



Lecture Series “Signatures of World Society”

in cooperation with the focus area UNIVERSAL

Realism between Comparison and Exception: Alfred T. Mahan and the Dynamics of Universalization of the Monroe Doctrine, 1890-1914

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Between 1890 and his death in 1914, American naval historian and founder of classical geopolitics, Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914), returned obsessively to the topic of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), describing it as a “living principle” that adapts as needed to the growing “necessities” of the American empire. Specter argues that Mahan’s writings on the Monroe Doctrine both universalized the US historical experience into a general theory of “spheres of influence,” and paradoxically, stressed the unique qualities of the U.S. that resist practices of comparing. Realism (in international relations theory) rests on a practice of comparing the behavior of peer “great powers.” Having steered US strategy onto this implicitly comparative terrain, Mahan then developed a new answer to the question of American exceptionalism. Mahan’s work on the Monroe Doctrine negotiates geopolitical universality and national particularity, and illustrates the broader dynamics of the universalization of the Western realist tradition.

This lecture will also be broadcast via Zoom
Meeting ID: 696 7099 4418 – Passcode: 609070

