

Revisiting Mackinder and Angell: The Obsolescence of Great Power Geopolitics

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Norman Angell and Sir Halford Mackinder were contemporaries with similar backgrounds in early 20th century England, but their theories of international relations could hardly have been more different. The world wars seemed to confirm the importance of what Mackinder had to say and discredit Angell, but today the outlook is quite different. Now that major, great power war is all but obsolete, Angell's ideas about the futility of war seem to have been taken to heart by policy makers in the most powerful states. Many of the core concepts of geopolitics, including "relative gains" and the balance of power itself, are irrelevant for the states at the upper levels of the system. A century after Mackinder and Angell wrote, the fortunes of their theories have been reversed—and that reversal is likely permanent.

Just before the outbreak of the First World War, two British intellectuals developed revolutionary theories that have long outlasted the empire they both loved. Sir Halford Mackinder and Norman Angell, though of similar background and upbringing, produced views of the world that were diametrically opposed in their assumptions, evidence, and conclusions. The works that made their reputations became classics of international relations, and helped lay the foundation for the two broad schools of thought that still dominate the study of world politics.

Sir Halford Mackinder introduced the world to geopolitics, the connection between the earth and grand strategy, and warned that whoever ruled the heartland had the best chance to dominate the world. Almost simultaneously, Norman Angell captured the imagination of liberals across Europe by arguing that warfare between the great powers had become a futile and self-destructive exercise. The world wars that followed were seen by their contemporaries and successors to vindicate the theories of Mackinder, and devastate those of Angell.

Both men were highly educated, intelligent, patrician imperialists. Both were ardent patriots who sought nothing more earnestly than to help Britain maintain its power, prosperity, and international prestige. But there the similarities end, for the two intellectual giants diverged in their views of world politics and of the interaction between the great powers. The theories of these two men are worth returning to again and again, if only to remind ourselves of the extent to which the fundamental nature of international relations have changed in the century since Mackinder and Angell wrote.

Mackinder's view of great power interaction accurately captured the reality of 19th century great power interaction—and if the rules governing world politics were as static as some suggest, they still would today. However, international relations, like all areas of human endeavor, evolves. Nearly a hundred years of evolution from the time that these

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two men wrote have rendered Mackinder's theories, and the worldview from which they sprang, as obsolete as major war itself. At the dawn of the 21st century, long-discredited Norman Angell has emerged triumphant.

This paper will revisit Mackinder and Angell, and examine their relevance, or lack thereof, for the 21st century. The coming century is likely to be one free of major war between the great powers—therefore, Mackinderian great power geopolitics will have little to teach modern policy makers. Concepts once crucial to international security—such as “relative gains” and the “balance of power”—look quite different if the potential for conflict is removed from the equation. The concluding sections begin to examine the titanic implications that the “obsolescence of major war” would have for geopolitics, and for the entire field of security studies.

Mackinder, Angell and the Traditions They Established

Mackinder

Mackinder's reputation in the history of international strategic theory was assured when he gave his famous lecture at the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, where he virtually invented the modern study of geopolitics. The term may have predated his “The Geographical Pivot of History” by a few years, but it was Mackinder who brought the study of geography and its relation to international politics to the public.¹

Mackinder's “heartland” theory needs little introduction, for even those unfamiliar with Sir Halford will recognize the essence of the theory from writings of his successors. Mackinder argued that the important ideal area of the world from a strategic perspective is the “heartland” of the Eurasian landmass, which, although defined a few different ways over the course of Mackinder's career, was roughly equivalent to area occupied by the former Soviet Union. Whoever dominated this region, the “greatest natural fortress on the earth,” would have the greatest chance to project power over the entire world. Mackinder's oft-quoted cherub whispered in the ears of the peacemakers in Versailles that, to paraphrase, “who controls the Heartland controls the world.”²

An understanding of the genesis of Mackinder's theory is vital to assess its implications. The notion of the “key position” on the battlefield, which was a crucial concept to Napoleonic-era military strategy, was experiencing a bit of a revival at the turn of the last century.³ The Heartland, the key position on the battlefield of the world island, is essentially an extension of military tactics to the grand strategic level. Mackinder looked at his Mercator Projection as if it were a “Risk” game board and, armed with four decades of experience in geography, identified where he thought the key position would be, were all things equal. The Heartland is therefore the “key position” on the global battlefield.

Daniel Bell could have had Mackinder in mind when he warned all who would predict the future that “every seer has a sense that an age is ending.”⁴ Mackinder thought that the historians of the future might mark the end of the “Columbian Epoch,” the great age of exploration and discovery, at the beginning of the 20th century. The end of this epoch meant the beginning of an era of a “closed” international system, where the world was not only explored but also almost completely divided by competing European empires.⁵ Since expansion was no longer an option, the states in the closed system would now be forced to turn their gaze inward, to compete for dominance in the finite space. Mackinder sought to define the scope of the coming contest between competing empires, hoping to discern the key position on the “permanent” playing field that the earth offers. In his introduction to the 1962 edition, Anthony J. Pearce began by noting that “*Democratic*

Ideals and Reality is a masterly analysis of the permanent strategic factors which have governed all struggles for world empire.”⁶

Mackinder invented what would perhaps better be considered *geo-strategy*, which envisions the entire world as a battlefield and tries to find the most advantageous position during the inevitable and ongoing struggle for global dominance. Mackinder, Mahan, and Spykman (and their modern-day successors Colin S. Gray and Zbigniew Brzezinski) are concerned with geo-strategy writ large, which deals with the interaction and the balance among the most powerful players of the international system. The smaller, weaker states of the periphery are of geo-strategic importance only to the extent that they influence the actions of the great powers.

Mackinder’s successors like to attribute many great power grand strategies that followed his lecture—Hitler, the Cold War, and containment, to name a few—to his theories. In reality, however, his ideas were largely ignored when they were first introduced.⁷ One of Mackinder’s contemporaries held much more popular and critical acclaim, with assumptions and conclusions almost diametrically opposed to those of Mackinder. The First World War reversed their roles in the consciousness of analysts, but that reversal may not prove to have been permanent.

Angell

Norman Angell is among the most misunderstood of international relations theorists. He did not argue that war between the great powers was obsolete or impossible, as contemporary writers are prone to suggest. Instead, *The Great Illusion*⁸ of which he spoke was that war could be profitable, that any nation would emerge from total war in the modern industrial era better off than when they entered. He never announced the end of warfare—quite the contrary, he thought a European war was inevitable, and instead tried to convince his contemporaries that they were on a road to destruction, one that could not be advantageous for any of the great powers. He argued that, because of modern military technology and economic interdependence, the world had “passed out of that stage in development in which it is possible for one civilized group to advance its well-being by the military domination of another.”⁹ Yet Angell understood that few agreed with this conclusion, and until they did, and “so long as the current political philosophy in Europe remains what it is,” he did not recommend “the reduction of our war budget by a single sovereign.”¹⁰

Angell’s predictions held up quite well throughout World War I. Militarily, his vision of a frightfully bloody entrenched deadlock was borne out, especially in the west where the fighting was done by the most industrialized states of the era. Economically, as Angell noted after the war, the Allies “actually had achieved, though at frightful costs, the goal of all participants in the great power rivalry. They had been able to dictate their terms to the enemy. Having done so, they were no more prosperous or secure than before.”¹¹ London’s *Daily News* noted that “Mr. Angell, whether he likes it or not, is a prophet whose prophesies have come true.”¹² The Allies were victorious, but as Angell foresaw, victory at such an appalling cost was close to worthless.¹³

World War I demonstrated that the mere futility of war, even if true, would not be enough to prevent its outbreak. In order for major war to become obsolete, the great powers had to be *convinced* that it was futile. As one of Angell’s early critics argued,

Mr. Angell may be right in his contention that modern war is unprofitable to both belligerents . . . but he is wrong if he imagines that his theory will

prevent European war. To prevent European wars it needs more than the truth of his theory: it needs that the war lords and diplomatists and financiers and workers of Europe shall believe the theory.¹⁴

The “war lords and diplomatists and financiers and workers” of the era of Angell and Mackinder clearly did not yet believe that major war was a thing of the past.

Post-Mackinder Geo-Strategy

Angell was something of a celebrity in both popular and intellectual circles in ante-bellum Europe; Mackinder’s theories were largely ignored. The world wars reversed their fortunes. Although the “Geographical Pivot” did not make much of a splash when it was written, by the beginning of the Cold War Mackinder’s theories were part of the education of every student of international strategy.

This is not to say that Mackinder has been free from critical analysis in the century since his famous lecture. In fact, his first critic arose immediately after Mackinder finished speaking. British political scientist Leopold Amery, who was in the audience that day at the Royal Society of Geographers, suggested that with advancements in technology, “a great deal of this geographical speculation must lose its importance. . . . The successful powers,” of the future, he maintained, would be “those which have the greatest industrial basis.” It would “not matter whether they were in the center of a continent or on an island; those people who have the industrial power and the power of invention and of science will be able to defeat all others.”¹⁵

Many others have rephrased Amery’s basic critique over the years, gradually adding to and refining it. Virtually every aspect of Mackinder’s geo-strategy has been rethought, sometimes by critics and other times by like-minded analysts. Perhaps the most influential of the latter group was Yale’s Nicholas Spykman, who in the early 1940s noted that the most economically viable territories on the earth were those that had access to both the major sea and land trading routes, not those in the middle of the Eurasian landmass. Spykman argued that it was from these areas, not the barren and inhospitable Heartland, that a potential hegemon could emerge. He recommended that the United States seek to maintain a balance in these “rimlands,” for they held the key to the World Island.¹⁶ The influence of Mackinder and Spykman on the “containment” strategy during the Cold War, noted one observer, was “so apparent as to approach the status of a cliché.”¹⁷

Geo-strategy came to real prominence in the United States during the Second World War, as the allies tried to decipher German grand strategy.¹⁸ Karl Haushofer, a German political geographer and teacher of Rudolf Hess, who was of course one of Hitler’s closest advisors, had become enamored with Mackinder, and his writings had some influence on the foreign policy of the Reich.¹⁹ German “*geopolitik*” became a subject of interest in the United States. After the war, as the Soviet Union emerged as the next great threat, the warnings of Mackinder’s cherub remained on the minds of many American strategists.²⁰

Despite the important objections that his critics have raised over the years, Mackinder has enjoyed another mini-renaissance in strategic circles in the United States and in Russia since the end of the Cold War. This renaissance is understandable, given the confusing new world of international politics that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet collapse. Some analysts have returned to the “classics,” seeking guidance among the dizzying array of policy alternatives, hoping to find the successor to “containment,” a new grand strategy that could guide the West into the new age.²¹

As we search for this new grand strategy, it is important to note that geo-strategy, especially Mackinderian geo-strategy “writ large,” assumes that a certain degree of

conflict is inherent in the international order, and indeed considers states to be little more than “essential geographical identities *qua* identities in perpetual conflict.”²² The geopolitician/geo-strategist typically defines the fault lines that organize and define that conflict, and go on to advise his countrymen on how to proceed. The reader comes away with a world defined by contrasting and conflictual imagery, whether it be of sea power vs. land power, heartland vs. rimland, or USSR vs. USA. Conflict, and the oppositions that arise from it, is a central assumption of geo-strategic analysis. Where there is no such conflict, or the potential for conflict, geo-strategic analysis is almost useless.

Angell Triumphant: The Obsolescence of Great Power War

No intellectual renaissance was in the cards for Norman Angell. His ideas, unlike those of Mackinder, lay dormant and discredited for decades. In the 1970s, when scholars like Keohane and Nye argued that growing levels of economic interdependence had dramatically changed international interaction, realists were quick to remind them that, although Angell had made similar arguments nearly a century before, war came anyway.²³ While these critics were using Angell as the paragon of utopian foolishness, a change was taking place in international politics, a change that was scarcely perceptible. While in the past important, titanic changes in the system were often precipitated by wars, this seismic shift was so quiet, so gradual that many did not seem to notice. As the second half of the 20th century wore on, the great powers of the world became convinced by the arguments that Angell had put forward.²⁴ By the time the new century dawned, major war had been rendered obsolete.

Mackinder can be forgiven for failing to anticipate the titanic changes in the fundamental nature of the international system much more readily than can his successors. Indeed, Mackinder and his contemporaries a century ago would hardly recognize the rules by which the world is run today—most significantly, unlike their era, ours is one in which the danger of major war has been removed, where World War III is, in Michael Mandelbaum’s words, “somewhere between impossible and unlikely.”²⁵ Geopolitical and geo-strategic analysis has not yet come to terms with what may be the central, most significant trend of international politics: great power war, major war of the kind that pit the strongest states against each other, is now obsolete.²⁶ John Mueller has been the most visible, but by no means the only, analyst arguing that the chances of a World War III emerging in the next century are next to nil.²⁷ Mueller and his contemporaries cite three major arguments supporting this revolutionary, and clearly controversial, claim.

First, and most obviously, modern military technology has made major war too expensive to contemplate. As John Keegan has argued, it is hard to see how nuclear war could be considered “an extension of politics by other means”—at the very least, nuclear weapons remove the possibility of victory from the calculations of the would-be aggressor.²⁸ Their value as leverage in diplomacy has not been dramatic, at least in the last few decades, because nuclear threats are not credible in the kind of disagreements that arise between modern great powers. It is unlikely that a game of nuclear “chicken” would lead to the outbreak of a major war.

Others have argued that, while nuclear weapons surely make war an irrational exercise, the destructive power of modern conventional weapons make today’s great powers shy away from direct conflict.²⁹ The world wars dramatically reinforced Angell’s warnings, and today no one is eager to repeat those experiences, especially now that the casualty levels among both soldiers and civilians would be even higher.

Second, the shift from the industrial to the information age that seems to be gradually occurring in many advanced societies has been accompanied by a new definition of power, and a new system of incentives which all but remove the possibility that major war could ever be a cost-efficient exercise. The rapid economic evolution that is sweeping much of the world, encapsulated in the “globalization” metaphor so fashionable in the media and business communities, has been accompanied by an evolution in the way national wealth is accumulated.³⁰

For millennia, territory was the main object of war because it was directly related to national prestige and power. As early as 1986 Richard Rosecrance recognized that “two worlds of international relations” were emerging, divided over the question of the utility of territorial conquest.³¹ The intervening years have served only to strengthen the argument that the major industrial powers, quite unlike their less-developed neighbors, seem to have reached the revolutionary conclusion that territory is not directly related to their national wealth and prestige. For these states, wealth and power are more likely to derive from an increase in economic, rather than military, reach. National wealth and prestige, and therefore power, are no longer directly related to territorial control.³²

The economic incentives for war are therefore not as clear as they once may have been. Increasingly, it seems that the most powerful states pursue *prosperity* rather than power. In Edward Luttwak’s terminology, geopolitics is slowly being replaced by “geo-economics,” where “the methods of commerce are displacing military methods—with disposable capital in lieu of firepower, civilian innovation in lieu of military–technical advancement, and market penetration in lieu of garrisons and bases.”³³ Just as advances in weaponry have increased the cost of fighting, a socioeconomic evolution has reduced the rewards that a major war could possibly bring.

Angell’s major error was one that has been repeated over and over again in the social sciences ever since—he overestimated the “rationality” of humanity. Angell recognized earlier than most that the industrialization of military technology and economic interdependence assured that the costs of a European war would certainly outweigh any potential benefits, but he was not able to convince his contemporaries who were not ready to give up the institution of war. The idea of war was still appealing—the *normative* cost/benefit analysis still tilted in the favor of fighting, and that proved to be the more important factor. Today, there is reason to believe that this normative calculation may have changed. After the war, Angell noted that the only things that could have prevented the war were “surrendering of certain dominations, a recasting of patriotic ideals, a *revolution of ideas*.”³⁴ The third and final argument of Angell’s successors is that today such a revolution of ideas has occurred, that a *normative evolution* has caused a shift in the rules that govern state interaction.

The revolutionary potential of ideas should not be underestimated. Beliefs, ideologies, and ideas are often, as Dahl notes, “a major independent variable,” which we ignore at our peril.³⁵ “Ideas,” added John Mueller,

are very often forces themselves, not flotsam on the tide of broader social or economic patterns . . . it does not seem wise in this area to ignore phenomena that cannot be easily measured, treated with crisp precision, or probed with deductive panache.³⁶

The heart of this argument is the “moral progress” that has “brought a change in attitudes about international war” among the great powers of the world,³⁷ creating for the first time, “an almost universal sense that the deliberate launching of a war can no longer

be justified.”³⁸ At times leaders of the past were compelled by the masses to defend the national honor, but today popular pressures push for peaceful resolutions to disputes between industrialized states. This normative shift has rendered war between great powers “subrationally unthinkable,” removed from the set of options for policy makers, just as dueling is no longer a part of the set of options for the same classes for which it was once central to the concept of masculinity and honor. As Mueller explained,

Dueling, a form of violence famed and fabled for centuries, is avoided not merely because it has ceased to seem ‘necessary’, but because it has sunk from thought as a viable, conscious possibility. You can’t fight a duel if the idea of doing so never occurs to you or your opponent.³⁹

By extension, states cannot fight wars if doing so does not occur to them or to their opponent.

As Angell discovered, the fact that major war was futile was not enough to bring about its end—people had to *believe* that it was futile. Angell’s successors suggest that such a belief now exists in the industrial (and postindustrial) states of the world, and this “autonomous power of ideas,” to borrow Francis Fukuyama’s term, has brought about the end of major, great power war.⁴⁰

Could Major War be Obsolete? Realists Respond

The arguments of realists and other critics of the major-war-is-obsolete hypothesis generally fall around two main lines of thought anchored in different levels of analysis, both of which attack the potential for change in international politics. First, some critics focus on the individual level of analysis and maintain that aggression and war are imbedded in human nature, and therefore will always be with us. Others argue that war is part of the immutable and fundamental nature of states and/or of the anarchic international system. Neither critique makes a convincing case for the impossibility of fundamental international political evolution.

War and the Individual

Millennia of historical and psychological evidence seems to suggest that aggression is a permanent part of human nature, which allows realists and other scholars to claim that warfare, including major war, is all but unavoidable. “If our instinctive pugnacities and hates are uncontrollable,” wrote Angell, “and they dictate our conduct, no more is to be said. We are the helpless victims of outside forces, and might as well surrender.”⁴¹ But while it is true that the scourge of war has always been part of the human experience, and that some level of aggression is probably part of our nature, it is not necessarily true that such bellicose individual tendencies have to be translated into national policies.

By definition, fundamental aspects of human nature are not open to much evolutionary “progress.” But the degree to which war is a natural occurrence, even if our natures are permanently “flawed,” is not clear. Freud argued that the instinctual aggressive impulses are often internalized by “civilized” people, which brings advantages to society even if it may be at times harmful to the individual. “Sensations which were pleasurable to our ancestors have become indifferent or even intolerable to ourselves; there are organic grounds for the changes in our ethical and aesthetic ideas.”⁴² Aggressive human tendencies can theoretically be diverted into non-violent outcomes. The philosopher

William James famously argued that the human impulses could and should be funneled to society's benefit, marshaled to fight against social ills and inequalities with the tenacity of warfare.⁴³

But more importantly, those who link the perceived flaws in human nature to war make an egregious mistake in connecting individual level passions with state level actions. Even if aggression is an immutable part of our natures war need not be the result, for the institution of war is separate from the passions of the individual, even those of individual leaders. War is an act of state, not an act of the individual. It is an institution, a rational institution, which although is created by humans is not "human" in itself. As such war emerges out of conflicts of national interests, not individual passions. Norman Angell noted long ago that, "in human society mere instinct has always been modified or directed in some measure by taboos, traditions, conventions, constituting a social discipline."⁴⁴ Institutions to a large extent are designed to tame and control our instincts for the benefit of society at large. Good government can act as a filter, refusing to allow the darker side of human nature to show itself on the international stage.

Huntington committed this error when he argued that war is as inevitable as murder, for both result from flaws in human nature.⁴⁵ Murder is an individual act, as often an act of passion as one of reason; war is a state action, a symptom of the broader practices of the system. A number of scholars have investigated the notion that war could break out as an act of passion, or as an accident, and not one has found much support for the suggestion that war can begin as anything but a calculated act of state.⁴⁶ In the long history of the international system of states, virtually no war has ever broken out as a result of uncontrolled passions.⁴⁷ The relationship of aggression to human nature seems to be nearly irrelevant in predicting the frequency of the rational act of war.

War is an institution, an idea, a tradition of dispute resolution, a method states have chosen to employ when their interests diverge. Granted, it has been with us throughout history. But as Mueller noted, "unlike breathing, eating, or sex, war is not something that is somehow required by the human psyche, by the human condition, or by the forces of history."⁴⁸ John Keegan summarized this debate by noting that, "the proposition that man is biologically disposed towards violence [is] one of the most fiercely contested issues in behavioural science. . . . It is not necessary to take the disbelieving view in order to be impressed by the evidence that mankind, wherever it has the option, is distancing itself from the institution of warfare."⁴⁹ To argue that people can change their minds and think differently is not to propose that they can change their "natures" and *be* different. War is a product of reason not emotion, and therefore it should be able to evolve freely as people change their minds or opinions according to intellectual fashion.

War and the System

As the discussion above is meant to suggest, war is not an inevitable outgrowth of our flawed natures, for war is an act of state, not of the individual. Since war is not an individual act, the change rendering major war obsolete would be a state and a systemic change. But many scholars tell us that the international system of states has certain attributes that are not open to any significant evolution. Conflict and war, because of the overriding condition of anarchy, are supposedly two of those immutable attributes.

If indeed war is no longer a policy option for the great powers, then something about the way the world works today must be different than at almost any time in the past.⁵⁰ Realists can certainly make a compelling case that over the course of the past few centuries the essential nature of the international system remained relatively static.⁵¹ The

system seemed to conform to realist expectations—states were concerned with power and security in an anarchical world, and war was as much a “natural” state of affairs as was peace. Only fools would declare major war to be obsolete under these circumstances.

Holsti, Siverson, and George were broadly correct when they argued in 1980 that, “all social sciences have been notably more successful in developing taxonomies (statics) than in explaining change (dynamics).”⁵² This is especially true for international relations. While realists do acknowledge that systemic transformation occurs, and have models to explain things like shifts from bipolarity to multipolarity, how regional hegemons emerge, and why coalitions rise and fall,⁵³ they do not allow for more fundamental evolution in the *nature*, not just the *structure*, of the system. Realists insist that somehow states have natures all their own, as if they have some reality apart from the people that comprise them, and that this nature is immutable. Therefore, to even discuss the possibility that war could become obsolete is a waste of time, for it would necessitate a change in the nature of the state.

The great failure of the present notion of systemic transformation is that there are some aspects of international politics for which the literature refuses to allow even the potential for change. Zeev Maoz begins his study of the effect of domestic politics on global change by stating an assumption that is common throughout the literature, from all directions: “Basic political processes and behaviors are stable and tend to preserve their fundamental patterns even in the face of great changes.”⁵⁴ This assumption holds if and only if the behavior of the people that constitute states remain stable. The burden of proof would seem to be on those who would suggest that the basic philosophical outlook of humanity has shown no potential for evolution.

Those that argue that major war is obsolete by virtue of their position have a fundamental disagreement with *realpolitik* in that they believe that the international system is open to change, to evolution, to the adaptation of ideas into practice. Because states are merely amalgams of people, they argue, theoretically they ought to be able to exhibit some rational human attributes, such as learning and adaptation.⁵⁵ Thus these scholars suggest that a radical, even revolutionary, change has taken place in the *nature*, not the *structure*, of the international system. The proposed impetus for this change is the broad acceptance of the idea that major war can no longer be employed as an instrument of state. Although ideas have radically changed international politics many times before, nonetheless the notion that major war is a thing of the past is rejected *a priori* by many who cannot allow for anything but structural systemic change.

People learn. The people that lead states learn as well, which implies that the behavior of states should evolve along with the learning patterns of their leaders, and the ideas present in the society. The very fact of that there is evidence of learning present in international behavior suggests the nature of state behavior has the potential to change.⁵⁶ Mueller, Mandelbaum, and others identify a distinct pattern of learning on part of the people who comprise states, a continual evaluation of the utility of war that has engendered an evolution in theory and philosophy. This learning has led to changes that are thought to be so crucial, so fundamental, that they might just lead us to the optimistic conclusion that major war is a thing of the past.

Implications for the Theory and Practice of International Relations

The obsolescence of major war, if true, would be of crucial and perhaps revolutionary importance to the theory and practice of international politics. Not only are wars between the most powerful actors in the system typically the most destructive variety, but the major

powers have also historically been the most war-prone of states. Traditionally, not just military capability but actual *bellicosity* has become part of the very definition of great power status.⁵⁷ Historically speaking, the most powerful state in the system by various empirical measures also is the one that experiences the most conflict. “Great powers are distinguished from other states by their general behavior,” Levy wrote.

They defend their interests more aggressively and with a wider range of instrumentalities, including the frequent threat or use of military force . . . the Great Powers account for a disproportionate number of alliances and wars in the international system (often fought against each other), particularly those designed to maintain the balance of power and prevent the dominance of any single state.⁵⁸

The most intense war-making in world history was experienced by European powers prior to 1945.⁵⁹ Jefferson called Europe an “arena of gladiators” where “war seems to be the natural state of man.”⁶⁰ If the most powerful actors in the international system have truly abandoned the institution of war as a method of conflict resolution, then to borrow a phrase from Norman Angell, the world will indeed have moved.

In addition, for most of history, the most powerful states were not only the most war-like, but they also “determined the structure, major processes, and general evolution of the system” as Levy argued. For this reason the actions and interaction of the great powers has been of “primary interest” to international relations—and geopolitical—theory. “Secondary states and other actors have an impact on the system largely to the extent that they affect the behavior of the Great Powers.”⁶¹ So this focus on major war between the great powers has the potential to be theoretically and practically monumental, even if it allows for the potential for a wide variety of conflicts to continue.

In addition, if it is true that war is obsolete for the strongest of powers, then the weakest have hope that it will end for them too, either through economic and social development or an adaptation of the institutions and technology that made it obsolete for the industrialized world. Angell’s successors speak of something akin to a trickle-down effect for peace, that we should expect there to be less fighting in the “global south” in the post-Cold War era because potential combatants would not be able to find support for their cause in a world undivided by ideology. As John Mueller explained,

Few wars since 1945 have been directly initiated by the major belligerents in the Cold War, but quite a few local wars were exacerbated by interfering Cold War contestants. . . . A central tenet of Communist ideology was that violent revolutionary conflict was inevitable, and that the Communist states were duty-bound to help out. Meanwhile, the Western policy of containment often suggested that force would have to be used to oppose this thrust. At times they big countries restrained—or tried to restrain—their smaller clients. But more often they jumped in. . . . With the demise of the Cold War, it is to be expected that such exacerbation will not take place.⁶²

The empirical data seems to support this trickle-down theory. Empirical analyses of warfare from SIPRI/Uppsala and the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland have shown that the number of all types of wars declined rapidly in the 1990s.⁶³ So while the “obsolescence of war” hypothesis may seem at first Eurocentric and irrelevant to much of the world, and even pointless during

the current “war on terror;” in fact there is some early evidence to indicate that the end of warfare in the “global north” may mean the beginning of its decline in the “south.”

Implications for Great Power Geopolitics

One of the most significant implications of the obsolescence of major war is the concomitant obsolescence of Mackinderian great power geo-strategy. In fact, geo-strategic analysis emerged at the end of the era in which it could have been useful—the 19th century—when *realpolitik* was the dominant guiding principle for state behavior. Looking to the earth for clues about how to proceed in a struggle for control of the world made sense in an age of conflicting empires, of near-constant warfare and zero-sum games. One would want to know where the most strategic area on earth is, because the assumption was safe that all states, as Spykman said, “other things being equal, all states have a tendency to expand.”⁶⁴

As was noted above, geopolitics as we have known it to this point, from Mackinder to Brzezinski, needs conflict to survive. Without the threat of war, geopolitical reasoning, and more importantly the conclusions to which it leads, will have little to say about how the most powerful, industrialized countries behave in the 21st century. Today the threat of great power war is next to zero, a conclusion which has yet to sink in for international relations theory but that has revolutionized the way the most powerful states interact. This is not to say that political geography itself is irrelevant, for war will not be absent from the planet. But useful geopolitical analysis will involve interaction between the great powers and the smaller, or between smaller powers, because *at the upper levels of international relations geopolitical analysis is already as obsolete as major war itself.*

Rather than the grand oppositions of Mackinderian geopolitics (Heartland vs. Rimland, or sea power vs. land power, or east vs. west), the most appropriate geographic metaphor with which to view the 21st century is not one with conflict at its core. International politics is dividing into two different worlds, two “zones”: a “zone of peace” and prosperity; and another of “turmoil,” instability and continued violence.⁶⁵ The rich, industrialized states of the world will likely remain prosperous and peaceful, while the poor states will struggle with the same rules that ruled all international politics a hundred years ago. At times, these two “zones” will clash, as we saw on September 11th—rather than a “clash of civilizations,” perhaps the war on terrorism is perhaps better understood as a struggle between these two zones, between the “haves” and the “have-nots.”⁶⁶ Geopoliticians should therefore concern themselves with relations of the states inside this zone of turmoil, rather than those between great powers.

Perhaps then the theories of Mackinder and Mahan, Gray, Brzezinski and the rest are due for a radical reassessment. There will never be a heartland (or rimland) power that threatens to take over the world. There will be no need to balance the power of the Eurasian states, because today, as will be argued below, even overwhelming power does not threaten the other actors in the upper levels of the international system of states.

On the “Balance of Power”

It is important to note that Mackinder’s ideas (and the tradition they founded) were explicitly policy-oriented. Throughout its history, geopolitics has never been content to be merely a description of state behavior like, say, Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*. In fact, Waltz makes it quite clear that neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy in the way that geopolitics, from Mackinder to Haushofer to Brzezinski, has always

self-consciously been. Mackinder's target audience was on Downing Street, and then at Versailles; Haushofer wanted to help create successful policy for the Reich; Brzezinski seeks to shape American action on the "grand chessboard" of Eurasia. As the title of a Mackinder biography points out, geopolitics has always been "an aid to statecraft."⁶⁷

Decisions informed by flawed theories are unlikely to lead to optimal policies. Just as geopolitics itself has always been self-consciously policy-oriented, its obsolescence also should have an impact on the way governments behave. To a large extent it already has, but many analysts and scholars stubbornly refuse to recognize the changes that have occurred in the international system. One important implication of the obsolescence of geo-strategy writ large that has not been widely recognized by observers is the end of the importance of a balance of power in the "zone of peace."

Mackinder tells us that his first political memory was of the French defeat at Sedan.⁶⁸ The emerging German juggernaut made an enormous impression on the young Mackinder, just as it was beginning to replace the Russian menace as enemy number one to policy makers in London. The threat that Germany posed was the same that Russia had throughout most of the 19th century—it threatened the balance of power in Eurasia. The "balance of power" was a key concept to Europeans, and it is a central component of all geo-strategic analysis.

Political scientists have long studied the mechanisms of alliance formation, and the tendency of states to "balance" or "bandwagon"—in other words, to resist or join together with the most powerful states in the system.⁶⁹ Balancing behavior occurs in response to a threat to the perceived national interests, especially when such a threat cannot be countered alone. In a system where the vital national interests of the players rarely come into conflict, and those that do not are considered unworthy of contestation by force, one would expect the impetus to balance to be greatly decreased.

From the beginning, the "balance of power" has been a central focus of geo-strategy—indeed, perhaps the cardinal policy lesson of geopolitics has been that a balance of power is vital for international stability. The threat posed by a Heartland power is that it might upset "balanced globe of human beings" that Mackinder thought would be "happy, because balanced and thus free."⁷⁰ Metternich and his contemporaries overseeing the post-Napoleonic "Concert of Europe" felt that a balance of power was the only way that inherently power-hungry states can be expected to exist in peace, for if one state perceives an advantage over its neighbors, it will be tempted to expand. This sentiment endured through the last century, despite the fact that near-perfect balance prior to the First World War was not enough to prevent its outbreak.

The idea that any state ever consciously sought a "balance" is of course open to debate. In a perfectly balanced world, a state could expect a fifty-fifty chance of success during an outbreak of hostilities, which is not altogether comforting in a world of near-constant war. In reality states seek favorable balances of power, or, more precisely, imbalances of power in which they are advantaged. The geopolitics of Henry Kissinger (which, of course, like all geopolitics is explicitly policy-oriented) is obsessed with "balance," while in reality he seeks an imbalance in his country's favor.⁷¹ The perception of balance is actually threatened when the other side grows near parity. If statesmen actually ever believed that a balance of power was in their interests, then they would have followed Waltz's advice when he noted, that "it behooves the state that desires peace as well as safety to become neither too strong nor too weak."⁷² There is little evidence that this kind of thinking ever became state policy anywhere.

Instead, especially for the "insular" or "island" powers, a "balance" has always held another meaning. Mackinder echoed a long-standing British desire to see divisions in

continental Europe, not only to maintain peace but also to prevent the emergence of a rival, who, with the combined resources of the entire continent, might be able to rival the Royal Navy and threaten Britain itself. No single power was strong enough to attack Great Britain alone, but a hostile hegemonic power or coalition could. Therefore keeping a balanced (divided) Europe was the most important of the “eternal and perpetual interests” from the oft-quoted Palmerston remark.⁷³ Britain intervened on the side of the smaller continental power again and again for three centuries.

The United States inherited a great deal of strategic and intellectual responsibility with the erosion of British power. It became the leader in the maintenance of stability on the high seas, in financial markets, and in the Persian Gulf. It assumed leadership of the free world in the struggle against tyranny, especially of the communist variety, and it also became the guardian of the balance of power on the Eurasian landmass. Spykman echoed British theorists of the 19th century when he argued that

If the New World can be united or organized in such a manner that large masses of unbalanced forces are available for action across the ocean, it can influence the politics of Europe and Asia. And if the Old World remains divided and balanced, that external force can play a determining role in its political life. If, on the other hand, the Old World can be united and organized in such a manner that large masses of unbalanced power become available for action across the oceans, the New World will be encircled and, depending on its powers of resistance, may have to submit to the dictates of the Old.⁷⁴

American geo-strategists adopted the age-old British fear of a united Europe to American realities, advising Washington to beware of unbalanced power in Eurasia. The United States could no longer hide behind its oceans, the argument went, and had to understand that, like Britain, it was an island off the main landmass of the world, which was home to the majority of its people and resources. As Colin S. Gray noted, by the 1940s “the British role as most critical ‘balancer’ devolved upon the continental-sized, but also off-shore (Eurasia) United States.”⁷⁵

Such policy prescriptions made sense during the Cold War, when a coalition led by an implacably hostile enemy ideology threatened to turn the resources of Eurasia against the United States.⁷⁶ Walt Rostow identified two threats that a united (Red) Eurasia would pose to the United States. The first threat was military—“the combined resources of Eurasia could pose a serious threat of military defeat to the United States.” The advent of nuclear weapons made such an assault nearly impossible, for a massed Eurasian transoceanic fleet would make a perfect target for the nuclear arsenal of a great power facing the threat of imminent invasion. The second threat, however, is more realistic. Because of modern communication technologies,

Whatever the military situation might be, a Eurasia coalesced under totalitarian dictatorships would threaten the survival of democracy both elsewhere and in the United States. It is, therefore, equally in the American interest that the societies of Eurasia develop along lines broadly consistent with the nation’s own ideology; for under modern conditions it is difficult to envisage the survival of a democratic American society as an island in a totalitarian sea.⁷⁷

To these two threats identified by Rostow a third can be added: the danger that a united and hostile communist Eurasia would pose to the economic health of the United States.

The impact of an embargo of Eurasian trade would no doubt have been devastating to the standard of living in the Western Hemisphere, and unacceptable to the people of the United States. Thus, great power geo-strategy had perhaps not yet outlived its usefulness as long as the Cold War continued.

That unbalanced power on the Eurasian landmass would still be a major threat to the United States has become something of a truism. It is a notion that has penetrated policy and theory to the highest levels—the 1990 *National Security Strategy* of the first Bush Administration noted that “for most of this century, the United States has deemed it a vital interest to prevent any hostile power or group of powers from dominating the Eurasian landmass.”⁷⁸ The fear of a united Eurasia persists among post-Cold War geo-strategists. Samuel Huntington has argued that “the political integration of the European Community, if that should occur, would also bring into existence an extraordinarily powerful entity, which could not help but be perceived as a major threat to American interests.”⁷⁹ The object of the game being played on Brzezinski’s “grand chessboard” is to prevent the emergence of a hegemonic, hostile coalition on Eurasia, and he recommends that the United States, like Great Britain before it, support the weaker party in Eurasian disputes.⁸⁰ Few, however, seem to have noticed that the intellectual foundation upon which such fears are based is static, archaic, and, in the end, irrelevant to the international system of the 21st century.

In a world where great power conflict is “somewhere between unlikely and impossible,” calculations surrounding the balance of power must change. The three threats posed by a united Eurasia no longer exist: the military threat was never great, and today borders on preposterous; politically and economically, to paraphrase Francis Fukuyama, there is only “one game in town.” No rival political ideology exists around which to rally a hostile coalition, and although the flavors may differ, free market capitalism is almost universally recognized as the fastest way to prosperity and wealth. Even if—and this of course is a big, probably insurmountable *if*—a group of powers were to unite and work to remove U.S. influence from Eurasia, they would still find it in their interest to maintain trade relations. Whoever would dominate Eurasia would see it in its interest to maintain strong ties to the world’s largest market and producer of goods. As long as capitalism remains the dominant form of economic organization on earth (and there is not much evidence suggesting that any change is on the horizon), then the danger from a hostile coalition on the Eurasian landmass approaches zero.

At the heart of all theories of alliance formation is the assumption that power is fungible, and that all forms of power can be converted into military power. In the 19th century, this was quite literally true—policy makers in London and Paris had to be concerned with the growing prosperity of the newly unified Germany, for instance, because that economic power could easily be translated into military power when war came. And all knew that, sooner or later, war would come. Today, all know with some certainty that such major war will not come. In a world absent the threat of military assault and conquest, power is *de facto* balanced no matter the calculations of relative power.

The nature of great power politics is fundamentally different in an era when war is not a realistic option. Spykman himself argued that the basic, driving element in the balance of power was *instability*.

The balance always tended to deviate from equilibrium because the components of the balance, the states themselves, did not know with any degree of certainty just how much power was in the other scale and therefore desired, not a balance, but a surplus of power. Uncertainty, lack of yardsticks for

measurement, strivings for increases in relative power, all jarred the scales. The balance was upset; war was the consequence.⁸¹

Without that instability, the implications of imbalanced power are far less ominous.

Just as the industrialized nations of Eurasia do not concern themselves with “balancing” the overwhelming power of the United States,⁸² America should not be concerned about playing the “balancer” in Eurasia. The economic prowess of Germany and Japan aptly demonstrates the key difference between economic power in the 19th century and the 21st—unlike two centuries ago, economic growth is not directly related to military power. In fact, many of today’s richest states choose not to raise the enormous armies that their wealth makes possible. To borrow terminology from the physical sciences, economic prowess in the 19th century was *potential* military power that was almost always turned into *kinetic* power, militaries in motion; today, that potential seems to have been dimmed.⁸³ Mackinder warned that the “productive potential” of the Heartland made it inherently valuable, but today that potential (though arguable, due to climatic restrictions) is *economic*, not military.⁸⁴

Unlike in centuries past, statesmen today need not worry about “relative gains.” In fact, growing power benefits all states in the system, for international economics is now a positive sum game, where rising tides raise, rather than threaten, all boats.⁸⁵ Mackinder claimed that all the “great wars of history” were “the outcome, direct or indirect, of the unequal growth of nations, [due to] the uneven distribution of fertility and strategical opportunity upon the face of the globe.”⁸⁶ Today, uneven economic growth is not to be feared. The West should not feel threatened by a growing Russia or China, for example, because in a world free of major war, potential military power never becomes kinetic.

The United States would do well to recall that the primary “eternal and perpetual interest” of Palmerston has become obsolete—today Great Britain has nothing to fear from a united Europe, and does not entertain the notion of intervening on behalf of smaller powers. Similarly, the United States has little to fear from imbalances on the Eurasian landmass, despite what out-dated geo-strategic analysis may suggest.

Conclusion

All areas of human endeavor—religion and philosophy, economics and social mores—adapt and evolve, except, we are told, international politics. Realists and geo-strategists would have us believe that the rules by which the statesmen of the 19th century operated are the only ones that have ever, and will ever, govern state behavior. Therefore, the best place to look for advice on how to deal with the problems of today is at the lessons learned by leaders of the past. For reasons unclear, unlike every other aspect of human organization, geo-strategists tell us that “the game of politics . . . does not change from age to age, let alone from decade to decade.”⁸⁷

In reality, the world has changed a great deal since Mackinder and Angell wrote, and so have the rules by which states interact. Geopolitics itself is not obsolete, nor is military force, for instability and warfare will continue to be ubiquitous throughout the “zone of turmoil.” But among the great powers at the top of the hierarchy of states, force is no longer an option to resolve differences.⁸⁸ Geopolitics as geo-strategy has assumptions of conflict at its root—today, since conflict between the strongest players is unthinkable, great power geo-strategy *a la* Mackinder, Spykman, Mahan, and Brzezinski, is obsolete.

The implications of the obsolescence of major war have not begun to sink into either the theory or the practice international relations. Neorealists like Ken Waltz continue to

speak of the inevitability of balanced power, and geo-strategists like Colin Gray warn us of its dangers. The Americans are investing in research for a new generation of weapons technology, in what seems like preparation for an arms race in space; the French conduct nuclear weapons tests to assure their capability to deter an attack; the Italians maintain a blue-water navy. And Halford Mackinder still emerges from our intellectual memories, guiding statesmen into the future. Since geo-strategy is explicitly policy-oriented, Mackinderian descriptions of the world have the potential to be more dangerous than other outdated, baseless, and policy-ambivalent theories, which, by their academic nature, are easier to ignore and dismiss. It is hard to see how good policy can arise from a foundation of flawed theories and assumptions.

Instead, we would do well to reread the writings of Norman Angell, whose arguments about the futility of major war have become adopted into the behavior of the great powers, making conflict between them “subrationally unthinkable” at long last. Angell and Mueller remind us that as ideas and norms evolve, so do the political institutions based on those ideas and norms. After all, for hundreds of years in Europe and in America, dueling, slavery and even the burning of “witches” and heretics was a practice accepted by all levels of society.

Just as in the matter of burning witches a change of behaviour was the outcome of a change of opinion, in its turn the result of a more scientific investigation of the facts, so in the same way a change in the political conduct of Europe can only come about as a result of a change in thought. . . . During the 18th century, hundreds of judges in Europe—not ignorant men, but, on the contrary, exceedingly well educated men, trained to sift evidence—were condemning people to death by the hundreds for witchcraft. Acute and educated men still believed in it; its disproof demanded a large acquaintance with the forces and processes of physical nature, and it was generally thought that, while a few exceptional intelligences here and there would shake off these beliefs, they would remain indefinitely the possessions of the great mass of mankind. . . . A school boy to-day would scout the evidence which, on the judgment of very learned men, sent thousands of poor wretches to their doom in the 18th century.⁸⁹

Practices deemed ridiculous to the school children of today were perfectly rational to learned people of yesteryear. Perhaps tomorrow’s school children will think similarly about major war and great power geopolitics, and the triumph of Norman Angell will be complete.

Notes

1. The term “geopolitics” was first used by the Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellen in 1899, five years before Mackinder gave his lecture. See Øyvind Østerud, “The Uses and Abuses of Geopolitics,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1988), p. 191.

2. No discussion of Mackinder has ever omitted this famous quotation, so why should this be the first. Mackinder wrote, “When our statesmen are in conversation with the defeated enemy, some airy cherub should whisper to them from time to time this saying:

*Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
Who rules the World-Island commands the World.*

Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1919/1962), p. 150.

3. See Alfred Vagts, "Geography in War and Geopolitics," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1943, esp. p. 85.
4. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973/1999), p. 51.
5. The ideas from this paragraph can be found in Mackinder's second explanation of the Heartland concept, in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.
6. Quoted in Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. ix.
7. For good assessments of the impact of Mackinder with quite divergent views about his popularity, see R.E. Dickinson, *Makers of Modern Geography* (London: Routledge, 1969); Michael Gerace, "Between Mackinder and Spykman: Geopolitics, Containment, and After," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 10, 1991, pp. 347–364; Arthur R. Hall, "Mackinder and the Course of Events," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 45, No. 2, June 1955, pp. 109–126; Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft*; and Geroid O Tuathail, "Putting Mackinder in His Place," *Political Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1992, pp. 100–118.
8. *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power to National Advantage* (London: William Heinemann, 1909/1913), Angell's most famous work, was first published in 1909, five years after Mackinder's "Geographical Pivot." Like Mackinder, Angell would return to his basic ideas numerous times over the course of the next few decades, revising and refining each time. But the essential core of the ideas that would dominate their professional lives, and that would define their careers in the eyes of history, were written five years apart.
9. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, p. 317.
10. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, p. 329.
11. Norman Angell, *The Fruits of Victory: A Sequel to the Great Illusion* (New York: Garland, 1921/1973), pp. 8, 9.
12. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory*, p. ii.
13. There is a long literature discussing the relative value of World War I. Some maintain that the notion that the slaughter was worthless is a "myth" primarily espoused by the literary interpretations of the war. See Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War—Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001), chapter 1; and John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War, 1861–1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), chapters III–V, which view the war as a necessary and just crusade. But however convincing they may be from the perspective of any individual nation (it may be true, for instance, that Great Britain was compelled to fight), when seen from the perspective of the entire great power system, the war is difficult to justify. None of the European great powers emerged better than when they entered. The vanquished powers descended into chaos, but the costs far outweighed the benefits for the (European) victors, too. The Tsar tumbled from power, the British and French empires never fully recovered. Billions of dollars spent and millions of lives lost, all for the exchange of Alsace–Lorraine, the collapse of the Hapsburgs, a homeland for the Poles, and a few other minor concessions—hardly the stuff that could be said to make the Great War "worthwhile" in any real sense.
14. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory*, p. 341.
15. Incident related by Harold Sprout, in "Geopolitical Hypotheses in Technological Perspective," *World Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2, January 1963, p. 195.
16. The classic Nicholas Spykman text is *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1942/1970).
17. Colin S. Gray, "The Continued Primacy of Geography," *Orbis*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Spring 1996, p. 258.
18. See, for instance, Jean Gottman, "The Background of Geopolitics," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1942; and Hans W. Weigert, *Generals and Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942).
19. The actual influence of Haushofer and *geopolitik* on Hitler's plans, especially his decision to attack the USSR, is not clear. See Weigert *Generals and Geopolitics*; Gearoid O. Tuathail, "Introduction," in Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge, eds., *The Geopolitics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 19–25; and Holger Herwig, "*Geopolitik*: Haushofer,

Hitler, and Lebensraum,” in Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan, eds., *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

20. See Gerace, “Between Mackinder and Spykman.”

21. See, for instance, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). For more on this, see Christopher J. Fettweis, “Sir Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and Policymaking in the 21st Century,” *Parameters*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Summer 2000, pp. 58–71.

22. Gearoid O. Tuathail, “At the End of Geopolitics? Reflections on a Plural Problematic at the Century’s End,” *Alternatives*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 1997, p. 36.

23. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little Brown Pub., 1977). For a realist critique, see John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994/95, pp. 5–49.

24. This is not meant to suggest that Angell became a frequent reference point for the policy makers of the 20th century. One does not have to have ever *The Great Illusion* or even have heard of Norman Angell to reach similar conclusions.

25. Donald Kagan, Eliot A. Cohen, Charles F. Doran and Michael Mandelbaum, “Is Major War Obsolete? An Exchange,” *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Summer 1999, pp. 149, 150.

26. It must be emphasized that even those who argue that great power war is obsolete are careful to qualify their statement. They do not argue that all war, or even all international war, is a thing of the past. Rather, they refer to major war among great powers, of the kind that has been conspicuously and demonstrably absent during the “long peace” that followed the Cold War. See Kalevi J. Holsti, “The Horsemen of the Apocalypse: At the Gate, Detoured, or Retreating?” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, December 1986; Jack S. Levy, *War in the Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1983); John Lewis Gaddis, “The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System,” *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Spring 1986, pp. 99–142; and Richard Ned Lebow, “The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 249–277. But just as that era was hardly war-free, even the most optimistic observers do not foresee the end of civil wars, ethnic conflicts or war between lesser powers of the “third” and even “fourth worlds” in the near future. The main issue is *development*, in technology, economics, politics, and most importantly perhaps, philosophy—states or peoples that have not undergone such development have not seen the end of warfare. For more on the relationship between development and the obsolescence of major war, see Christopher J. Fettweis, *Angell Triumphant: The Geopolitics of Energy and the Obsolescence of Major War*, PhD Dissertation completed at the University of Maryland, College Park, January 2003.

27. See John Mueller, *Retreat From Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); and *Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

28. John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Knopf, 1993). See also Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Carl Kaysen, “Is War Obsolete? A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Spring 1990, pp. 42–64; and Michael Mandelbaum, “Is Major War Obsolete?” *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter 1998/99, pp. 20–38.

29. John Mueller, “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Post War World,” *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Fall 1988, pp. 55–79.

30. For the most widely-known discussion of globalization, see Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

31. Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and *The Rise of the Virtual State: Wealth and Power in the Coming Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

32. For a discussion about the potential for major war over territory rich in vital commodities, specifically energy-producing fossil fuels, and much more on the obsolescence of war debate in general, see Christopher J. Fettweis, *Angell Triumphant*.

33. Edward Luttwak, "From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics," *The National Interest*, No. 20, Summer 1990, p. 17.
34. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory*, p. xx, emphasis added.
35. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 183.
36. Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm*, p. 131.
37. James Lee Ray, "The Abolition of Slavery and the End of International War," *International Organization*, Vol. 43, No. 3, Summer 1989, p. 425.
38. Evan Luard, *War in International Society: A Study in International Sociology* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1986), p. 365.
39. Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday*, p. 11.
40. Francis Fukayama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
41. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory*, p. xxxii.
42. Sigmund Freud, "Why War?" in J. David Singer and Melvin Small, eds., *International War: An Anthology* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1985), p. 163.
43. William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in J. David Singer and Melvin Small, eds., *International War: An Anthology* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1985).
44. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory*, p. xxxii.
45. Huntington, "No Exit: The Errors of Endism," p. 7.
46. Evan Luard, *War in International Society: A Study in International Sociology* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1986), p. 220; Mueller, *The Quiet Cataclysm*.
47. The lone exception that some scholars have pointed to is the so-called "soccer war" between El Salvador and Honduras, where a disputed call by a referee touched off a bloody four day conflict. However, the situation was not as simple as it seems—relations between the two countries were very tense before the game began, complicated by a number of factors that were being used by politicians on both sides for political gains. In addition, the war ended after only four days, once the passions of the moment subsided. See Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Soccer War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
48. Mueller, *The Quiet Cataclysm*, p. 120.
49. Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, p. 60.
50. Realists point to the "Concert of Europe" and other periods of supposed great power peace that eventually came to violent ends as evidence to support the claim that all eras devoid of major war are fated by some "flaws" in nature of humanity to be temporary. Indeed the model followed by the Concert powers has influenced generations of statesman who have interpreted its lessons as proof of the ability of the balance of power, and only the balance of power, to maintain peace. But this common understanding is based upon a series of myths. "It is not the case," Luard has argued, "as is sometimes suggested, that this was, even in Europe, a peaceful age. . . . Wars were frequent. In Europe alone there were 74 conflicts of consequence in this period. . . . In the world as a whole there were at least 244 wars or about 1.9 a year on average." In addition, Luard counts 43 civil wars in Europe alone between 1815 and 1914. Charles Tilly added that, "it is hardly worth asking *when* states warred, since most states were warring most of the time" (emphasis in original). Although this era was one in which pacifism began to take root in some small minorities, in general war was seen as "normal, acceptable, or even desirable" by the great powers, and "public opinion generally was often bellicose." The peace of the 19th century is at once mythical and irrelevant. It should not be compared to the era of true great power stability that the world seems to have now entered, and it most certainly does not offer a convincing counter-argument to the obsolescence of major war hypothesis. See Luard, *War in International Society*, pp. 52, 54, 358, and 361, respectively; and Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990*. (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwood, 1990), p. 84.
51. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions;" and Markus Fischer, "Feudal Europe, 800–1300," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 427–466.
52. Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson and Alexander L. George, eds., *Change in the International System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), p. xx.

53. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Zeev Maoz, *Domestic Sources of Global Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 12–22; and Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Gregory Raymond, *A Multipolar Peace? Great Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
54. Maoz, *Domestic Sources of Global Change*, p. 2.
55. George Breslauer and Phillip Tetlock, eds., *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).
56. Breslauer and Tetlock, *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*; Lloyd Etheridge, *Can Governments Learn?* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985); and Sarah E. Mendelson, "Internal Battles and External Wars: Politics, Learning, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 3, April 1993, pp. 327–360.
57. Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm*, p. 37.
58. Levy, *War in the Great Power System*, p. 17.
59. See Levy, *War in the Great Power System*; Charles S. Gochman and Zeev Maoz, "Militarized International Disputes, 1816–1976: Procedures, Patterns, Insights," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1984, pp. 585–615; and George Modelski and William R. Thomson, *Leading Sectors and World Power: The Coevolution of Global Economics and Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).
60. Quoted in John Mueller, "Hatred, Violence, and Warfare: Thugs as Residual Combatants," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA (August 30–September 2, 2001), p. 26.
61. Both quotations from Levy, *War in the Great Power System*, p. 8.
62. Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm*, p. 11.
63. See Ted Robert Gurr, "Ethnic Warfare on the Wane," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 3, May 2000; Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, "Armed Conflict, 1989–99," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 5, 2000, pp. 625–649; and Ted Robert Gurr, Monty G. Marshall and Deepa Khosla, "Peace and Violent Conflict 2001," College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management (2001).
64. Nicholas J. Spykman, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy I," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3, June 1939, p. 394.
65. Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1996).
66. Osama Bin Laden is of course by no means a member of this global "have-not" class, but he very self-consciously represents the poor, impoverished, powerless Muslim masses, almost like a twisted modern-day Robin Hood.
67. W.H. Parker, Mackinder: *Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For more on this, see Gearoid O. Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1999, pp. 107–124.
68. Halford Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, July 1943, p. 595.
69. For perhaps the best treatment of this issue, and a good (if dated) review of the literature, see Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); see also Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Summer 1994, pp. 72–107.
70. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," p. 605.
71. See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 1994).
72. Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 222.
73. "We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow." Lord Palmerston, 1848.
74. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, p. 132.
75. Colin S. Gray, "Back to the Future: Russia and the Balance of Power," *Global Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 1992, p. 46.

76. Some geo-strategists argued that the superpower rivalry was better understood to be rooted in classical geopolitical oppositions—like sea power vs. land power, Heartland vs. Island—rather than as an ideological conflict about systems of governance. One would suspect that the simultaneous collapse of communism and end of the Cold War would remove much of the weight to these arguments. But proponents of geo-strategy writ large continue to warn about the danger that a hegemonic Eurasian power would pose.

77. Walter W. Rostow, *The United States in the World Arena: A Study in Recent History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 544. Discussed also by Simon Dalby in “American Security Discourse: The Persistence of Geopolitics,” *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2, April 1990, pp. 178, 179.

78. Quoted in Gray, “Back to the Future,” p. 46.

79. Samuel P. Huntington, “America’s Changing Strategic Interests,” *Survival*, Vol. 23, No. 1, January/February 1991, p. 12.

80. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*.

81. Quoted and discussed by Edgar S. Furniss, Jr. in “The Contribution of Nicholas John Spykman to the Study of International Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, April 1952, p. 391.

82. Kenneth Waltz disagrees with this conclusion, arguing that “multipolarity is developing before our eyes: To all but the myopic, it can already be seen on the horizon. . . . As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power. Faced by unbalanced power, states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance,” in “Evaluating Theories,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4, December 1997, p. 915. See also Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Spring 1993, pp. 5–51. However, he offers no evidence to convince those who he considers “myopic.” In light of the tremendous and unprecedented great power cooperation (“bandwagoning”) after September 11th, one is left wondering what balancing can be seen by Dr. Waltz, for it is apparently beyond the range of the geo-strategically short-sighted.

83. In “Geopolitical Hypotheses in Technological Perspective,” Sprout suggests such an analogy from the hard sciences, albeit in a somewhat different context, p. 188.

84. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 9.

85. For a brief but quite convincing argument elaborating on this point, see Paul Krugman, “Competition: A Dangerous Obsession,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2, March/April 1994. For more on this, see Duncan Snidal, “Relative Gains and the Pattern of International Cooperation,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 3, September 1991, pp. 701–726; Robert Powell, “Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, December 1991, pp. 1303–1320; and Joseph Grieco; Robert Powell; Duncan Snidal, “The Relative Gains Problem for International Cooperation,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3, September 1993, pp. 729–743.

86. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 1.

87. Colin S. Gray, “Clausewitz Rules, OK? The Future is the Past—with GPS,” in Michael Cox, Michael, Ken Booth and Tim Dunn, eds., *Interregnum: Controversies in World Politics, 1989–1999* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 163.

88. Luttwak argues that there are three levels of states in the system today—“post-belluc” states that have evolved past the point where warfare can attain national goals (in other words, the “great powers”); “pre-belluc” states that are not strong enough to wage war *qua* states (weak or “failed” states); and a small number in the middle, for which war still is an instrument of policy and, for our purposes, for which the rules of geopolitics still apply. Luttwak, “From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics,” p. 21ff.

89. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, pp. 327, 358.

