“No Peace Beyond the Line”?
Accounting for the Lack of War in Southern Seas

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Introduction
Good afternoon. I would like to join everyone else in thanking the Instituto de História Contemporânea, and especially Ana Paula, Luisa, Paulo, and Alex Monteiro, who suggested me to the organizers in the first place. I’m delighted to be able to share my thoughts about war at sea, but before getting to that, I’d like to take a moment to say a little about my world historical perspective, because it is quite distinct from that of the historians you have already heard, whose professional focus is on questions of sea power and naval strategy. As a world maritime historian, I focus on transcultural comparisons over time and space, and make concerted, sometimes exaggerated, shifts in perspective in order to see things from different angles.

Rather than looking at particular problems through a microscope, or even a telescope, my perspective more closely resembles a radar screen with an adjustable range so that I can zoom in and out in an effort to see my target in relation to the world around it. So, in my remarks today, I am going to be moving around the world map, and bouncing back and forth between different time periods in an effort to explore the premise of the title of my talk, “No Peace Beyond the Line? Accounting for the Lack of War in Southern Seas.”

As I will explain in a moment, the title refers to an expression that seems to have been coined during the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis—although since the negotiators were French and Spanish, the likelihood that anyone actually said “No peace beyond the line” is pretty small. Nonetheless, the phrase has an evocative, swashbuckling flavor to it, and it fits my curiosity about why there has been so little war at sea in the southern hemisphere, and—equally important—why there is so much of it north of the equator. This led me to questions about the nature of thalassocracies, sea kingdoms, and the nature of sea power generally. Then, as I tried to wrestle this back to the conference theme of “War at Sea in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” I was drawn almost inevitably to the American apostle of sea power, Alfred Thayer Mahan.

In particular, I am curious about his six fundamental elements or preconditions of sea power, and as I like to do when shifting perspectives, I thought I would see how these hold up under extreme conditions when applied to some ancient and early modern maritime societies. And with that under our belt, I want to look at how they might apply to questions of sea power in our own time, the twenty-first century.

I am aware, of course, that sea power has come to mean something—or several things—that are very specific in the minds of people who make a study of this. But by sea power I mean not only the highly refined vision of sea power discussed in academic circles and by students of applied strategy in military establishments worldwide (although I am certain that there is no one single definition upon which all naval officers agree). I mean a more general conception of sea power and its analogues like thalassocracy, a term that Thucydides, among others, used to describe the maritime character of ancient Crete, a place about which he apparently knew even less than we do.
**No Peace Beyond the Line**

In a paper he gave about a month before his death in 1962, the American historian of European history Garrett Mattingly attempted to define what people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might have meant by the expression “No peace beyond the line.” The phrase comes from references to the “Lines of amity,” or friendship, in the Franco-Spanish Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis of 1559, which brought to a close sixty-five years of warfare between Habsburg Spain and France for the control of Italy. Spanish and French diplomats apparently agreed, though not in writing, that whatever treaties might say about interstate relations in European waters, or waters adjacent to Europe, the rules did not apply beyond these lines of amity. The treaty does not specify what or where these lines of latitude and longitude were, and uncertainty persists to this day. The French and Spanish had different ideas about where the prime meridian lay; the French meridian ran through the Canary Islands, while the Spanish meridian lay farther west, in the Azores. Mattingly makes a convincing case that the most important parallel of latitude at the time ran through Cape Bojador—26°N—though other possibilities are the Tropic of Cancer, at 23°30’N, or less likely, the Equator.

It is likely that one reason for this unofficial agreement to tolerate a degree of lawlessness in the American Atlantic had to do with the fact that in the mid-sixteenth century, most privateers lacked the wherewithal to engage in such long-distance navigation, so they were more an irritant than an existential threat to Spain’s overseas holdings. In any case, the French crown lacked the enforcement powers necessary to control privateers determined to challenge Spanish interests.

Transatlantic raiders with or without official sanction would become a more significant problem in the 1600s, but by the end of that century, the French, English, and Dutch were deeply invested in the economic benefits of plantation and trade in the Caribbean, South America, and the Indian Ocean. As a consequence, a succession of treaties and national laws drafted between 1670 and 1700 outlawed privateering, piracy, and sailing under a false flag in an effort to minimize the threat of privateers, freebooters, pirates, and other non-state actors.

Although the expression “no peace beyond the line” refers to a limited geographic area at a specific historical time—the Atlantic of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the idea of a line demarcating the waters of the Mediterranean and northwest Europe from those beyond is an intriguing one, because it invites us to consider the conditions that made seaborne conflict commonplace in certain areas of the world but not in others.

At the same time, this idea of “no peace beyond the line” is an inversion of historical reality. For across the long arc of the past 4,000 years of recorded history, the greatest burden of war at sea—the hardship of waging and suffering from naval conflict—has fallen overwhelmingly on the people who lived around the Mediterranean and, for the last thousand years or so, northern Europe, well within the lines of amity wherever they may lie. Though certainly not without naval histories of their own, other areas of the world, especially south of the equator, have been comparatively quiet.

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Geographic and demographic: north/south and east/west
In these remarks, I want to test some basic ideas or suppositions about the nature of naval warfare by shifting our historical and geographical perspective between the northern and southern hemispheres, which offer some stark contrasts, and between the waters of western Eurasia and the rest of the world—especially elsewhere in the northern hemisphere—where geographic, demographic, and cultural differences are a bit more subtle. In so doing, I want to see whether we can draw any useful conclusions about the nature of sea power, thalassocracies, and maritime enterprise generally, and specifically about whether we can predict where naval warfare is likely to occur.

If we plot the location of the known naval wars and battles over the long span of recorded history, the vast majority have been fought in the northern hemisphere, and as I’ve said, most of those have been fought in the Mediterranean and northern European waters. Even accounting for the bias of our sources—most surviving accounts of fighting at sea come from Mediterranean and European authors—and considering only the period since the start of the early modern era, when naval warfare became more global and, as Frederick C. Lane and Niels Steensgaard have argued, violence ranked among Europe’s principal exports, the preponderance of naval activity has happened in the waters of western Eurasia.

At first glance, the reasons for the difference between the levels of activity in the northern and southern hemispheres are quite straightforward. With respect to the proportions of land and water, the northern and southern hemispheres are not symmetrical. In the south, there is much more water than land. This means that there are relatively fewer places from which to launch naval campaigns and fewer land objectives to fight over, and these lie at a great distance from one another.

The statistics are fairly straightforward. Sixty-eight percent of the earth’s landmass is in the northern hemisphere and only 32 percent in the southern. This means that the ratio of land to ocean in the Northern Hemisphere is about 1 to 1.5. But only about 25 percent of the Southern Hemisphere is land, including large parts of Indonesia, South America, and Oceania, and all of Australia and Antarctica. Antarctica has no permanent population, was not visited by people until 1899, and it has never been contested by military action, so it doesn't really factor in a discussion of sea power—at least so far.

Moreover, as you go south from the equator, the great, tapering landmasses of Africa and South America generally grow farther apart—from 2,800 nautical miles at 5° South, to about 3,700 miles at the latitude of Cape Town, at the southern end of Africa, and Buenos Aires. The handful of islands in the South Atlantic are few, and they do not sit astride the tracks of winds and currents that would allow them to be part of the connective tissue between Africa and the Americas in the way that the Canaries and Cape Verde Islands are in the North Atlantic. Finally, about 90 percent of the world’s population lives in the northern hemisphere.

In sum, there has been peace below the equator because there are fewer people competing for a smaller proportion of the world’s resources. The people who are there live farther apart from one another and therefore have less opportunity for conflict. And because the lands where they live are farther apart, there are also fewer chokepoints where conflict is likely to take place. Perhaps that’s all there is to it.

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Mahan’s six conditions for sea power
Distance can’t be the whole explanation, for distance can be considered in both absolute and relative terms. Or, to put it another way, the same seas that create a barrier for some people constitute a highway for others. Nonetheless, these observations lead us back to some fundamental questions about what gives rise to and sustains the ability to wage naval conflict. Looking at the geographical parameters of the northern and southern hemispheres, it seems likely that there is a degree of geographic and demographic determinism in play.

The concept of determinism has many detractors for the simple reason that it is seen to strip people of agency, and because it can be used to shape facile arguments. The best known elaboration of deterministic features in the realm of maritime history are the six conditions that Alfred Thayer Mahan identified as essential for sea power. These are “I. Geographical Position. II. Physical Conformation, including . . . natural productions and climate. III. Extent of Territory. IV. Number of Population. V. Character of the People. VI. Character of the Government, including therein the national institutions.”

This list seems to derive from Mahan’s assessment of the features that accounted for Britain’s place as the world’s foremost naval and merchant marine power at the end of the nineteenth century, and which could also suggest the potential of the United States to join Britain’s ranks.

It is worth noting that with respect to geographical position, physical conformation, productions and climate, extent of territory, and number of population, Great Britain and the United States have little in common. And historically speaking, Mahan’s categories do little to illuminate how other states at other periods in history have actually acquired and exercised sea power. But we can test some of them against the historical record in the northern and southern hemispheres—and between powers in the west Eurasian zone where naval conflict has been concentrated, and other parts of the world.

Geographical Position and Physical Conformation
To begin with Mahan’s first two points, geographical position, and the physical conformation of the land—at first blush it seems that “the tyranny of distance” in the southern hemisphere militates against long-distance voyaging. But while distances may help explain the lack of communication between Europe or Africa and the Americas before the fifteenth century, it was clearly not an issue in Oceania, where voyaging between remote, small island groups was unexceptional.

The open-ocean navigation practiced in the South Pacific may have been more advanced than anywhere else before the early modern period, but there are periodic examples of long-distance sailing elsewhere. The Norse transatlantic voyages of the tenth and eleventh centuries are the obvious examples in the North Atlantic. But of far greater antiquity and regularity was the monsoon sailing by people across the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea, and the waters of eastern Indonesia. But if the monsoons made it possible for navigators to traverse great distances early on—2,700 nautical miles from Mombasa to Calicut; 1,800 nautical miles from Aden to Mangalore; about 2,100 nautical miles across the Bay of Bengal from the Coromandel Coast to Palembang—they did not make it inevitable that people would do so.

One of the many great curiosities in maritime history is why there was almost no voyaging between the African mainland and Madagascar, or between northern Australia and Indonesia, although seasonal monsoon winds would have made either route favorable for regular communication. The case of Madagascar is especially difficult to make sense of, because the island was settled by navigators who sailed there from the island of Borneo, 4,300 nautical miles away, while Mozambique is only 275 nautical miles to the west, which one can easily cover in less than five days with a favorable wind.7

Equally puzzling is the lack of interaction between the people of northern Australia, New Guinea, and Indonesia, which were all within easy sails of each another—100 nautical miles from Cape York to New Guinea, and 275 nautical miles from Darwin to Timor. Two things make the absence of long-range voyaging around Australia especially beguiling. The first people to colonize Australia reached the island-continent from what is now Indonesia about 50,000 years ago, which makes them among the first people known to have taken to the sea.8

But it is the vitality found in Oceania that makes the absence of long-distance voyaging elsewhere in the waters south of the equator especially intriguing. Starting about 1200 BCE, Austronesian-speaking sailors pushed off from the Solomon Islands east of New Guinea to initiate their settlement of almost every habitable island in the South Pacific—starting with the Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu, and the Loyalty Islands—as well as the northern hemisphere islands of Micronesia and Hawaii. In a pattern we can find elsewhere, their progress was fitful, with intervals of three to seven hundred years during which more effort was expended on consolidating gains than on expanding into new realms. Regardless, by 1500 CE—that is to say, by the start of the period of European expansion—the people of Oceania had completed the settlement of a vast triangular area that covered a swath of ocean as big as the continent of Africa and the extremes of which were New Zealand in the southwest, Easter Island in the southeast, and Hawaii in the north, and they had even initiated contacts with mainland South America.

The question of why neither the people of Oceania seem to have reached Australia is no less beguiling than the question of why the descendants of Australia’s original settlers did not maintain maritime contacts with the Indonesian archipelago. While features of the prevailing winds and currents between the ancient jumping off point in the Solomon Islands and Australia are problematic, they are no more impenetrable than those that people had to cross to reach the more remote islands of New Zealand. In sum, neither technology nor geography nor predilection seems to account for why contact was not established. All we can certain of is that it didn’t happen.

To turn to Mahan’s belief that the “natural productions” of the land were a key to whether people developed robust maritime ambitions, in many cases this seems to have been irrelevant. Certainly in the age of wooden walls, wood was a necessity, but plenty of maritime people have gotten by without a domestic source of supply. The English at various times depended desperately on North American and Scandinavian wood when they had depleted easily accessibly stocks of timber in the British Isles. Sailors of the Persian Gulf—in particular the arid port of Siraf, to which even water for drinking and the merchants’ lavish gardens had to be piped in—relied on wood imported from either Africa or India. Similarly, “natural productions” used for trade goods in the Pacific presumably remained available even as inter-island traffic ebbed and flowed over the centuries for entirely different reasons.

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8 Recently dated finds in southern Crete are indicative of seafaring in the Mediterranean about 120,000 years ago.
Extent of Territory and Number of Population
When it comes to questions of extent of territory, or number of population, it seems neither of these suffices as an analytical tool to explain maritime accomplishment. The trading city of Tyre was not terribly big, even for its day, yet it was Tyrians who sailed from Lebanon to Tunisia and settled Carthage and from there dominated the trade of the central and western Mediterranean for about five hundred years, from the eighth to the third centuries BCE. By the end, their population was considerable, which is why they were able to sustain horrific losses in the three Punic Wars fought with Rome, whose population was similarly inexhaustible.

The population of ancient Athens was so small that during the Persian War the Athenians actually built more ships than they could man, and they had to recruit oarsmen from their allies. (It is worth pointing out here that for all the eulogizing of Athenian accomplishments, their maritime empire was deservedly short-lived—less than a century.)

Genoa and Venice both had small territories and small populations yet became among the greatest maritime powers in the late medieval and early modern periods. Portugal and Spain—countries of vastly different size and population emerged simultaneously as the preeminent overseas empires of the early modern period. The fact that Spain was bicoastal, and Portugal monocostal, seems to have made no substantive difference to their respective fortunes, either.

The archipelagoes of the British Isles and Japan are roughly comparable in size, and while Japan is farther from the Korean Peninsula than England is from France, the Tsushima Strait was regularly crossed in both peace and war. And while Japan launched a massive invasion of Korea at almost exactly the same time that the English deflected the Spanish Armada, once they abandoned that effort, they essentially turned their backs on the sea for about three hundred years.

Character of the People
If we have to be wary of the pitfalls of attributing a nation’s sea power to its geographical position, terrain, and population, we must be even more mindful of the pitfalls of invoking Mahan’s “character of the people” to explain success or failure in developing sea power. Although he did not refer specifically to Mahan, we can sense echoes of a belief in national character in Carlo Cipolla’s 1965 essay “Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion, 1400–1700,” in which he attributes Europe’s early modern superiority over Asia in military innovation to “the prevailing Chinese aura of patrician detachment and amateurish style.”9 In considering why the Chinese did not capitalize on their possession of firearms, he quotes J. R. Levenson: “they were amateurs in the fullest sense of the world, without interest in progress, [without] leanings to science, [without] sympathy for commerce or prejudice in favor of utility.”10

Having dismissed the Chinese ability to work effectively with modern armaments, Cipolla proceeds to a discussion of Chinese ships, which he notes did not develop in the way that European ships did starting in the thirteenth century. But in explaining this deficit, he quotes a Portuguese factor at Macao, Geronimo Roman, who obviously disdained the Chinese lack of preparedness. In so doing, however, Roman overlooks his own introductory observation: “The King of China maintains a numerous fleet on this coast,” he writes, “although he is not at war with any one.”11 Cipolla likewise ignores this point. He prefers to assume that, in an age of imperfect communication and

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9 “the prevailing Chinese aura”: Carlo Cipolla, European Culture and Overseas Expansion (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 93.
11 “The King of China”: in Cipolla, European Culture and Overseas Expansion, 94.
mutual ignorance between east and west, the Chinese—and indeed, all Asians—should have prepared themselves not only to deal with European arms, but with European sensibilities towards the use of violence and its synergistic relationship with trade. He contrasts the Chinese position with what he sees as the more open-minded attitude of the Japanese, whom Europeans tended to esteem as a martial race, and even the Koreans.

In assessing the relative merits of the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans, Cipolla fails to consider the historical moment about which he is writing, for the circumstances facing northeast Asia in the sixteenth century differed substantially from any period before or since. The mid-1500s had seen the most disruptive period of wokou piracy on the coasts of China, and while the worst was over by the time that Geronimo Roman wrote in the 1580s, thanks in part to the government’s easing the ban on overseas trade, the Chinese were still on their guard. While their weapons may have been inferior to that of the Portuguese, they were not substantially different from that of the wokou, who were their primary concern.

While many arguments about which countries did or did not exercise naval superiority at various times focus on advances made by this or that power, few critics choose to focus on the universal truth that navies are often crippling expensive and even the most advanced naval powers go to great lengths to minimize their expenditures on ships, weapons, and personnel whenever possible—especially in the aftermath of major naval wars.

In disparaging Ming naval forces—and the Chinese military generally—of the late 1500s and lauding those of Japan, Cipolla also ignores the fact that the Japanese invasion of Korea failed for two reasons. The first was the massive intervention of Chinese land forces to help stem the Japanese advance. The other was the strategic brilliance of the Korean admiral Yi Sun-sin, whose fleet was vastly outnumbered by the Japanese, but which included a handful of turtle ships, a vessel of revolutionary design that might have revolutionized naval warfare in Asia and abroad had there been any call for them, but which ultimately proved a technological dead-end because there was none.

It doesn’t seem especially worthwhile to criticize the diminished pace of naval activity in northeast Asia in the decades after 1600, and the concomitant loss of a technological edge at sea, because the results would not be fully apparent until the Opium Wars 250 years later. Even in our advanced state of technological development, no one today can imagine what we should be doing militarily to prepare ourselves for developments that won’t be manifest for another quarter of a millennium—except, perhaps, nuclear disarmament. And however clear an impression Europeans would eventually leave on China, as Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Leonard Blussé have written, for the time being these western interlopers “crawled like lice on the hide of the Asia,” and did not pose a serious threat in mainland East Asia.  

Character of the Government, including therein the national institutions
The last of Mahan’s preconditions I would like to touch on concerns the character of the government. In much of the foregoing discussion, I have deliberately tested his claims against examples that do not necessarily fit late nineteenth-century conceptions of sea power. At the same time, Mahan does refer repeatedly to Rome, although he pointedly disdains the venerable Mediterranean empire as an “essentially non-maritime state.”

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As we get into the early modern period, his assertions about national character and government become more difficult to defend, and his bias in favor of Protestant, northern European countries, with which the ruling elite of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century clearly identified itself, and his prejudice against Catholic, Mediterranean monarchies—notably Portugal and Spain—is evident.

Many have pointed out that Mahan was not an historian, but he was not an idiot, either. Anyone seriously interested in the identifying the elements of sea power, as he was, must recognize the fact that whatever their condition at the end of the nineteenth century, the Portuguese and Spanish seaborne empires were not only in the vanguard of European overseas expansion, their maritime empires were among the most durable in history. The Spanish overseas empire began with Pedro III of Aragon’s coronation as King of Sicily in 1282, and the crowns remained joined until 1714—a span of 432 years. In the meantime, of course, it had conquered Latin America and the Philippines, and while it shed colonies throughout the nineteenth century thanks to the same wave of revolutionary fervor that had cost Great Britain the United States, it would not surrender its last major colonies—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—until 1898, more than 600 years after Pedro’s coronation. The Portuguese run was somewhat less—from the capture of Ceuta in 1415 to the cession of Macau to China in 1999. Yet Mahan has nothing but scorn for the Iberian accomplishment, which in his telling seems like a sort of perverted accident of history.

Ideas about Sea Power in the Face of Innovation
Comparisons of various states is the more obvious approach to testing Mahan’s ideas. But another way of considering his preconditions for sea power against a variety of examples across space and time is to think of them in terms of changes to and innovations in technology or institutions like the law. As for the latter, it is clear that laws and treaties have played a significant role in the way nations exercise sea power. This much is clear from the sequence of European treaties and laws limiting piracy and privateering to which I alluded earlier. But these constitute only one of many types of legal instruments that have shaped how maritime power has been exercised by either individuals or states.

Legal regimes
In this regard one thinks of the commercial revolution of the Middle Ages, in which maritime merchants of different faiths worked out contractual arrangements that would allow them to honor prohibitions on usury—which were common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—while turning a reasonable profit for their labor and risk. The impact of the development of the commenda and its Muslim and Jewish analogues differed from place to place, and clearly it was Italian merchants from Venice, Genoa, and Pisa who benefited most over the long term, but this was a collaborative if informal effort that had enormous repercussions for world history.

In the fifteenth century, papal bulls and Luso-Spanish treaties concerning navigation in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans likewise had a profound effect on the shape of their empires, as well as on the approaches that Northern Europeans would take to challenge or undermine Spanish and Portuguese hegemony around the world.

One of the ways that the Dutch challenged Iberian pretensions to close the seas to outsiders was the legal challenge embodied in Hugo Grotius’s treatise Mare Liberum, On the Free Sea, which kicked off a lively and still ongoing debate on whether the seas are free to everyone, or whether there are circumstances in light of which a nation may block access to waters over which it claims a special relationship. The obvious example today is China’s adherence to the Nine-Dash Line. At the same time, it must be admitted that while the Americans pride themselves on being
the apostles of free trade, in 1945 President Harry Truman started walking back the doctrine of “the free sea” when he unilaterally extended U.S. jurisdiction to cover all natural resources on the continental shelf out to 200 miles—the size of the exclusive economic zone now accepted as part of the Law of the Sea.

Another form of legal regime are alliances by which countries try to use alliances to achieve a force-multiplier effect for their navies, but with mixed results, as we saw yesterday. When they work, they work very well. When they do not, they are close to useless. In the twenty-first century, we have also seen the emergence of less formal collaborations, as when Chinese and American naval forces have collaborated to curb piracy off the Horn of Africa in recent years.

I think two things are worth noting in this context. The first is that this collaboration seems to signal the turn to a new era in which corporate or commercial interest is beginning to rival national interest as a driver of naval strategy. This is obviously not a full-blown change as yet, and any number of developments could reverse this trend; but if it does not reverse, it would be very interesting to check in on the world order a hundred years from now to see how this evolves.

The second point worth mentioning is that international legal regimes have in effect hobbled individual nations, or even groups of nations, to deal swiftly, emphatically, and decisively with piracy. One can hardly imagine a Robert Maynard, who killed the pirate Edward Teach (Blackbeard), dealing with piracy off Nigeria or Malacca, much less the Horn of Africa, with the reserve shown by modern naval forces.

Finally, one thing that has yet to rise to the fore in the minds of either the public or naval strategists are legal instruments governing illegal whaling and fishing and other environmental issues. The antagonists and protagonists in the struggles that have taken place are as often as not non-state actors: illegal, often stateless fishing vessels or private institutional whalers sailing in violation of international treaties being pursued by small, self-appointed policemen like Sea Shepherd, often in the vast expanse of the Southern Ocean where it is easy for illegal vessels to escape detection or scrutiny.

A few weeks ago, an Argentine coast guard vessel sank a Chinese boat fishing illegally off the central coast of Argentina, but this incident was triggered because the vessel had violated Argentina’s 200-mile exclusive economic zone. It will be interesting to see when, if ever, the struggle over finite or endangered non-mineral resources will warrant state intervention. Certainly there is no hesitation about fighting and blockading over oil, which is also a finite resource; but fish have yet to swim into the purview of diplomats or naval strategists.

Technological regimes
As for how technology affects the workings of sea power, clearly it does, though always in ways we might expect. The switch from wood to steel, sail to steam, and coal to oil to nuclear power have all made it possible to go farther and faster and in defiance of seasonal climatological phenomena. But on the whole, geography is relatively resilient in the face of technological change, and as Andrew Lambert reminds us, because “the key to a successful sea strategy is … the ability to impact the land,” geography tends to shape commercial and naval strategy in fairly constant ways. If anything, one could argue that technological triumphs like the Panama and Suez Canals have led to a diminishment of maritime activity of all sorts in the Southern Ocean because it moved shipping to more northerly routes that avoided the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn.

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Otherwise, the importance of particular straits and other chokepoints have stayed remarkably constant the same regardless of the era, notwithstanding small-scale developments like the Kiel Canal. Probably the most contested place in the world ocean is the Strait of Sicily, on the shores of which the merchants of Tyre erected their new city of Carthage in the ninth century BCE. After seven centuries under Carthaginian and seven more centuries under Roman control, in 429 CE, control of the Strait of Sicily was contested by the Vandals, who settled at Carthage and so became the first foreign power to contest Rome’s dominance since the Punic Wars. The Byzantines retook Carthage, only to lose it to Umayyad armies at the end of the seventh century. The rulers of Ifriqiya (Tunisia) thereafter dominated the strait for the next 350 years, when Norman forces wrested Sicily from Muslim rule. Norman control of the strait was not absolute, however, which allowed trading states like Genoa and Pisa to trade and raid across and through the strait with impunity.

The balance of commercial and naval power in the Mediterranean returned to Italy, but control of the Strait shifted to Spain until the early 1700s. The Strait subsequently played a major role in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, both world wars, and the Cold War. Today, its waters are contested by refugees fleeing North Africa and Europeans trying to keep them at bay. But the final word in this regard perhaps belongs to the U.S. Navy’s Sixth Fleet, which since 1951 has stood watch over the Strait of Sicily from Naples, only eight hours’ steaming away. Whether the prevailing technology has centered on galleys, lateen-rigged round ships, galleons, full-rigged ships, wooden or steel-hulled steamships, battleships, battle cruisers, aircraft carriers, submarines—the strait remains to be fought over.

**Where does this leave us today?**

I’d like to leave with a brief look at two maritime powers that I believe will play an increasingly significant role in world affairs in the years ahead. The first is of course China, which everybody has an eye on. If the purpose of having a navy is to protect one’s trade, then China has as good a reason to have a navy as anyone, as it is the world’s largest economy and has the world’s largest merchant fleet. China’s posture in the South China Sea, and the response of its neighbors and the United States are well known. The potential for conflict is obviously there, and it will be up to very cool heads on all sides to keep a tense situation from spiraling out of control.

The other maritime power is Australia, which I single out not just because I want to end this talk about “No Peace Beyond the Line” south of the equator, but because Australia could be forced to make some difficult strategic choices in the coming years. Specifically, Australia will have to decide whether it wants to maintain its alliance with the United States and the west. It has paid dearly for this in blood and treasure, in a host of wars from Vietnam to Afghanistan, in which it had little or no stake. In exchange, however, it has ensured that the United States attend to Australian interests, namely the island-nation’s vulnerability to disruption of the long-distance trade which is its lifeblood. (After all, it was an Australian historian who coined the expression “the tyranny of distance.”)

Of all the strategic relationships around the world, this may well be the most interesting one to watch in the coming years. For China is by far Australia’s largest trading partner—$152 billion in imports and exports in 2014, compared with only $70 billion with Japan and $60 billion with the United States. It is not inconceivable that China will at some point choose to leverage its commercial clout with Australia to drive a wedge between it and the United States. For the Chinese to succeed in this, however, they will have to demonstrate that it has the capacity to guarantee the security of Australia’s trade to the same extent that the United States has since World War II, and that Great Britain did before the war.
One could argue that Australia’s western roots would militate against its acquiescing to Chinese demands, but pressure might be brought to bear by developments in Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding recent developments, the countries of Southeast Asia have a long tradition of accommodating Chinese power. Notwithstanding favorable relations with United States at the present time, even a brief glance at the current situation shows that good relations with the notwithstanding, these countries are not necessarily wedded to U.S. conceptions of democratic governance, which has been one of America’s biggest selling points since World War II. To see how quickly and dramatically the situation can change, we need only consider how recently Vietnam and Japan were in full-blown wars against the United States. Should the nations of mainland or island Southeast Asia decide it was in their interest to rebuff the United States in favor of more favorable relations with China, the pressure on Australia to follow suit would be considerable.

**Conclusion**
I hope that this survey of different aspects of sea power has demonstrated that notwithstanding the sentiment of the sixteenth-century cry, “No Peace Beyond the line,” and in spite of all the myriad changes in technology, law, and governance worldwide that have taken place since then, it is clear that peace has been more the norm rather than the exception on the waters south of the equator. Barring some unforeseen calamity—perhaps the opening of Antarctica to settlement due to climate change—it is likely to remain so, at least for the foreseeable future.