

MARE LIBERUM.

Imagine the controversies that would arise on the question whether cargoes which would be contraband if consigned to a government, are or are not bona fide the property of individuals. On that question wars might easily arise. Imagine, again, the opportunities which would be afforded to an unscrupulous belligerent of sending out swarms of vessels in the guise of trading vessels, and then transforming them into commerce-raiders, preying indifferently on enemy and neutral. A mere prohibition in international law would be quite ineffective to prevent this abuse: it would only prove an additional trap for honourable powers, as so many of the existing provisions have proved to be.

But there is a still stronger reason against the American doctrine. In modern times every threat to the liberty of free nations has come from a great land-power. In every case it has been broken against the resistance of sea-power, which is by itself unable to threaten the existence of any State, but is very strong for defence. To disarm sea-power while leaving land-power in possession of all its weapons of offence, as the American doctrine would do, would not merely be an injustice to the powers which depend upon sea-power, but would be a positive danger to the liberties of the world. Sea-power must not be disarmed unless and until land-power is equally effectually disarmed. And this will not be until the danger of war has been practically brought to an end. Complete freedom of the seas in time of war is therefore an impossible ideal, because it cannot be justly or safely established until the danger of war itself has been conjured away.

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