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Introduction

Since the 1980s, both the academic world and the analytical community in the field of international relations and political theory have shown a renewed interest for classical geopolitics. On one hand, leading scholars in strategic studies, such as Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan in Britain, Mackubin T. Owen and Francis Sempa in the U.S., have promoted a much needed rediscovering of classical authors. The above mentioned analysts have attempted to demonstrate that classical geopolitical thinking is still a valuable tool to read post-Cold War power relations, and that geography remains the most important factor in international relations, because it is "the most permanent" and - ultimately - "inescapable", notwithstanding the crucial changes in the relationship between man and the earth thanks to new military, transportation, and communication technologies.

On the other hand, critical geopolitics has produced a number of in-depth studies which, together with accurate biographical works, have helped scholars to better understand the cultural origins, biases, and theoretical limitations of classical geopolitics.

However, both "neo-classical" and "critical" thinkers have concentrated their efforts mostly on the works of Sir Halford J. Mackinder (Blouet 1987, 2004; Gray and Sloan 1999; Loughlin 1994; O' Tuathail 1996), and to a lesser extent on the previously largely overlooked geopolitical thinking of Alfred T. Mahan (Sumida 1997, 1999). As a result, the theoretical and analytical work of Dutch-born American scholar Nicholas J. Spykman has been less accurately and less deeply reconsidered.

Although Spykman has traditionally been recognised as one of the most important and influential geopolitical thinkers, at the same time he has very often been "reduced" to being the author of the "Rimland thesis", as opposed to Mackinder, who put emphasis on the strategic prize and role of the "Heartland". In addition, most of the articles and essays on classical geopolitics have in fact considered Spykman in light of Mackinder's seminal work. In this brief paper, this author would like to highlight the richness of Spykman's thought, its originality and prescience. Moreover, I will attempt to show, albeit very succinctly, that Spykman's in-depth analysis of geography's political-strategic significance constitutes an excellent introduction to the methodology of geopolitics.

The "other" Spykman

The "Rimland thesis"

Because of the goals of this paper, I shall not emphasise the importance of the "Rimland thesis" in Spykman's intellectual work. While it would be incorrect to overlook the impact of that thesis on the U.S., and western, strategic thinking in the second half of the 20th century, the reader can refer to Spykman's well-known posthumous work *The Geography of the Peace* and to a series of studies on classical geopolitics to judge the soundness of the author's best known geopolitical and strategic hypothesis. Moreover, students of geopolitics can refer to Michael Gerace's groundbreaking article on the real and presumed influence of Mackinder's and Spykman's thinking on U.S. containment strategy during the Cold War (Gerace 1991).

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