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NC&S Online Foundation Knowledge Course D14

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Session 3: Mahan Gold/Blue Teams

Due: The primary post is due on NLT Monday at 2359 and the secondary posts are due NLT Wednesday at 2359.

Prompts

1. Gold Team

- a. Please answer the following question: *How does Mahan argue that a navy should be utilized during war? What are the pros and cons of following a Mahanian naval strategy in this era of renewed great power competition?*
- b. Your answer should be **350-500** words in length. Begin your initial post with **"GOLD POST:"** Additionally, you are required to **respond to at least two of the Blue Team DBF answers**. Your responses should be a **minimum of 100 words** in length.

2. Blue Team

- a. Please answer the following question: *What are Mahan's fundamental elements of sea power? Do they remain relevant in the modern security environment?*

- b. Your answer should be 350-500 words in length. Begin your initial post with "BLUE POST:" Additionally, you are required to respond to at least two of the Gold Team DBF answers. Your responses should be a minimum of 100 words in length.

Gold Answer

GOLD POST:

Alfred Thayer Mahan, a naval theorist regarded as one of the most consequential in history, asserted that command of the sea was the goal of a wartime navy. Defeating the enemy fleet was a prerequisite to conducting meaningful naval operations against the enemy's trade and strategic mobility. In *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, Mahan highlighted the significance of decisive fleet actions, the value of concentrating naval forces, and the application of naval power to blockade and economically exhaust adversaries. The theory often boiled down to a simple formula of battle and blockade, calls for an offensive strategy that seeks to shorten wars through control of the seas. But Mahan's vision was much deeper and interwoven with more familiar aspects of national power, economic policy, and diplomacy, as revealed in Kevin McCranie's Chapter 12 in *Mahan, Corbett, and the Foundations of Naval Strategic Thought*.

Mahan's "way of war" weaves together ends, ways, and means across both peacetime and wartime. He conceived of sea power as the combination of naval and commercial strength, best utilized to influence and sway the international environment before war occurs. Key components consisted of deterrence, forward presence, and economic development. He believed these actions would not only have tactical advantages but also weaken the enemy's will or ability to resist. He also noted the long-term utility of economic strangulation, like Britain's naval blockade use in the Napoleonic Wars, to wear down opponents over time. As a result, Mahan's wartime strategy encompassed both swift, decisive action and slow, sustained, protracted economic pressure.

In the current era of revived great power competition, especially between the United States and China, a Mahanian approach has clear advantages. It reaffirms the value of sea control, strategic deterrence, and forward-deployed naval power. Mahan's integration of economic power, geographical position, and naval force to describe sea power remains pertinent at a point when world trade and military logistics still rely heavily on sea lines of communication (SLOC). However, modern threats, ranging from anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems to cyber warfare and precision strike capabilities, complicate the concept of the concentration of force that Mahan favored. Large, concentrated fleets are becoming increasingly vulnerable to over-the-horizon long-range, high-speed hypersonic weapons. Mahan's skepticism toward coalitions contradicts today's focus on interoperability and coalition forces, particularly given the large size of China's navy.

In addition, Mahan's underappreciation of joint and expeditionary operations having equal importance to sea power limits his relevance to combined joint warfare. His emphasis on naval superiority risks missing the critical role of land, air, space, and information domains in contested regions. Nevertheless, his observation relating readiness, strategic foresight, and the importance of linking maritime power to national prosperity has lasting importance. In this era of renewed great power competition, the Mahanian approach must apply its tenets to a distributed, networked, and high-tech battlespace environment, where influence is exercised not solely by raw force projection but also by agility, integration, and information dominance.

Blue Response #1

Emmanuel, I enjoyed your post. You did an excellent job laying out Mahan's six elements of sea power and tying them to the present strategic environment. I particularly appreciated how you

emphasized the continuing importance of geography and economic power, while also noting how AI, cyber, and unmanned systems are disrupting how we think about naval power today. The comment on multi-domain integration you made really struck a chord and connected with some of the concepts I discussed in my own post, particularly Mahan's predisposition to deprioritize land, air, space, and cyber domains in determining outcomes. It got me thinking about whether the concept of a decisive fleet engagement, which Mahan argued for, still resonates in a world that constantly moves toward a preference for distributed operations and rapid, networked responses. Your post hit a great balance between history and the modern day. Well done!

Blue Response #2

Jacob - You effectively broke down Mahan's theory into simple, manageable parts. I appreciated how you made a case for the critical relationship between geography, people, and government, and how each element is essential in its own way in the construction of sea power. Your point about technology is super relevant. While Mahan could not have anticipated new types of warfare such as cyber or advanced weapons systems, your argument that technology might itself be a necessary additive element is sensible. It enriches the conversation and reflects the realities of the maritime world today. This post was very well-organized with a solid contemporary perspective.