

# GEOPOLITICS AND GEOSTRATEGY

## Geopolitics

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**Geopolitics**, from [Greek](#) Γη (earth) and Πολιτική (politics) in broad terms, is a theory that describes the relation between politics and territory whether on local or international scale.

It comprises the art and practice of analyzing, proscribing, forecasting, and the using of political power over a given territory. Specifically, is a method of foreign policy analysis, which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behaviour primarily in terms of geographical variables. Those geographical variables generally are: geographic location of the country or countries in question, size of the countries involved, climate of the region the countries are in, topography of the region, demography, natural resources available in the territory, technological development.<sup>[1]</sup> Traditionally, the term has applied primarily to the impact of geography on politics (and likewise), but its usage has evolved over the past century to encompass wider connotations.

In the abstract, geopolitics traditionally indicates the links and causal relationships between political power and geographic space; in concrete terms it is often seen as a body of thought assaying specific strategic prescriptions based on the relative importance of land power and sea power in world history... The geopolitical tradition had some consistent concerns, like the geopolitical correlates of power in world politics, the identification of international core areas, and the relationships between naval and terrestrial capabilities.<sup>[2]</sup>

Academically, the study of geopolitics involves the analysis of [geography](#), [history](#) and [social science](#) with reference to [spatial politics](#) and patterns at various scales (ranging from the level of the state to international). It is multidisciplinary in its scope, and includes all aspects of the social sciences with particular emphasis on political geography, international relations, the territorial aspects of political science and international law.

<sup>[3]</sup> Also, the study of geopolitics includes the study of the ensemble of relations between the interests of international political actors, interests focused to an area, space, geographical element or ways, relations which create a geopolitical system.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Main schools and doctrines

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The term was coined at the beginning of the 20th century by [Rudolf Kjellén](#) (1864–1922), a Swedish political scientist, inspired by the German geographer [Friedrich Ratzel](#), whose book *Politische Geographie* ([political geography](#)) was published in 1897. It was later popularized in English by the hungarian historian [Emile](#)

[Reich](#) and later by the American diplomat [Robert Strausz-Hupé](#), a faculty member of the [University of Pennsylvania](#). Although [Halford Mackinder](#) had a pioneering role in the field, he actually never used the term geopolitics himself.<sup>[5]</sup>

## **German Geopolitik**

German [Geopolitik](#) is characterized by the belief that life of States is similar to the one of Human beings and animals, mainly imposed by scientific [determinism](#) and [Social Darwinism](#). German geopolitics will thoroughly develop the concept of [Lebensraum](#) (vital space) supposedly necessary to the development of a Nation alike a favorable natural environment would be for animals.

### ***Ratzel***

[Friedrich Ratzel](#) (1844–1904), influenced by thinkers like [Darwin](#) and [zoologist Ernst Heinrich Haeckel](#), contributed to Geopolitik by the expansion on the biological conception of geography, without a static conception of borders. States are instead organic and growing, with borders representing only a temporary stop in their movement. It is not the state proper that is the organism, but the land in its spiritual bond with the people who draw sustenance from it. The expanse of a state's borders is a reflection of the health of the nation meaning that static countries are in decline.

He published several papers, among which the essay [Lebensraum](#) (1901) concerning [biogeography](#), creating a foundation for the uniquely German variant of geopolitics: geopolitik. Influenced by the American [geostrategist Alfred Thayer Mahan](#), Ratzel wrote of aspirations for German naval reach, agreeing that sea power was self-sustaining, as the profit from trade would pay for the merchant marine, unlike land power.

The geopolitical theory of Ratzel has been criticized as being too sweeping, his interpretation of human history and geography too simple and mechanistic. In his analysis of the importance of mobility, and the move from sea to rail transport, he failed to predict the revolutionary impact of air power. Critically also he underestimated the importance of social organization in the development of power.<sup>[6]</sup>

### ***The association of German Geopolitik with Nazism***

After [World War I](#), the thoughts of [Rudolf Kjellén](#) and Ratzel were picked up and extended by a number of German authors such as [Karl Haushofer](#) (1869–1946), [Erich Obst](#), [Hermann Lautensach](#) and [Otto Maull](#). In 1923 [Karl Haushofer](#) founded the [Zeitschrift für Geopolitik](#) (Journal for Geopolitics), which later proved useful to [Nazi Germany propaganda](#). The key concepts of Haushofer's Geopolitik were Lebensraum, [autarky](#), [pan-](#)

[regions](#) and organic borders. States have, Haushofer argued, undeniable right to seek [natural borders](#) which would guarantee autarky.

More recently Haushofer's influence within the [Nazi Party](#) has been questioned (O'Tuathail, 1996) since Haushofer failed to incorporate the Nazis' racial ideology into his work. Popular views of the role of geopolitics in the Nazi Third Reich suggest a fundamental significance on the part of the geopoliticians in the ideological orientation of the Nazi state. Bassin (1987) reveals that these popular views are in important ways misleading and incorrect. Despite the numerous similarities and affinities between the two doctrines, geopolitics was always held suspect by the National Socialist ideologists. This suspicion was understandable, for the underlying philosophical orientation of geopolitics ran counter to that of National Socialism. Geopolitics, deriving from the political geography of Ratzel, shared his scientific materialism and determinism. Human society was determined by external influences, in the face of which qualities held innately by individuals or groups were of reduced or no significance. National Socialism rejected in principle both materialism and determinism and also elevated innate human qualities, in the form of a hypothesized 'racial character,' to the factor of greatest significance in the constitution of human society. These differences led after 1933 to friction and ultimately to open denunciation of geopolitics by Nazi ideologues.<sup>[7]</sup> Nevertheless, German Geopolitik was discredited by its (mis)use in Nazi expansionist policy of [World War II](#) and has never achieved standing comparable to the pre-war period.

## **Anglo-American geopolitical doctrine**

### ***Alfred Thayer Mahan and the sea power***

[Alfred Thayer Mahan](#), a frequent commentator on world naval strategic and diplomatic affairs, believed that national greatness was inextricably associated with the sea, with its commercial usage in peace and its control in war. His goal was to discover the laws of history that determined who controlled the seas.

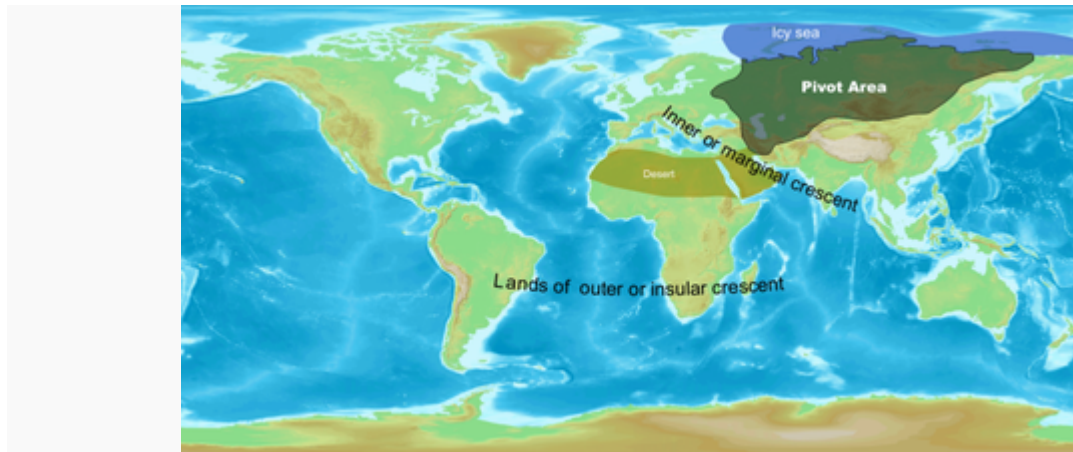
Mahan's theoretical framework came from [Antoine-Henri Jomini](#), with an emphasis on strategic locations (such as [chokepoints](#), canals, and coaling stations), as well as quantifiable levels of fighting power in a fleet. He proposed six conditions required for a nation to have [sea power](#):

1. An advantageous geographical position
2. Serviceable coastlines, abundant natural resources, and a favorable climate
3. Extent of territory
4. A population large enough to defend its territory
5. A society with an aptitude for the sea and commercial enterprise
6. A government with the influence to dominate the sea.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Emile Reich**

Hungarian historian [Emile Reich](#) (1854–1910) is considered to be the first having coined the acception in english<sup>[9]</sup> as early as 1902 and later in 1904 in his book [Foundations of Modern Europe](#).<sup>[10]</sup>

## **Mackinder and the Heartland theory**



Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland concept showing the situation of the "pivot area" established in the [Theory of the Heartland](#). He later revised it to mark Eastern Europe as a pivot while keeping area marked above as Heartland.

The concept of geopolitics initially gained attention through the work of Sir [Halford Mackinder](#) in England and his formulation of the [Heartland Theory](#) which was set out in his article entitled "[The Geographical Pivot of History](#)" in 1904. Mackinder's doctrine of geopolitics involved concepts diametrically opposed to the notion of [Alfred Thayer Mahan](#) about the significance of navies (he coined the term *sea power*) in world conflict. He saw navy as a basis of Colombian era empire (roughly 1492–19<sup>th</sup> century) and expected 20<sup>th</sup> century to be domain of land power. The Heartland theory hypothesized the possibility for a huge empire being brought into existence in the Heartland, which wouldn't need to use coastal or transoceanic transport to remain coherent.

The basic notions of Mackinder's doctrine involve considering the geography of the [Earth](#) as being divided into two sections, the [World Island](#) or Core, comprising [Eurasia](#) and [Africa](#); the Peripheral "islands", including the [Americas](#), [Australia](#), [Japan](#), the [British Isles](#), and [Oceania](#). Not only was the Periphery noticeably smaller than the World Island, it necessarily required much sea transport to function at the technological level of the World Island, which contained sufficient natural resources for a developed economy.

Also, the industrial centers of the Periphery were necessarily located in widely separated locations. The World Island could send its navy to destroy each one of them in turn. It could locate its own industries in a region further inland than the Periphery could, so they would have a longer struggle reaching them, and would face a well-stocked industrial bastion. Mackinder called this region the *Heartland*. It essentially comprised [Eastern Europe](#): [Ukraine](#), Western [Russia](#), and [Mitteleuropa](#).<sup>[11]</sup> The Heartland contained the grain reserves of Ukraine, and many other natural resources. Mackinder's notion of geopolitics can be summed up in his saying "Who

rules East Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules the World-Island commands the World." His doctrine was influential during the [World Wars](#) and the [Cold War](#), for [Germany](#) and later [Russia](#) each made territorial strides toward the Heartland.

### ***Spykman and the Rimland***

[Nicholas J. Spykman](#) could be considered as a disciple and critic of both geostrategists [Alfred Mahan](#), and [Halford Mackinder](#). His work is based on assumptions similar to Mackinder: the unity of world politics, and the unity of the world sea. He extends this to include the unity of the air. Spykman adopts Mackinder's divisions of the world, renaming some:

- the [Heartland](#);
- the [Rimland](#) (analogous to Mackinder's "inner or marginal crescent" also an intermediate region, lying between the Heartland and the marginal sea powers); and
- the Offshore Islands & Continents (Mackinder's "outer or insular crescent").<sup>[12]</sup>

The purpose of Rimland is to separate Heartland from ports usable throughout the year (not frozen up during winter), therefore any attempts by Heartland nations ([Russia](#)) to conquer Rimland must be prevented. Spykman modified Mackinder's formula on relationship between the Heartland and the Rimland (or the inner crescent), he claimed, that "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia. Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." This theory can be traced in the origins of [Containment](#), a [U.S.](#) policy on preventing the spread of Soviet influence after the World War II (see also [Truman Doctrine](#)).

### ***Huntington***

Since then, the word *geopolitics* has been applied to other theories, most notably the notion of the [Clash of Civilizations](#) by [Samuel Huntington](#) thoroughly inspired from [Fernand Braudel](#) in [Grammaire des civilisations](#). In a peaceable world, neither sea lanes nor surface transport are threatened; hence all countries are effectively close enough to one another physically. It is in the realm of the political ideas, workings, and cultures that there are differences, and the term has shifted more towards this arena, especially in its popular usage. Huntington's geopolitical model, especially the structures for North Africa and Eurasia, is largely derived from the "[Intermediate Region](#)" geopolitical model first formulated by [Dimitri Kitsikis](#) and published in 1978.<sup>[13]</sup>

### **French approach on Geopolitics**

French doctrines mainly relies in opposition to German [Geopolitik](#) and rejects the idea of a fixed geography, hence french geography is focused on the evolution of polymorphic territories being the result of mankind actions. It also relies in the consideration of long time periods through refusal of taking specific events into account.

This Method has been theorized by Professor Lacoste according to three principles: [Representation](#), [Diachronie](#); [Diatopie](#).

### ***Montesquieu***

In [The Spirit of the Laws](#), [Montesquieu](#) outlined the view that man and societies are influenced by climate. He believed that hotter climates create hot-tempered people and colder climates aloof people, whereas the mild climate of France is ideal for political systems.

### ***Élisée Reclus***

Considered as one of the founders of french geopolitics, [Reclus](#), is the author of a book considered as a reference in modern geography (*Nouvelle Géographie universelle*). Alike Ratzel, he considers geography through a global vision. However, in complete opposition to Ratzel's vision, Reclus considers geography not to be unchanging; it is supposed to evolve in contingent with human actions. His progressive political views got him rejected from the academic establishment.

### ***Jacques Ancel***

[French geographer](#) and geopolitician [Jacques Ancel](#) is considered to be the first theorician of geopolitics in France notably through the lectures he gave at the [Carnegie foundation](#) and his book "Géopolitique" published in 1936. Alike Reclus he rejects German determinist views on geopolitics (such as Haushofer's doctrines).

### ***Fernand Braudel, Vidal de la Blache***

[Braudel](#)'s broad view used insights from other social sciences, employed the concept of the *longue durée*, and downplayed the importance of specific events. This method was inspired by the [French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache](#) (himself influenced by German thought especially by [Friedrich Ratzel](#) whom he had met in Germany). Moreover, Braudel's method consisted in analysing the interdependence between individuals and their environment.<sup>[14]</sup>

"Vidalian" geography is based on varied forms of cartography and on [possibilism](#) (founded on a societal approach of geography ie on the principle of spaces polymorphic faces depending from many factors among them mankind, culture, and ideas) as opposed to *determinism*.

### **Lacoste and the rebirth of French Geopolitics**

Because of the German Geopolitik influence on French Geopolitics, the latter were for a long time banished from academic works, often considered to be a Nazi science.

In the mid-1970s, [Yves Lacoste](#) a French [geographer](#) who was directly inspired by Ancel, Braudel and Vidal de la Blache founded l'Institut Français de Géopolitique (French Institute for Geopolitics) that publishes the [Hérodote](#) journal. While rejecting generalizations and broad abstractions employed by the German and Anglo-American traditions, the school focuses on spatial dimension on different levels of analysis.

In his work, Lacoste set a system of academic principle. According to Lacoste every issue (conflictual situation whether it is local or global) is to be apprehended through three key notions:

- **Representation:** Each group or individuals is the product of an education, thus, views regarding every issues are oriented, being the product of their beliefs education ethnic group... Therefore one should analyse the representations of the forces in presence with distance in order to understand their motivations and revendications.
- **Diachronie:** diachronic analyse is a tool that allows to conduct a Braudelian analyse (ie through long period of time)
- **Diatopie:** diatopic analyse is a tool that allows to conduct a cartographic survey through a multiscale mapping.
- **Horogenesis:** Neologism coined by geographer [Michel Foucher](#), the concept consists in the studying of the *birth and death of borders*

### **Russian Geopolitics**

The modern day [Russian](#) Geopolitics is centered on [Eurasianist](#) tradition and is highly interlinked with politics. The trauma of the disintegration of the [Soviet Union](#) left behind various views ranging from moderate – stressing the unique position of Russia between Europe and Asia – to more extreme arguing for Greater Russia aspirations (renaissance of Russian empire in the borders of the former Soviet Union) associated with expansionist views of [Alexandr Dugin](#).

### **See also**

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- [Astropolitics](#)
- [Balkanization](#)
- [Critical geopolitics](#)
- [Geopolitik](#)
- [Geojurisprudence](#)
- [Geostrategy](#)
- [Lebensraum](#)
- [Natural gas](#) and [list of natural gas fields](#) and [Category:Natural gas pipelines](#)
- [Petroleum politics](#)
- [Political geography](#)
- [Realpolitik](#)
- [Space geostrategy](#)
- [Sphere of Influence](#)
- [Strategic depth](#)
- [Theopolitics](#)
- [Water politics](#)

## Notes

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1. [^](#) Evans, G & Newnham, J., (1998), "The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations", Penguin Books, London, Uk. [ISBN 0-14-051397-3](#)
2. [^](#) Oyvind Osterud, "The Uses and Abuses of Geopolitics", "[Journal of Peace Research](#), no. 2, 1988, p. 192.
3. [^](#) Geopolitics Journal home page - <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/14650045.asp>
4. [^](#) Vladimir Toncea, 2006, "Geopolitical evolution of borders in Danube Basin"
5. [^](#) Kearns, Gerry. 2009. *Geopolitics and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. [^](#) O Tuathail (2006) page 20
7. [^](#) Mark Bassin, "Race Contra Space: The Conflict Between German 'Geopolitik' and National Socialism," *Political Geography Quarterly* 1987 6(2): 115-134,
8. [^](#) [Sea Power](#)
9. [^](#) Christopher Lloyd GoGwilt, "The Geopolitical Image: Imperialism, Anarchism, and the Hypothesis of Culture in the Formation of Geopolitics", *Modernism/modernity*, Volume 5, Number 3, September 1998, pp. 49-70 et *The Fiction of Geopolitics: Afterimages of Culture, from Wilkie Collins to Alfred Hitchcock*. Stanford. Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 35-36.
10. [^](#) *Foundations of Modern Europe*, London, George Bell, 1904, 284 pages



11. [^](#) See map in Polelle, [Raising Cartographic Consciousness](#), p. 57.
12. [^](#) See map in Polelle, [Raising Cartographic Consciousness](#), p. 118.
13. [^](#) Dimitri Kitsikis, *A Comparative History of Greece and Turkey in the 20th century*. In Greek, *Συγκριτική Ιστορία Ελλάδος καί Τουρκίας στον 20ό αιώνα*, Athens, Hestia, 1978. Supplemented 2nd edition: Hestia, 1990. 3rd edition: Hestia, 1998, 357 pp.. In [Turkish](#), *Yirmi Asırda Karşılaştırmalı Türk-Yunan Tarihi*, İstanbul, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi, II-8, 1980.
14. [^](#) Braudel "The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II La part du milieu (vol. 1) [ISBN 2-253-06168-9](#)

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# Geostrategy

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(Redirected from [Geostrategist](#))



The [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation](#) is a geostrategic [military alliance](#) concerned with most of Europe and North America

**Geostrategy**, a subfield of [geopolitics](#), is a type of [foreign policy](#) guided principally by [geographical](#) factors as they inform, constrain, or affect political and military planning. As with all [strategies](#), geostrategy is concerned with matching means to ends<sup>[1][2][3][4][5]</sup> — in this case, a country's resources (whether they are limited or extensive) with its geopolitical objectives (which can be local, regional, or global). Strategy is as intertwined with geography as geography is with [nationhood](#), or as [Gray](#) and [Sloan](#) state it, "[geography is] the mother of strategy."<sup>[6]</sup>

Geostrategists, as distinct from geopoliticians, advocate aggressive strategies, and approach geopolitics from a [nationalist](#) point-of-view. As with all [political theories](#), geostrategies are relevant principally to the context in which they were devised: the nationality of the strategist, the strength of his or her country's resources, the scope of his or her country's goals, the political geography of the time period, and the technological factors that affect military, political, economic, and cultural engagement. Geostrategy can function normatively, advocating foreign policy based on geographic factors, analytical, describing how foreign policy is shaped by geography, or predictive, predicting a country's future foreign policy decisions on the basis of geographic factors.

Many geostrategists are also geographers, specializing in subfields of [geography](#), such as [human geography](#), [political geography](#), [economic geography](#), [cultural geography](#), [military geography](#), and [strategic geography](#). Geostrategy is most closely related to strategic geography.

Especially following [World War II](#), some scholars divide geostrategy into two [schools](#): the uniquely German [organic state theory](#); and, the broader [Anglo-American](#) geostrategies.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup>

Critics of geostrategy have asserted that it is a [pseudoscientific](#) gloss used by dominant nations to justify [imperialist](#) or [hegemonic](#) aspirations, or that it has been rendered irrelevant because of technological advances, or that its [essentialist](#) focus on geography leads geostrategists to incorrect conclusions about the conduct of foreign policy.

## Defining geostrategy

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Academics, theorists, and practitioners of geopolitics have agreed upon no standard definition for "geostrategy." Most all definitions, however, emphasize the merger of [strategic](#) considerations with geopolitical factors. While geopolitics is ostensibly neutral, examining the geographic and political features of different regions, especially the impact of geography on politics, geostrategy involves comprehensive planning, assigning means for achieving national goals or securing assets of [military](#) or political significance.

## Coining the term

The term "**geo-strategy**" was first used by [Frederick L. Schuman](#) in his 1942 article "Let Us Learn Our Geopolitics." It was a translation of the [German](#) term "*Wehrgeopolitik*" as used by German geostrategist [Karl Haushofer](#). Previous translations had been attempted, such as "**defense-geopolitics**." [Robert Strausz-Hupé](#) had coined and popularized "**war geopolitics**" as another alternate translation.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Modern definitions

- "[G]eostrategy is about the exercise of power over particularly critical spaces on the Earth's surface; about crafting a political presence over the international system. It is aimed at enhancing one's security and prosperity; about making the international system more prosperous; about shaping rather than being shaped. A geostrategy is about securing access to certain trade routes, strategic bottlenecks, rivers, islands and seas. It requires an extensive military presence, normally coterminous with the opening of overseas military stations and the building of warships capable of deep oceanic power projection. It also

requires a network of alliances with other great powers who share one's aims or with smaller 'lynchpin states' that are located in the regions one deems important."

—James Rogers and Luis Simón, "Think Again: European Geostrategy"<sup>[11]</sup>

- "[T]he words *geopolitical*, *strategic*, and *geostrategic* are used to convey the following meanings: *geopolitical* reflects the combination of geographic and political factors determining the condition of a state or region, and emphasizing the impact of geography on politics; *strategic* refers to the comprehensive and planned application of measures to achieve a central goal or to vital assets of military significance; and **geostrategic** merges strategic consideration with geopolitical ones."

—Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan* (emphasis in original)<sup>[12]</sup>

- "For the [United States](#), [Eurasian](#) geostrategy involves the purposeful management of geostrategically dynamic states and the careful handling of geopolitically catalytic states, in keeping with the twin interests of America in the short-term preservation of its unique global power and in the long-run transformation of it into increasingly [institutionalized](#) global cooperation. To put it in a terminology that hearkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of [imperial](#) geostrategy are to prevent [collusion](#) and maintain [security dependence](#) among the [vassals](#), to keep [tributaries pliant](#) and protected, and to keep the [barbarians](#) from coming together."

—Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*<sup>[13]</sup>

- *Geostrategy* is the geographic direction of a state's foreign policy. More precisely, geostrategy describes where a state concentrates its efforts by projecting military power and directing diplomatic activity. The underlying assumption is that states have limited resources and are unable, even if they are willing, to conduct a *tous asimuths* foreign policy. Instead they must focus politically and militarily on specific areas of the world. Geostrategy describes this foreign-policy thrust of a state and does not deal with motivation or decision-making processes. The geostrategy of a state, therefore, is not necessarily motivated by geographic or geopolitical factors. A state may project power to a location because of ideological reasons, interest groups, or simply the whim of its leader.

—[Jakub J. Grygiel](#), *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change* (emphasis in original)<sup>[14]</sup>

- "It is recognized that the term '**geo-strategy**' is more often used, in current writing, in a global context, denoting the consideration of global land-sea distribution, distances, and accessibility among other geographical factors in strategic planning and action... Here the definition of geo-strategy is used in a more limited regional frame wherein the *sum of geographic factors interact to influence or to give advantage to one adversary, or intervene to modify strategic planning as well as political and military venture.*"

—[Lim Joo-Jock](#), *Geo-Strategy and the South China Sea Basin*. (emphasis in original)<sup>[15]</sup>

- "A science named "geo-strategy" would be unimaginable in any other period of history but ours. It is the characteristic product of turbulent twentieth-century world politics."

—[Andrew Gyorgi](#), *The Geopolitics of War: Total War and Geostrategy* (1943).<sup>[10]</sup>

- "'Geostrategy,'—a word of uncertain meaning—has... been avoided."

—[Stephen B. Jones](#), "The Power Inventory and National Strategy"<sup>[16]</sup>

## History of geostrategy

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### Precursors

As early as [Herodotus](#), observers saw strategy as heavily influenced by the geographic setting of the actors. In *History*, Herodotus describes a clash of civilizations between the [Egyptians](#), [Persians](#), [Scythians](#), and [Greeks](#)—all of which he believed were heavily influenced by the physical geographic setting.<sup>[17]</sup>

[Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow](#) proposed a geometrical science of strategy in the 1799 *The Spirit of the Modern System of War*. His system predicted that the larger states would swallow the smaller ones, resulting in eleven large states. Mackubin Thomas Owens notes the similarity between von Bülow's predictions and the map of Europe after the [unification of Germany](#) and [of Italy](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

### Golden age

Between 1890 and 1919 the world became a geostrategist's paradise, leading to the formulation of the classical geopolitical theories. The international system featured rising and falling [great powers](#), many with global reach. There were no new [frontiers](#) for the great powers to [explore](#) or [colonize](#)—the entire world was divided between the empires and colonial powers. From this point forward, international politics would feature the struggles of state against state.<sup>[18]</sup>

Two strains of geopolitical thought gained prominence: an Anglo-American school, and a German school. [Alfred Thayer Mahan](#) and [Halford J. Mackinder](#) outlined the American and British conceptions of geostrategy, respectively, in their works *The Problem of Asia* and "*The Geographical Pivot of History*".

<sup>[19]</sup> [Friedrich Ratzel](#) and [Rudolf Kjellén](#) developed an [organic theory of the state](#) which laid the foundation for Germany's unique school of geostrategy.<sup>[18]</sup>

## World War II



Fr. Edmund A. Walsh, SJ

The most prominent [German](#) geopolitician was General [Karl Haushofer](#). After [World War II](#), during the [Allied occupation of Germany](#), the [United States](#) investigated many officials and public figures to determine if they should face charges of [war crimes](#) at the [Nuremberg trials](#). [Haushofer](#), an academic primarily, was interrogated by Father [Edmund A. Walsh](#), a professor of geopolitics from the [Georgetown School of Foreign Service](#), at the request of the U.S. authorities. Despite his involvement in crafting one of the justifications for Nazi aggression, Fr. Walsh determined that Haushofer ought not stand trial.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Cold War

After the [Second World War](#), the term "geopolitics" fell into disrepute, because of its association with [Nazi geopolitik](#). Virtually no books published between the end of World War II and the mid-1970s used the word "geopolitics" or "geostrategy" in their titles, and geopoliticians did not label themselves or their works as such. German theories prompted a number of critical examinations of *geopolitik* by American geopoliticians such as [Robert Strausz-Hupé](#), [Derwent Whittlesey](#), and [Andrew Gyorgy](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

As the [Cold War](#) began, [N.J. Spykman](#) and [George F. Kennan](#) laid down the foundations for the U.S. policy of [containment](#), which would dominate [Western](#) geostrategic thought for the next forty years.<sup>[18]</sup>

[Alexander de Seversky](#) would propose that airpower had fundamentally changed geostrategic considerations and thus proposed a "geopolitics of airpower." His ideas had some influence on the administration of President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), but the ideas of Spykman and Kennan would exercise greater weight.<sup>[18]</sup> Later during the Cold War, [Colin Gray](#) would decisively reject the idea that airpower changed geostrategic considerations, while [Saul B. Cohen](#) examined the idea of a "shatterbelt", which would eventually inform the [domino theory](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

## Post-Cold War



Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, for most [NATO](#) or former [Warsaw Pact](#) countries, Geopolitical strategies have generally followed the course of either solidifying security obligations or accesses to global resources; however, the strategies of other countries have not been as palpable.

## Notable geostrategists

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The below geostrategists were instrumental in founding and developing the major geostrategic [doctrines](#) in the discipline's history. While there have been many other geostrategists, these have been the most influential in shaping and developing the field as a whole.

### Alfred Thayer Mahan

[Alfred Thayer Mahan](#) was an [American Navy](#) officer and president of the [U.S. Naval War College](#). He is best known for his [Influence of Sea Power upon History](#) series of books, which argued that naval supremacy was the deciding factor in [great power](#) warfare. In 1900, Mahan's book *The Problem of Asia* was published. In this volume he laid out the first geostrategy of the modern era.

The *Problem of Asia* divides the continent of Asia into 3 zones:

- A northern zone, located above the [40th parallel north](#), characterized by its cold climate, and dominated by land power;
- The "Debatable and Debated" zone, located between the 40th and [30th parallels](#), characterized by a temperate climate; and,
- A southern zone, located below the 30th parallel north, characterized by its hot climate, and dominated by sea power.<sup>[21]</sup>

The Debated and Debatable zone, Mahan observed, contained two [peninsulas](#) on either end ([Asia Minor](#) and [Korea](#)), the [Isthmus of Suez](#), [Palestine](#), [Syria](#), [Mesopotamia](#), two countries marked by their mountain ranges ([Persia](#) and [Afghanistan](#)), the [Pamir Mountains](#), the [Tibetan Himalayas](#), the [Yangtze Valley](#), and [Japan](#).<sup>[21]</sup> Within this zone, Mahan asserted that there were no strong states capable of withstanding outside influence or capable even of maintaining stability within their own borders. So whereas the political situations to the north and south were relatively stable and determined, the middle remained "debatable and debated ground."<sup>[21]</sup>

North of the 40th parallel, the vast expanse of Asia was dominated by the [Russian Empire](#). Russia possessed a central position on the continent, and a wedge-shaped projection into [Central Asia](#), bounded by the [Caucasus mountains](#) and [Caspian Sea](#) on one side and the mountains of Afghanistan and Western China on the other side. To prevent Russian expansionism and achievement of predominance on the Asian continent, Mahan believed pressure on Asia's flanks could be the only viable strategy pursued by sea powers.<sup>[21]</sup>

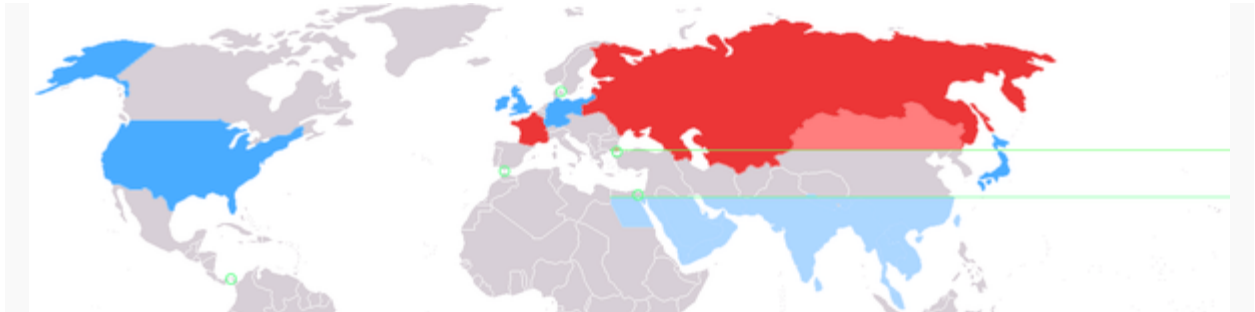
South of the 30th parallel lay areas dominated by the sea powers—[Britain](#), the [United States](#), [Germany](#), and [Japan](#). To Mahan, the possession of [India](#) by Britain was of key strategic importance, as India was best suited for exerting balancing pressure against Russia in Central Asia. Britain's predominance in [Egypt](#), [China](#), [Australia](#), and the [Cape of Good Hope](#) was also considered important.<sup>[21]</sup>

The strategy of sea powers, according to Mahan, ought to be to deny Russia the benefits of commerce that come from sea commerce. He noted that both the [Dardanelles](#) and [Baltic straits](#) could be closed by a hostile power, thereby denying Russia access to the sea. Further, this disadvantageous position would reinforce Russia's proclivity toward expansionism in order to obtain wealth or [warm water ports](#).<sup>[21]</sup> Natural geographic targets for Russian expansionism in search of access to the sea would therefore be the Chinese seaboard, the [Persian Gulf](#), and Asia Minor.<sup>[21]</sup>

In this contest between land power and sea power, Russia would find itself allied with [France](#) (a natural sea power, but in this case necessarily acting as a land power), arrayed against Germany, Britain, Japan, and the United States as sea powers.<sup>[21]</sup> Further, Mahan conceived of a unified, modern state composed of [Turkey](#), [Syria](#), and [Mesopotamia](#), possessing an efficiently organized army and navy to stand as a counterweight to Russian expansion.<sup>[21]</sup>



Further dividing the map by geographic features, Mahan stated that the two most influential lines of division would be the Suez and [Panama canals](#). As most developed nations and resources lay above the [North-South division](#), politics and commerce north of the two canals would be of much greater importance than those occurring south of the canals. As such, the great progress of historical development would not flow from north to south, but from east to west, in this case leading toward Asia as the locus of advance.<sup>[21]</sup>



This map depicts the world as divided by geostrategist Alfred Thayer Mahan in his 1900 piece *The Problem of Asia*. Asia is divided along the 30 north and 40 north parallels, represented here by green lines. In between the 30th and 40th parallel is what Mahan termed the "Debatable and debated ground," subject to competition between the land powers and sea powers.

The two allied land powers, the Russian Empire and France

The portions of Asia above the 40th parallel under effective influence of Russian land power

The four allied sea powers, Great Britain, the German Empire, Japan, and the United States

The portions of Asia below the 30th parallel subject to effective control by sea power

Key waterways identified by Mahan: the Suez Canal, Panama Canal, Dardanelles, Straits of Gibraltar, and Baltic Straits.

## Halford J. Mackinder



Halford J. Mackinder

[Halford J. Mackinder](#) His major work, *Democratic ideals and reality: a study in the politics of reconstruction*, appeared in 1919.<sup>[12]</sup> It presented his theory of the Heartland and made a case for fully taking into account geopolitical factors at the Paris Peace conference and contrasted (geographical) reality with Woodrow Wilson's idealism. The book's most famous quote was: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World Island commands the World." This message was composed to convince the world statesmen at the Paris Peace conference of the crucial importance of

Eastern Europe as the strategic route to the Heartland was interpreted as requiring a strip of buffer state to separate Germany and Russia. These were created by the peace negotiators but proved to be ineffective bulwarks in 1939 (although this may be seen as a failure of other, later statesmen during the interbellum). The principal concern of his work was to warn of the possibility of another major war (a warning also given by economist John Maynard Keynes).

Mackinder was anti-Bolshevik, and as British High Commissioner in Southern Russia in late 1919 and early 1920, he stressed the need for Britain to continue her support to the White Russian forces, which he attempted to unite.[13] [edit] Significance of Mackinder

Mackinder's work paved the way for the establishment of geography as a distinct discipline in the United Kingdom. His role in fostering the teaching of geography is probably greater than that of any other single British geographer.

Whilst Oxford did not appoint a professor of Geography until 1934, both the University of Liverpool and University of Wales, Aberystwyth established professorial chairs in Geography in 1917. Mackinder himself became a full professor in Geography in the University of London (London School of Economics) in 1923.

Mackinder is often credited with introducing two new terms into the English language : "manpower", "heartland". [edit] Influence on Nazi strategy

The Heartland Theory was enthusiastically taken up by the German school of Geopolitik, in particular by its main proponent Karl Haushofer. Whilst Geopolitik was later embraced by the German Nazi regime in the 1930s, Mackinder was always extremely critical of the German exploitation of his ideas. The German interpretation of the Heartland Theory is referred to explicitly (without mentioning the connection to Mackinder) in The Nazis Strike, the second of Frank Capra's Why We Fight series of American World War II propaganda films. [edit] Influence on American strategy

The Heartland theory and more generally classical geopolitics and geostrategy were extremely influential in the making of US strategic policy during the period of the Cold War.[14] [edit] Influence on later academics

Evidence of Mackinder's Heartland Theory can be found in the works of geopolitician Dimitri Kitsikis, particularly in his geopolitical model "Intermediate Region".

## **Friedrich Ratzel**



Friedrich Ratzel

Influenced by the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan, as well as the German geographers [Karl Ritter](#) and [Alexander von Humboldt](#), **Friedrich Ratzel** would lay the foundations for *geopolitik*, [Germany's](#) unique strain of *geopolitics*.

Ratzel wrote on the natural division between [land powers](#) and [sea powers](#), agreeing with Mahan that sea power was self-sustaining, as the profit from [trade](#) would support the development of a [merchant marine](#).

<sup>[22]</sup> However, his key contribution were the development of the concepts of [raum](#) and the [organic theory of the state](#). He theorized that states were [organic](#) and growing, and that [borders](#) were only temporary, representing pauses in their natural movement. <sup>[22]</sup> *Raum* was the land, [spiritually](#) connected to a [nation](#) (in this case, the German peoples), from which the people could draw sustenance, find adjacent inferior nations which would support them, <sup>[22]</sup> and which would be fertilized by their *kultur* (culture). <sup>[23]</sup>

Ratzel's ideas would influence the works of his student Rudolf Kjellén, as well as those of General Karl Haushofer. <sup>[22]</sup>

## Rudolf Kjellén

**Rudolf Kjellén** was a [Swedish](#) political scientist and student of Friedrich Ratzel. He first coined the term "geopolitics." <sup>[23]</sup> His writings would play a decisive role in influencing [General Karl Haushofer's](#) *geopolitik*, and indirectly the future [Nazi](#) foreign policy. <sup>[23]</sup>

His writings focused on five central concepts that would underlie German *geopolitik*:

1. *Reich* was a territorial concept that was composed of *Raum* ([Lebensraum](#)), and strategic military shape;
2. [Volk](#) was a racial conception of the state;
3. *Haushalt* was a call for [autarky](#) based on land, formulated in reaction to the vicissitudes of [international markets](#);
4. *Gesellschaft* was the social aspect of a nation's organization and cultural appeal, Kjellén [anthropomorphizing](#) inter-state relations more than Ratzel had; and,

5. *Regierung* was the form of [government](#) whose [bureaucracy](#) and [army](#) would contribute to the people's pacification and coordination.<sup>[23]</sup>

## General Karl Haushofer

[Karl Haushofer](#)'s geopolitik expanded upon that of Ratzel and Kjellén. While the latter two conceived of geopolitik as the state-as-an-organism-in-space put to the service of a leader, Haushofer's Munich school specifically studied geography as it related to war and designs for empire.<sup>[22]</sup> The behavioral rules of previous geopoliticians were thus turned into dynamic [normative doctrines](#) for action on lebensraum and world power.<sup>[22]</sup>

Haushofer defined geopolitik in 1935 as "the duty to safeguard the right to the soil, to the land in the widest sense, not only the land within the frontiers of the Reich, but the right to the [more extensive Volk](#) and cultural lands."<sup>[20]</sup> Culture itself was seen as the most conducive element to dynamic expansion. Culture provided a guide as to the best areas for expansion, and could make expansion safe, whereas solely military or commercial power could not.<sup>[22]</sup>

To Haushofer, the existence of a state depended on living space, the pursuit of which must serve as the basis for all policies. Germany had a high [population density](#), whereas the old colonial powers had a much lower density: a virtual mandate for German expansion into resource-rich areas.<sup>[22]</sup> A buffer zone of territories or insignificant states on one's borders would serve to protect Germany.<sup>[22]</sup> Closely linked to this need was Haushofer's assertion that the existence of small states was evidence of political regression and disorder in the international system. The small states surrounding Germany ought to be brought into the vital German order.<sup>[22]</sup> These states were seen as being too small to maintain practical autonomy (even if they maintained large colonial possessions) and would be better served by protection and organization within Germany. In Europe, he saw [Belgium](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Portugal](#), [Denmark](#), [Switzerland](#), [Greece](#) and the "mutilated alliance" of [Austro-Hungary](#) as supporting his assertion.<sup>[22]</sup>

Haushofer and the Munich school of geopolitik would eventually expand their conception of lebensraum and autarky well past a restoration of the [German borders of 1914](#) and "a place in the sun." They set as goals a New European Order, then a New Afro-European Order, and eventually to a Eurasian Order.<sup>[23]</sup> This concept became known as a [pan-region](#), taken from the American [Monroe Doctrine](#), and the idea of national and continental self-sufficiency.<sup>[23]</sup> This was a forward-looking refashioning of the [drive for colonies](#), something that geopoliticians did not see as an economic necessity, but more as a matter of prestige, and of putting pressure on older colonial powers. The fundamental motivating force was not be economic, but cultural and spiritual.<sup>[22]</sup>

Beyond being an economic concept, pan-regions were a strategic concept as well. Haushofer acknowledged the strategic concept of the [Heartland](#) put forward by the Halford Mackinder.<sup>[22]</sup> If Germany could control [Eastern Europe](#) and subsequently [Russian territory](#), it could control a strategic area to which hostile [sea power](#) could be denied.<sup>[24]</sup> Allying with [Italy](#) and [Japan](#) would further augment German strategic control of Eurasia, with those states becoming the naval arms protecting Germany's insular position.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Nicholas J. Spykman

**Nicholas J. Spykman** was an [Dutch](#)-American geostrategist, known as the "godfather of [containment](#)." His geostrategic work, *The Geography of the Peace* (1944), argued that the balance of power in [Eurasia](#) directly affected United States security.

N.J. Spykman based his geostrategic ideas on those of Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland theory. Spykman's key contribution was to alter the strategic valuation of the Heartland vs. the "Rimland" (a geographic area analogous to Mackinder's "Inner or Marginal Crescent").<sup>[25]</sup> Spykman does not see the heartland as a region which will be unified by powerful [transport](#) or [communication](#) infrastructure in the near future. As such, it won't be in a position to compete with the United States' [sea power](#), despite its uniquely defensive position.<sup>[25]</sup> The rimland possessed all of the key resources and populations—its domination was key to the control of Eurasia.<sup>[25]</sup> His strategy was for Offshore powers, and perhaps Russia as well, to resist the consolidation of control over the rimland by any one power.<sup>[25]</sup> Balanced power would lead to peace.

## George F. Kennan



George F. Kennan

**George F. Kennan**, U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, laid out the seminal Cold War geostrategy in his [Long Telegram](#) and [The Sources of Soviet Conduct](#). He coined the term "[containment](#)",<sup>[26]</sup> which would become the guiding idea for U.S. [grand strategy](#) over the next forty years, although the term would come to mean something significantly different from Kennan's original formulation.<sup>[27]</sup>

Kennan advocated what was called "strongpoint containment." In his view, the United States and its allies needed to protect the productive industrial areas of the world from Soviet domination. He noted that of the five centers of industrial strength in the world—the United States, Britain, Japan, Germany, and Russia—the only

contested area was that of Germany. Kennan was concerned about maintaining the [balance of power](#) between the U.S. and the [USSR](#), and in his view, only these few industrialized areas mattered.

Here Kennan differed from [Paul Nitze](#), whose seminal Cold War document, [NSC-68](#), called for "undifferentiated or global containment," along with a massive military buildup.<sup>[28]</sup> Kennan saw the Soviet Union as an [ideological](#) and political challenger rather than a true military threat. There was no reason to fight the Soviets throughout [Eurasia](#), because those regions were not productive, and the Soviet Union was already exhausted from [World War II](#), limiting its ability to project power abroad. Therefore, Kennan disapproved of U.S. involvement in [Vietnam](#), and later spoke out critically against [Reagan's](#) military buildup.

## Henry Kissinger



Henry Kissinger

**Henry Kissinger** implemented two geostrategic objectives when in office: the deliberate move to shift the [polarity](#) of the international system from bipolar to tripolar; and, the designation of regional stabilizing states in connection with the [Nixon Doctrine](#). In Chapter 28 of his long work, *[Diplomacy](#)*, Kissinger discusses the "[opening of China](#)" as a deliberate strategy to change the [balance of power](#) in the international system, taking advantage of the [split within the Sino-Soviet bloc](#).<sup>[29]</sup> The regional stabilizers were pro-American states which would receive significant U.S. aid in exchange for assuming responsibility for regional stability. Among the regional stabilizers designated by Kissinger were [Zaire](#), [Iran](#), and [Indonesia](#).<sup>[30]</sup>

## Zbigniew Brzezinski

[Zbigniew Brzezinski](#) laid out his most significant contribution to post-[Cold War](#) geostrategy in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*. He defined four regions of [Eurasia](#), and in which ways the United States ought to design its policy toward each region in order to maintain its global primacy. The four regions (echoing Mackinder and Spykman) are:

- Europe, the Democratic Bridgehead
- Russia, the Black Hole
- The Middle East, the Eurasian Balkans
- Asia, the Far Eastern Anchor

In his subsequent book, *The Choice*, Brzezinski updates his geostrategy in light of [globalization, 9/11](#) and the intervening six years between the two books.

## Criticisms of geostrategy

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"Few modern ideologies are as whimsically all-encompassing, as romantically obscure, as intellectually sloppy, and as likely to start a third world war as the theory of 'geopolitics.'"

—Charles Clover, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland"<sup>[31]</sup>

Geostrategy encounters a wide variety of criticisms. It has been called a crude form of [geographic determinism](#). It is seen as a gloss used to justify international aggression and [expansionism](#)—it is linked to [Nazi](#) war plans, and to a perceived U.S. creation of Cold War divisions through its containment strategy. [Marxists](#) and [critical theorists](#) believe geostrategy is simply a justification for [American imperialism](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

Some political scientists argue that as the importance of [non-state actors](#) rises, the importance of geopolitics concomitantly falls.<sup>[18]</sup> Similarly, those who see the rise of economic issues in priority over security issues argue that [geoeconomics](#) is more relevant to the modern era than geostrategy.<sup>[32]</sup>

Most [international relations theory](#) that is critical of [realism in international relations](#) is likewise critical of geostrategy because of the assumptions it makes about the hierarchy of the international system based on [power](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

Further, the relevance of geography to international politics is questioned because advances in technology alter the importance of geographical features, and in some cases make those features irrelevant. Thus some geographic factors do not have the permanent importance that some geostrategists ascribe to them.<sup>[18]</sup>