged and, indeed, made almost imperative effective Anglo-American understanding and cooperation.<sup>80</sup>

But Mahan's influence in Europe was by no means limited to Britain. In 1890 the world's second naval power was France, where Mahan's first book was promptly translated and came to the attention of French naval officers. Captain Darrieus, a former professor of strategy and naval tactics at the French Naval War College, was greatly impressed with Mahan's criticisms of French naval policy. In a book of his own covering much the same period of history as Mahan, he reiterated the faults of French naval strategy which Mahan had pointed out.<sup>81</sup> Another French naval officer, Admiral Raoul Castex of the French War College, declared that Mahan's two ideas, first the paramount importance of command of the sea, and second, the necessity of

<sup>79</sup> Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 45-48; Heindel, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>80</sup> Heindel, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-47; Puleston, chap. XXIII.

<sup>81</sup> Puleston, *Mahan*, pp. 107, 326.

organized force, would alone "entitle him to the consideration of posterity." Castex did not like Mahan's style, but he believed that it did not in any way detract "from the priceless value of Mahan's work which was truly creative in the field of strategic theory."<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Mahan's ideas never evoked in France the wide acclaim which they enjoyed in Britain, in the United States, and in Germany. After all it could hardly be expected, as Mr. Ropp shows in the next chapter, that the French would receive with enthusiasm a philosophy which was so at variance with their historic policies.

Mahan's writings had a practical influence on German policy second only to their influence in the United States. As in England and in America, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* appeared at a critical moment. Emperor William II had recently dismissed the aged Bismarck largely because of the latter's obstinate insistence that Germany should remain a continental power, and the nation under the young kaiser launched itself on an avowed policy of imperialistic expansion overseas. The newly founded German navy was an essential part of the new policy, and although small, the imperial fleet was growing.<sup>83</sup>

Sea power was not for Germany the result of spontaneous and natural processes as it had been in England. Interest in a navy was from the first artificially aroused and stimulated. The *Reichsmarineamt* and, later, the Navy League (*Flottenverein*) undertook a systematic campaign to popularize naval power.<sup>84</sup> The leaders in this effort to enlist public interest at once realized the value of Mahan's writings for their purposes and the Navy itself took a hand in translating them into German. Ernst von Halle, one of the leaders of the movement to popularize sea power, himself wrote a book applying Mahan's doctrines to the events of German history. The propagandists presented the need for naval power to the German people as a business proposition, using Mahan's contention that the development of profitable economic interests overseas was dependent upon the possession of sea power.<sup>85</sup>

Germany, in contrast to France and Britain, had practically no naval history at all, and hence few naval traditions. German officers were, therefore, more than willing to accept ready made the doctrines of strategy which Mahan had formulated. Mahan's picture of sea power as something which derives from a combination of colonies, overseas trade, and naval power had an almost intoxicating effect on a people just awakening to an interest in colonies and foreign commerce. The message which the German kaiser sent to a friend in May, 1894 is typical of the enthusiastic reception Mahan's ideas found in Germany. "I am just now not reading but devouring Captain Mahan's book," he wrote, "and am trying to learn it by heart. It is a first-class work and classical

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>83</sup> Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 288 ff.; A. Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik* (1935), p. 652, note 1. The author wishes here to express appreciation for the assistance of Dr. Felix Gilbert in summarizing German source material.

<sup>84</sup> Concerning the *Flottenverein*, with its hundreds of thousands of members, see Chap. 13, especially note 4.

<sup>85</sup> E. Kehr, *Schlachtflottenbau und Parteipolitik 1894-1901* (Berlin, 1930), pp. 38, 45, 101-110. E. von Halle, *Die Seemacht in der deutschen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1907). See especially p. 6 on "das epochemachende Werk des Amerikaners A. T. Mahan."

in all points. It is on board all my ships and constantly quoted by my captains and officers."<sup>86</sup>

The guiding spirit of German naval policy was Alfred von Tirpitz. From 1897 until the First World War, Tirpitz was entirely responsible for the material as well as the administrative and ideological organization of the German navy. Tirpitz was familiar with the writings of Mahan and always spoke well of them, and the effect of the American officer's ideas on Tirpitz's program and policies is evident.<sup>87</sup> Tirpitz maintained that only a world power, meaning a power with interests around the globe, could be considered a Great Power. No mere land power could, therefore, be a Great Power; possession of sea power was necessary. The acid test of a nation's possession of sea power was not a large fleet of cruisers for use in a *guerre de course* against enemy commerce but the existence of a fleet of battleships. It is interesting that Tirpitz's first act as secretary of the navy was to replace his predecessor's program for increasing the number of German cruisers with proposals for building a fleet of battleships.

Tirpitz was really identifying sea power with battleship strength—a position which might conceivably have resulted from too casual perusal of Mahan's writings, for it was certainly not altogether consistent with Mahan's views. Tirpitz also put special emphasis on "the political importance of a navy." A navy will increase the alliance value of a state, he maintained. It will serve to gain influence and to win friends. He further explained in his memoirs that "only a fleet which represented alliance value to other Great Powers, in other words, a competent battle fleet, could put into the hands of our diplomats the tool which, if used to good purpose, could supplement our power on the continent."<sup>88</sup> This alliance-value idea was the basis of Tirpitz's famous "risk" theory, the essence of which was as follows: Since "the German navy could not be made strong enough for a reasonable chance of victory against every opponent, it should be made so strong that its destruction would cost even the strongest sea power such heavy losses, endangering its supremacy vis-à-vis third navies, that the mere thought of that risk would act as a deterrent against an attack."<sup>89</sup> Tirpitz hoped that instead of risking her control of the seas by fighting the German navy, Britain would make concessions and come to an understanding with Germany. But events of the First World War did not substantiate Tirpitz's theory. The English neither came to an agreement with the Germans nor were deterred from attacking the German fleet. Germany's battleships were finally bottled up in German waters and the Allied fleets once more demonstrated the real value of command of the sea.

<sup>86</sup> Vagts, *op. cit.*, p. 652, note 1. The Kaiser's statement is quoted in Puleston's *Mahan*, p. 159.

<sup>87</sup> For Tirpitz's views on the value of a navy to Germany, see Tirpitz's draft of a speech in the Reichstag, March 1896, published by H. Hallman, *Krügerdepesche und Flottenfrage* (Stuttgart, 1927), p. 85. For Mahan's influence on his ideas of the "political justification of the battle fleet" see Hallman, *Der Weg zum deutschen Schlachtflottenbau* (Stuttgart, 1933), p. 128.

<sup>88</sup> *My Memoirs* (Eng. trans. 1919), I, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup> H. Rosinski, "German Theories of Sea Warfare," *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1940, p. 89.

The influence of Mahan on German naval thought before 1914 is undeniable, but there is good evidence that it was a misunderstood Mahan which the Germans adopted.<sup>90</sup> Mahan's writings contain many discussions of the disadvantages under which geography placed the German nation with relation to British sea power. Had the Germans understood the real essence of sea power they inevitably must have realized that only a naval force large enough to defeat the British fleet could ever transform Germany into a sea power in Mahan's sense of the word. Tirpitz appears not to have comprehended the basic geographical limitations on the German position with relation to the control of the sea.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Tirpitz failed to heed Mahan's warning that a nation cannot hope to be a great land power and a great sea power as well.

In the postwar years German naval theorists apparently realized that faulty naval strategy was responsible for the failure of the German navy to play a more useful role in the war. Tirpitz's prestige remained so great that none dared attack him openly, but there was a definite trend in the direction of a new naval theory presumably better fitted to the German geographical situation. The pendulum swung to the other extreme and in recent years the Germans have turned their attention to a new *guerre de course* waged with submarines, aircraft, and surface raiders, but in essence similar to that which French naval strategists followed in the past.<sup>92</sup>

No estimate of the influence of Mahan on military thought could be complete without mention of the part played by Mahan's theories in the development of German *Geopolitik*.<sup>93</sup> This new German approach to statecraft comprises a theory of state power and growth built on expanding land power, roughly analogous to Mahan's philosophy of growing sea power. According to Robert Strausz-Hupé, in his recent book explaining German geopolitics, Mahan was "one of the several Anglo-Saxon thinkers whose influence is most clearly noticeable throughout Haushofer's own teachings—in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that Haushofer's own doctrine of land power is the most extreme negation of Mahan's theories."<sup>94</sup>

A large part of geopolitical writing and thinking is concerned with the conflicts between land power and sea power. The exponents of land power were eager to find the "weak spots in Britain's strategic setting." Hence they turned eagerly to the works of the British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, who had pointed out the "sensitive regions in the anatomy of British sea power."<sup>95</sup> In developing his theory of the Eurasian Heartland Mackinder critically reexamined the Mahan doctrine of sea power. He restated certain qualifications of the sea power theory which Mahan had pointed out but which his followers had frequently ignored. It was Britain's position and the location of her adversaries

<sup>90</sup> See Rosinski, "Mahan and the Present War," *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1941, pp. 9-11.

<sup>91</sup> See Vagts, *op. cit.*, p. 1524.

<sup>92</sup> See the analysis of German post-war naval theory by Rosinski, "German Theories of Sea Warfare" in *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1940, pp. 88-101.

<sup>93</sup> On geopolitics, see Chap. 16.

<sup>94</sup> R. Strausz-Hupé, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* (New York, 1942), p. 246.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252; also p. 53.

which gave the British fleet such a powerful leverage on world affairs. Insularity alone gave no "indefeasible title to marine sovereignty." Mackinder also raised the vital question of the relation of the bases of sea power to land power.<sup>96</sup>

German geopolitics studied the history of sea power, Strausz-Hupé suggests, "only to be able to conclude categorically that the day of island empires was drawing to a close and that in the future landpower would be in the ascendant." Haushofer and his followers apprehended the changes in strategic geography produced by the railroad and later by mechanized land warfare much sooner than the exponents of sea power. They put their fingers on the weaknesses of Hongkong and Singapore years before war demonstrated these weaknesses to the world. They realized, if the rest of the world did not, that the "world political potential of seapower had been in full retreat before the rapidly increasing potential of landpower, long before the first submarine had plunged below the surface and the first plane had taken to the air."<sup>97</sup>

German geopolitical writers have frequently expressed their admiration for Mahan, whose global philosophy was built on a scale more grandiose and more audacious than any European expansionist theories of his day. Haushofer considered Mahan a great geopolitical thinker, a "seer" who had set "the United States on the path to greatness" and who had taught American statesmen to "think in terms of world power and greater space."<sup>98</sup>

It is one of the strange quirks of history that the American naval officer whose doctrines became the guiding principles of the world's leading sea powers should have inadvertently provided inspiration for the creation of an antithetical theory of land power. Had the grand strategy of Haushofer and Hitler succeeded, it would have spelled the doom of sea power as Mahan understood it. And as the modern world has been largely predicated upon British and more recently upon Anglo-American control of the seas, the results of a Nazi victory would have been revolutionary far beyond their best hopes and our worst fears.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53 ff., 249 ff. Mackinder's views on Britain's position are summarized in his *Britain and the British Seas* (2nd ed. 1930), chap. XX, and especially p. 358.

<sup>97</sup> Strausz-Hupé, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254, 255-264, especially p. 261.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 243-246.