

CHAPTER 2

Survey of Geopolitics

The true value of modern geopolitics is as a scholarly analysis of the geographical factors underlying international relations and guiding political interactions. Such analysis does not determine the directions that statecraft must take. It does, however, present desirable directions and alerts policy makers to the likely impact of their decisions on these relations and interactions.

Geography as a discipline has had to overcome some controversial roots. Introduced a century ago as a deterministic field of study and a recipe for statecraft, it was first offered as a set of geographically determined laws governing a state's strategic destinies and evolved as the geographical underpinnings of *realpolitik*. Presented as a science, its scholarly legitimacy was challenged on the grounds that it lacked empirically based principles in its development of doctrines that served the singular needs of particular states. In addition, the focus on *realpolitik* was criticized for the absence of a moral and ethical basis.

Later, in Nazi German hands, *geopolitik* became a distorted pseudoscience, with no scientific bounds. During and since the Cold War, the field has diverged into two competing schools of thought—one nation centered, the other offering universalistic perspectives.

Definitions

Geopolitics is a product of its times, and its definitions have evolved accordingly. Rudolf Kjellén, who coined the term in 1899, described geopolitics as “the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space.”¹ For Karl Haushofer, the father of German *geopolitik*, “Geopolitics is the new national science of the state, . . . a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography.”² On the eve of World War II, Derwent Whittlesey, the American political geographer, dismissed geopolitics as “a dogma, . . . the faith that the state is inherently entitled to its place in the sun.”³ Richard Hartshorne defined it as “geography utilized for particular purposes that lie beyond the pursuit of knowledge.”⁴

In contrast to geographers Whittlesey and Hartshorne, political scientist Edmund Walsh espoused an American geopolitics based upon international justice and that was “a combined study of human geography and applied political science . . . dating back to Aristotle, Montesquieu and Kant.”⁵

For Geoffrey Parker, geopolitics is “the study of international relations from a spatial or geographical perspective,”⁶ while John Agnew defined the field as “examination of the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world

politics.”⁷ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, an exponent of critical geopolitics, argues that “geopolitics does not have a singular, all-encompassing meaning or identity. Its discourse is a culturally and politically varied way of describing, representing and writing about geography and international politics.”⁸ Robert Kaplan, a national security specialist, takes a deterministic approach in asserting that “geopolitics and the competition for space is eternal.”⁹ This ignores the reality that the content, and therefore the importance, of certain spaces may be radically reduced over time.

Statesmen and scholars who view geopolitics as a vehicle for integrating geography and international politics may find it useful to define geopolitics not as a school of thought, but as a mode of analysis, relating diversity in content and scale of geographical settings to exercise of political power and identifying spatial frameworks through which power flows.

“Geopolitics” is defined in this volume as the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other, political processes. The settings are composed of geographical features and patterns and the multilayered regions that they form. The political processes include forces that operate at the international level and those on the domestic scene that influence international behavior. Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequences of this interaction. In this analysis, geography is defined in spatial terms as “places” and the “connections” between and among them. “Places” are bounded settings in which the interactions between humans and natural environments occur. “Connections” refers to the circulation of people, goods, and ideas that tie places together and have an impact on them.

The approach that has been taken in this work is regional and developmental. It treats the world’s geopolitical structure as an evolving system composed of a hierarchy of levels. National states and their subnational units are framed within geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions.

Because geopolitics straddles two disciplines—geography and politics—its approaches vary according to frameworks of analysis common to each discipline. Since most early theories and concepts of geopolitics grew out of geographical thought, later applications by historians and political scientists often failed because they did not adapt their theories to the dynamic, complex nature of geographical settings.

Stages of Modern Geopolitics

Modern geopolitics has developed through five stages—the race for imperial hegemony; German *geopolitik*; American geopolitics; the Cold War—state centered versus universalistic geographical; and the post–Cold War period.

STAGE 1: THE RACE FOR IMPERIAL HEGEMONY

Geopolitical thinking can be traced back to Aristotle, Strabo, Bodin, Montesquieu, Kant, and Hegel. Its nineteenth-century precursors include Humboldt, Guyot, Buckle, and Ritter.

However, the founders of modern geopolitics were Ratzel, Mackinder, Kjellén, Bowman, and Mahan, whose writings reflected their era of intense nationalism, state expansionism, and overseas empire building. The principles and laws of these leading theoreticians reflected their national perspectives and experiences, including command of modes of transportation and communication for world outreach as well as the influence of social Darwinism.

Ratzel

Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), the German “father” of political geography and a natural scientist, was the first to treat space and location systematically, in his comparative studies of states.¹⁰ He provided successor geopoliticians with a scientific basis for state expansionist doctrines that reflected Germany’s nineteenth-century experiences and its ambitions for the future. During the last half of the nineteenth century Germany had emerged as the chief economic and military power on the European continent. Unified under Bismarck’s leadership and victorious in its wars with Austria and France, it had enlarged its territory, expanded its heavy industries, and enacted social reform. With the aid of a new, powerful naval fleet, Germany posed a serious threat to Britain and France as it acquired an overseas empire in East and West Africa and the West Pacific, and sought commercial footholds in East Asia.

Ratzel based his system upon principles of evolution and science.¹¹ He viewed the state as an organism fixed in the soil whose spirit derived from mankind’s ties to the land. His geographical “laws” focused on space (*raum*) and location (*lage*), the former dependent upon and contributing to the political character of groups living in the space, the latter providing space with its uniqueness. Frontiers were the “skins” or peripheral organs of states, reflecting growth and decline. When correlated with continental areas organized under a single government, states would generate vast political power. These “organic” theories of state growth fitted Germany’s view of its future as a youthful, aggressive, capitalist “giant state.”

Mackinder

Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), who established geography as a university discipline in Britain, foresaw the ending of the Victorian era. His concern was safeguarding the British Empire’s political, commercial, and industrial primacy at a time when command of the seas no longer appeared to guarantee world supremacy. With the advent of the transcontinental railroad age (the Union Pacific, 1869; Berlin-Baghdad via Anatolia, 1896; and the Trans-Siberian, 1905), Mackinder viewed the rise of Eurasian continental states as the greatest threat to British world hegemony.

For Mackinder, geographical realities lay in the advantages of centrality of place and efficient movement of ideas, goods, and people. In 1904, he theorized that the inner area of Eurasia (the great Eurasian lowland), characterized by interior or polar drainage and impenetrable by sea power, was the “pivot area” of world politics (figure 2.1). This area included basically the forests of Siberia in the north and its steppes of the south, bounded by the deserts and subarid steppes of Turkestan. He warned that rule of the heart of the world’s greatest landmass could become the basis for world domination owing to the superiority of rail

over ships in terms of time and reach. A Eurasian land power (be it Russia, Germany, or even China, and especially an alliance of the first two) that gained control of the pivot area would outflank the maritime world.¹² Eleven years later, the English geographer James Fairgrieve, who introduced the term “heartland,” opined that China was in an excellent position to dominate Eurasia.¹³

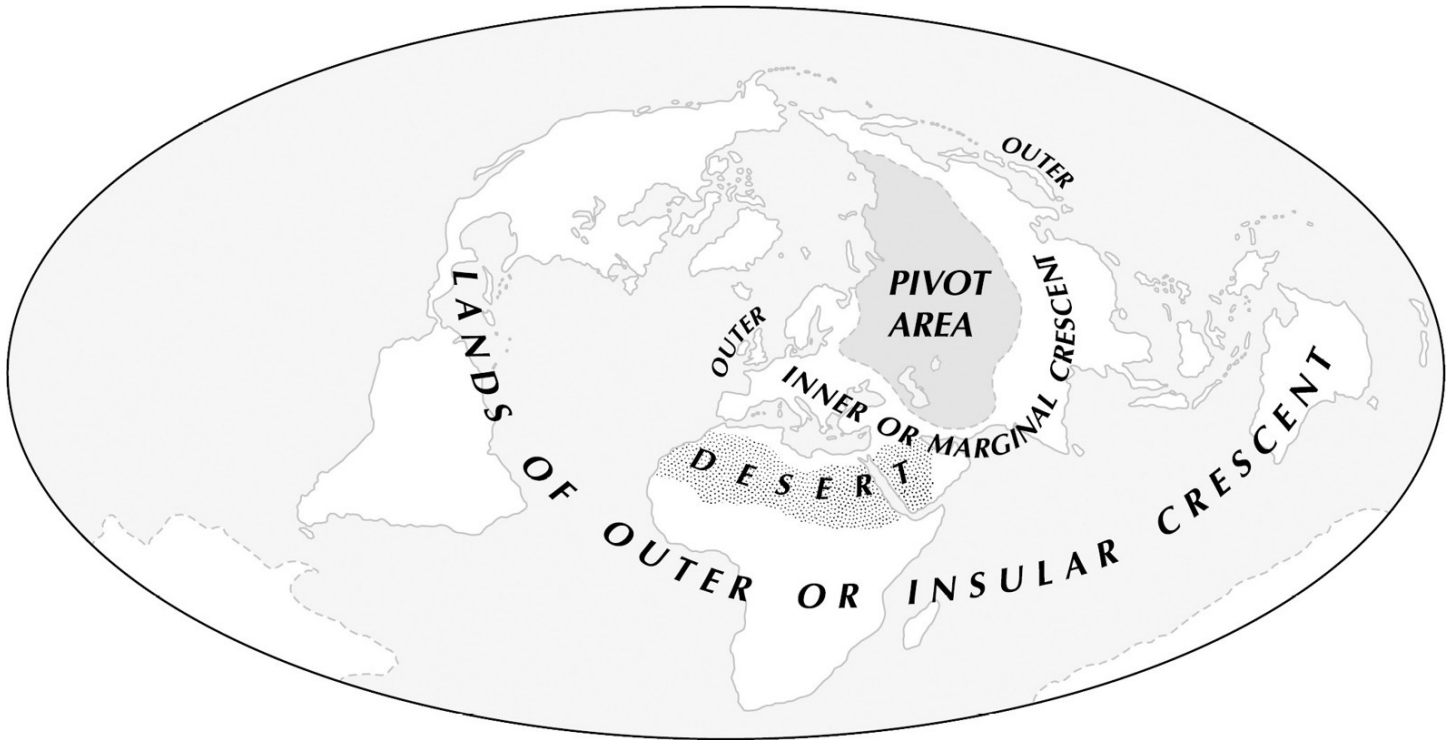


Figure 2.1. Mackinder's World: 1904

In *Democratic Ideals and Realities* (1919), Mackinder, now using the term “heartland” and taking into account advances in land transportation, population increases, and industrialization, enlarged his map to include Eastern Europe from the Baltic through the Black Sea as Inner Eurasia’s strategic annex (figure 2.2). This became the basis for his dictum, “Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands World-Island: Who rules World-Island commands the world.”¹⁴ The warning to Western statesmen was clear—the key to world domination lay in the middle tier of German and Slavic states, or Mitteleuropa—a region as accessible to Germans as it was to Russia.

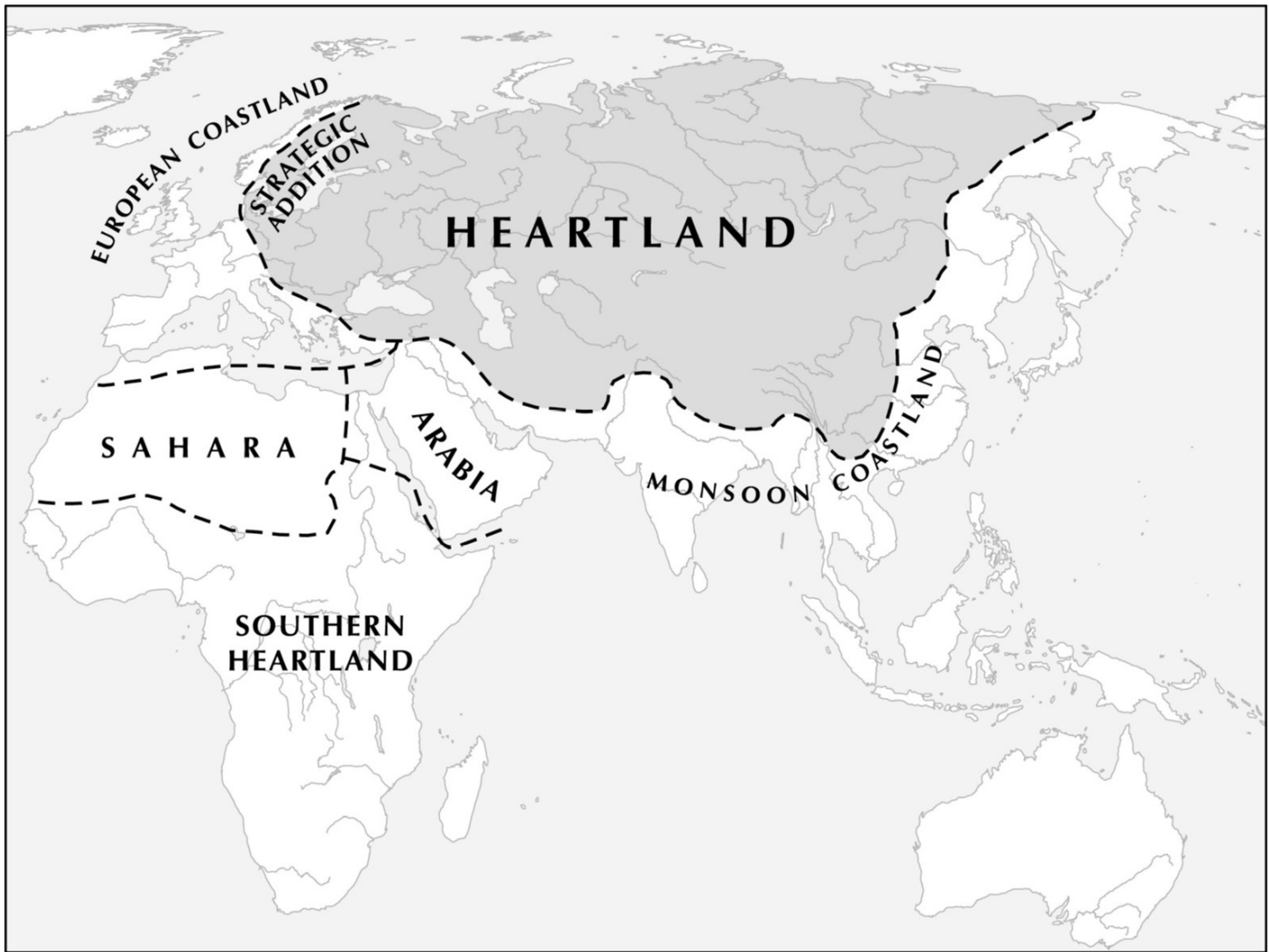


Figure 2.2. Mackinder's World: 1919

Mackinder described the world as a closed system. Nothing could be altered without changing the balance of all, and rule of the world still rested upon force, notwithstanding the juridical assumptions of equality among sovereign states. Mackinder called himself a democratic idealist in advocating equality of opportunity for nations to achieve balanced economic development. He also described himself as a realist who feared that the League of Nations would degenerate into an unbalanced empire as one or two of the great powers bid for predominance. As a safeguard, he urged smaller powers to federate to increase the number of significant players on the world scene and make it more difficult for hegemony to be attained by potential tyrants. Foreseeing the decline of Britain as the world's leading power, he called for Western Europe and North America to become a single community of nations—a forerunner of the North Atlantic community.

Mackinder remained steadfast in his commitment to the concept of balance. In looking at the shape of the post-World War II order, he foresaw a world geopolitically balanced between a combination of the North Atlantic (“Midland Ocean”) and Asian heartland powers. By working together, they could keep future German ambitions in check. The monsoonal lands of

India and China represented an evolving third balancing unit within the world system. He also speculated that the continental masses bordering the South Atlantic might eventually become a unit within the balancing process. The “Mantle of Vacancies,” a barrier region extending from the Sahara through the Central Asian deserts that divides the major communities of humankind, might emerge as a fifth component of the system. Mackinder forecast that this barrier region might someday provide solar energy as a substitute for exhaustible resources.

These thoughts were sketched out in a 1943 article titled “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace.”¹⁵ In it, Mackinder discarded his famous 1919 dictum that rule of Heartland meant command of World-Island. He drew no map to accompany his article. Therefore, a map that cartographically expresses what he wrote is presented here (figure 2.3). First, he detached Lenaland (the central Siberian tableland) from Heartland. Thus, Heartland now consisted largely of the cleared forest and steppe portions of Eurasia. More important, Mackinder’s concept of the map of the world had changed, as he introduced the concept of a world balanced by a multiplicity of regions, each with a distinct natural and human resource base.

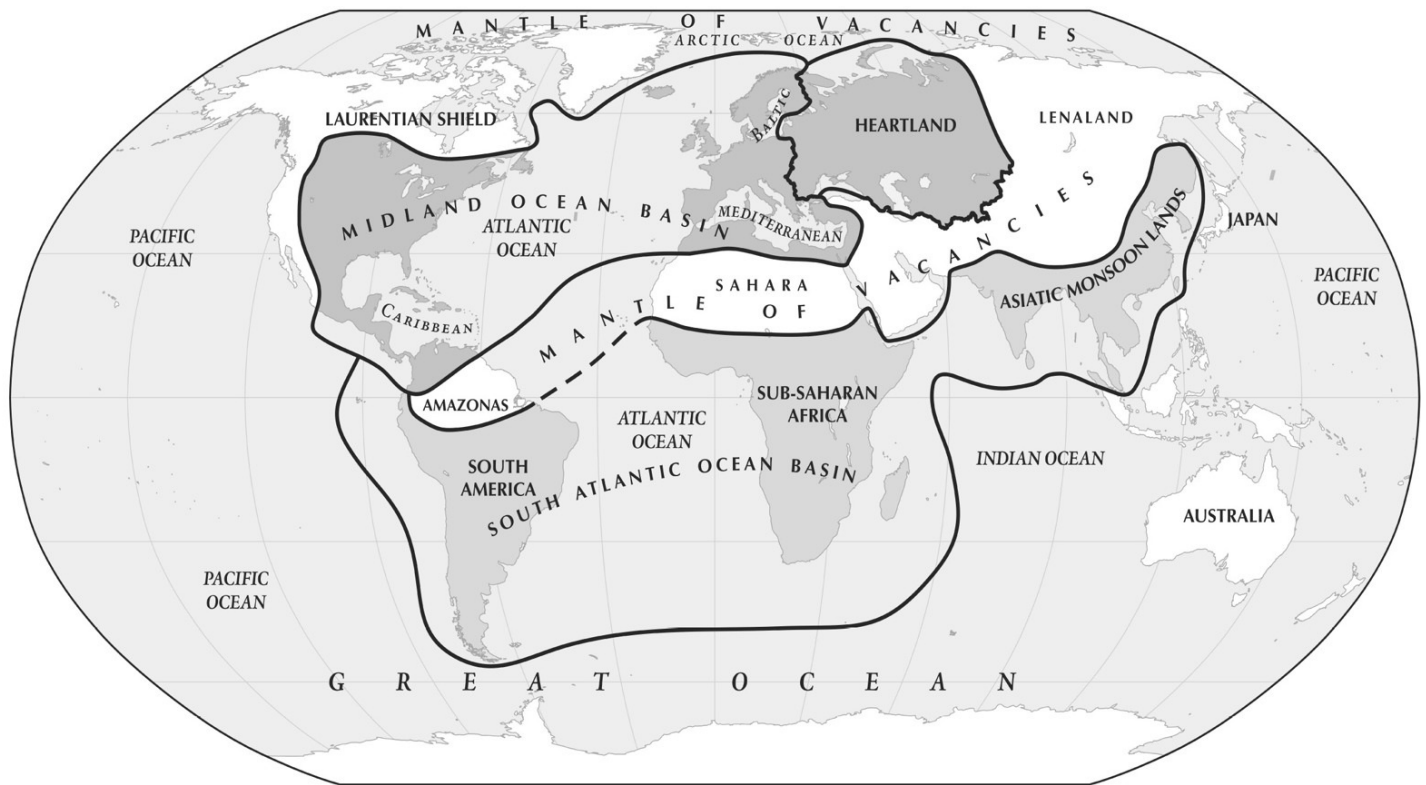


Figure 2.3. Mackinder’s World: 1943

The yardsticks that Mackinder used in drawing the boundaries of his Heartland indicate that the original concept of the pivot area of the world had changed from that of an arena of movement (i.e., as a region of mobility for land forces) to one of a “power citadel” based upon people, resources, and interior lines. The three boundaries (figure 2.4) that reflect Mackinder’s changing views of the earth indicate that he was well aware of technological developments,

including air power. To place Mackinder's views in historical and contemporary perspectives, Cold War US containment policy was based on his Heartland worlds of 1904 and 1919. Post-Cold War American balance-of-power goals are more in consonance with his 1943 global view.

Whereas Ratzel's theories of the large state were based on concepts of self-sufficiency, closed space, and totalitarian controls, Mackinder was strongly committed to cooperation among states, democratization of the empire into a commonwealth of nations, and preservation of small states. He bridged the academy and politics, serving as a Conservative and Unionist member of Parliament (1910–22) and as British high commissioner for South Russia (1919–20). While he was an advocate of open systems, he exhibited ambivalence over trade issues. Initially a Liberal imperialist and proponent of free trade, he eventually became committed to a preferential tariff system to protect British imperial unity.¹⁶



Figure 2.4. Changing Heartland Boundaries

The impact of Mackinder's thinking spanned half a century, and his ideas were the cornerstone for generations of strategic policy makers. His view of the world became the basis for Lord Curzon's imperial strategies in South Asia and South Russia, for German *geopolitik* between World Wars I and II, and for Western containment strategies of the post-World War II era.

Mahan

Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1849–1914) was a naval historian and second president of the United States Naval War College. His global perspective was also Eurasian centered.¹⁷ For Mahan, the northern land hemisphere, the far-flung parts of which were linked through the passageways offered by the Panama and Suez Canals, was the key to world power; within that hemisphere, Eurasia was the most important component. Mahan recognized Russia as the dominant Asian land power, whose location made it unassailable. However, he felt that Russia's landlocked position put it at a disadvantage because, in his view, sea movement was superior to land movement.

For Mahan, the critical zone of conflict lay between the thirtieth and fortieth parallels in Asia, where Russian land power and British sea power met. He argued that world dominance could be held by an Anglo-American alliance from key bases surrounding Eurasia. Indeed, he predicted that an alliance of the United States, Britain, Germany, and Japan would one day hold common cause against Russia and China.

Mahan developed his geopolitical views as America's frontier history was drawing to a close and the country had begun to look beyond its continental limits to a new role as a world power. He considered the United States to be an outpost of European power and civilization, regarding its Pacific shore and islands to be extensions of the Atlantic-European realm. The United States thus lay within the Western half of a twofold global framework, the Oriental (Asian) being the other half. In many ways, Mahan's view of the world's setting anticipated Mackinder's. Their diametrically opposed strategic conclusions stemmed from different assessments of the comparative effectiveness of land versus sea movement.

Espousing a "blue water strategy," Mahan strongly supported US annexation of the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico; control of the Panama Canal Zone; and tutelage over Cuba. His writings helped bring an end to American isolationism and were highly influential in shaping US foreign policy during the McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt administrations. Roosevelt, in particular, endorsed the Mahan call for a larger navy as well as his broader geopolitical concepts.¹⁸

Bowman

Isaiah Bowman (1878–1949), the leading American geographer of his period, was also engaged at policy levels in an attempt to fashion the new world order envisaged by Woodrow Wilson: "The effects of the Great War are so far-reaching that we shall have hence-forth a new world. . . . [T]he new era would date from the years of the First World War, just as Medieval Europe dates from the fall of Rome, or the modern democratic era dates from the Declaration of Independence." Describing the war as the combination of assassination, invasion, and Germanic ambitions "colored by the desire to control the seats of production and the channels of transportation of all those products," he viewed the relations among states as an evolutionary struggle.¹⁹

Bowman did not believe that the League of Nations was, in and of itself, the framework for a new world. Rather, he saw different leagues emerging for functional purposes, each designed

to advance cooperative plans that would reduce the causes of international trouble. “The world’s people are still fundamentally unlike,” he wrote, “and the road to success passes through a wilderness of experiment.”²⁰

No grand theory here, as was Mackinder’s, but rather the prescription of an empiricist, of a practitioner grounded on boundaries, resources, national minorities—a world of shifting international parts that was disorganized, unstable, and dangerous and requiring mediating international groups to minimize the dangers. Bowman’s idea of a new world was essentially a map of the world as it was, with greater attention to the sovereign interests of certain nationalities and to a need for coordinated international action. His work was, in effect, an explication of what problems would be encountered by Woodrow Wilson’s fourteenth point—the call for a general association of nations to guarantee the peace of the world.

Kjellén

Rudolf Kjellén (1864–1922), the political scientist who coined the term “geopolitics” in 1899, was influenced both by his Swedish background and by Germany’s growth into a giant state. He viewed the impending breakdown of the Concert of Europe and the drift toward war and chaos as the death knell for a small state like Sweden. Adopting Ratzel’s organic state concept, he considered Germany’s emergence as a great power inevitable and desirable. The needs of Sweden would be fulfilled within the framework of a new Mitteleuropean bloc from Scandinavia and the Baltic through Eastern Europe and the Balkans, dominated by an ascendant Germany.

A Conservative member of the Swedish parliament, Kjellén viewed geopolitics as the “science of the state,” whereby the state’s natural environment provided the framework for a power unit’s pursuit of “inexorable laws of progress.” Geopolitics was initially conceived by Kjellén as one of five major disciplines for understanding the state, the others being termed econo-, demo-, socio-, and crato- (power) politics. As the mainstay of the five, geopolitics came to subsume the others.

The dynamic organic approach led Kjellén to espouse the doctrine that political processes were spatially determined. Moreover, since giant states in Europe could only be created by war, he viewed geopolitics as primarily a science of war.²¹

STAGE 2: GERMAN GEOPOLITIK

German *geopolitik* emerged in reaction to Germany’s devastating defeat in World War I. Humbled by the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was stripped of its overseas empire and important parts of its national territory. Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, small border areas were annexed by Belgium, and North Schleswig was returned to Denmark in a plebiscite. Historic Prussia was divided. In West Prussia, Poznan (Posen) went to Poland, as did the land that constituted the Polish Corridor. Danzig became a “free city” and, in the easternmost part of East Prussia, the Memel Territory first came under the League of Nations, administered by France, and was then annexed by Lithuania. Parts of Upper Silesia went to Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Saar was put under French administration, pending a

plebiscite to be held in 1935 to determine its final status, and the Rhineland was occupied by Allied forces. Germany was now but a shadow of the expanding giant state of Ratzel's and Kjellén's imperial era.

In addition, the social cohesion forged by Bismarck's policies was shattered. The socialist Weimar Republic was beleaguered by class warfare and attempts to overthrow it by Communists on the left and racist militant nationalists and aristocratic conservatives on the right. Unemployment was rampant and inflation raged. This was the setting within which Karl Haushofer and his colleagues established the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (1924–39) and the Institute for Geopolitics at the University of Munich. Undoing Versailles by restoring the lost territories and rebuilding Germany as a world power undergirded the pseudoscientific “laws” and principles of *geopolitik* that served Nazi Germany.

Haushofer

Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), the former military commander who became a political geographer, was not an original thinker. The *geopolitik* of the group of German geopoliticians whom he led (Otto Maull, Erich Obst, Ewald Banse, Richard Hennig, Colin Ross, Albrecht Haushofer) was based essentially upon the writings of Kjellén, Ratzel, and Mackinder. Others whose teachings he invoked included Mahan, Fairgrieve, and such geographical determinists as Ellen Churchill Semple, who was Ratzel's leading American disciple.

Much of the organismic Hegelian philosophy of *geopolitik* came from Ratzel directly or via Kjellén. *Lebensraum* (living space) and autarchy became slogans for doctrines whose consequences were conflict and total war. Three geographical settings permeated the literature of *geopolitik*: Ratzel's large states, Mackinder's World-Island, and panregions. The organic growth of Germany to its west and east was regarded as inevitable. To gain mastery over World-Island, it was necessary for Germany to dominate the USSR and destroy British sea power. The geopoliticians posited that German control over Pan-Europe (including Eastern Europe) would force the Soviet Union, regarded as an Asian power, to come to terms.

During most of the 1920s and 1930s, Haushofer espoused continental panregionalism based upon complementarity of resources and peoples: Pan-America, Pan-Eur-Africa, and Pan-Asia, with the United States, Germany, and Japan as respective cores. His position on the USSR was ambiguous. He proposed variously a German-Russian alliance, a Pan-Russia-South Asia grouping, and a Japan-China-Russia bloc. His call for Germany, the USSR, and Japan to form a Eurasian panregion that would dominate World-Island influenced the German-Soviet pact of 1939 but was made moot by Hitler's subsequent invasion of the Soviet Union.

The German school could overlook these contradictions because *geopolitik* made no pretense of objectivity. Its principles were designed to fulfill German national and imperial aims. Doctrines such as *blut und boden* (blood and soil) and *rasse und raum* (race and space) became ideological foundations for the murderous Nazi regime, which plunged the world into history's most devastating war and perpetrated the Jewish Holocaust and the murder of millions of Slavic peoples.

While Karl Haushofer was the key figure in *geopolitik*, there were other important contributors. Otto Maull was a cofounder and coeditor of the *Zeitschrift* and subscribed to the theory of the organic state as a collection of spatial cells (regions, cities, etc.) with a life of its own. Erich Obst, the third cofounder of the *Zeitschrift*, sought to establish “objective” standards for *lebensraum*. Richard Hennig developed a doctrine in which land, space, and economics were deemed more important than racial considerations, for which he was bitterly attacked by some of his colleagues. Ewald Banse outlined the strategy and tactics for the coming *blitzkrieg*. Albrecht Haushofer focused on the Atlantic world and on translating geographic data into expansive power politics. An American contributor to the *Zeitschrift* was Colin Ross, an early advocate of Japan’s freedom to develop its own “laws of life,” independent of German direction. Nevertheless, it was Karl Haushofer who was the architect and mastermind of the *Zeitschrift* and the Institute for Geopolitics—he held the main responsibility for the content and direction taken by German *geopolitik*.

Haushofer’s extraordinary influence derived from his close ties to Rudolf Hess, his aide-de-camp in World War I and, subsequently, his student at the University of Munich. Through Hess, he had contact with Hitler from 1923 to 1938. Many of Haushofer’s doctrines, especially *lebensraum*, were incorporated into *Mein Kampf*, and Haushofer advised Hitler at Munich in 1938.²² With Hess’s flight to England in 1941, the influence of the geopoliticians upon Hitler ended. Indeed, Haushofer was imprisoned briefly at Dachau (ironically, he had a Jewish wife). His son Albrecht, also a geographer with links to aristocrat military circles, was involved in the generals’ plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944 and was killed by the SS. Haushofer and his wife committed suicide in 1946.

STAGE 3: GEOPOLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Spykman

Most American academic geographers vigorously repudiated German *geopolitik*, resulting in a general reluctance to pursue the study of geopolitics. Nicholas Spykman, a US scholar of international relations who had been born in Amsterdam, was one of the few who did work in the field during this period (1942–44). His “rimland” theory reflected Mahan’s view of the world and was presented as an antidote to the concept of heartland primacy.²³

However, Spykman’s terminology, his detailed global geographical setting, and the political conclusions that he derived from his views of the world show that his basic inspiration came from Mackinder, whose strategic conclusions he attempted to refute. Essentially, Spykman sought to arouse the United States against the danger of world domination by Germany.²⁴ He felt that only a dedicated alliance of Anglo-American sea power and Soviet land power could prevent Germany from seizing control of all the Eurasian shorelines and thereby gaining domination over World-Island.

Spykman considered that the Eurasian coastal lands (including maritime Europe, the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and China) were the keys to world control because of their populations, their rich resources, and their use of interior sea-lanes.

In essence, Spykman had the same global view as Mackinder, but he rejected the land-power doctrine to say, “Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.” To Spykman, the rimland (Mackinder’s “Marginal Crescent”) was the key to the struggle for the world. In the past, the fragmentation of the Western European portion of rimland and the power of the United Kingdom and the United States (parts of what Spykman considered the offshore continents and islands) had made unitary control of the rimland impossible. (This offshore region, which included the New World, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Australasia, was equivalent to Mackinder’s “Outer Crescent.”) Now, however, Spykman feared that a single power, such as Germany, might seize control of the European rimland and then sweep onto the other portions through various combinations of conquests and alliances, using ship superiority and command of a network of naval and air bases around Eurasia.

Certainly there is still much to be said in favor of sea communication as far as the movement of goods is concerned. Also, aircraft carriers and submarines have given a mobility in the use of aircraft and missiles to ocean basin powers that fixed land bases cannot. The inadequacy of Spykman’s doctrine was and remains the fact that no Eurasian rimland power is capable of organizing all of the rimland because of the vulnerability of the rimland to both the heartland and the offshore powers. A united maritime Europe would have to have complete control of the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Australia before it could attempt to exert its strategic dominance upon the remainder of the South and East Asian portions of the rimland. It could succeed only if the heartland or the offshore New World’s American power did not intervene. He also held that a rimland China that swept into control of offshore or South Asia would be at a disadvantage in seeking to control the Middle East against heartland-, Western European-, or African-based pressures.

The importance of interior lines of land communication, even between parts of the rimland, looms greater today than it did in Spykman’s considerations. Thus, the Chinese land base was able to sustain North Korea and North Vietnam in spite of the control of the seas and the air by offshore powers. Communist networks of rails and modern highways (as well as jungle and mountain trails) in South China and North Vietnam were the sinews of politico-economic penetration that ultimately defeated the United States in Vietnam and that have drawn Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into China’s strategic oversight.

Other Theoreticians

The impact of the air age upon geopolitical thought produced a variety of views. In 1942, George Renner suggested that the air lanes had united the heartland of Eurasia with a second, somewhat smaller heartland in Anglo-America, across Arctic ice fields, to form a new, expanded heartland within the northern hemisphere.²⁵ A major attribute of this new heartland was the mutual vulnerability of its Eurasian and its Anglo-American portions across the Arctic. According to Renner, not only would the expanded heartland be the dominant power center of the world, but it also possessed the advantages of interior air, sea, and land routes across the polar world. Thus the Arctic, as the pivotal world arena of movement, was the key to heartland and therefore to world control.

Another opinion, that of Alexander de Seversky, has been described by Stephen Jones as “the airman’s global view.”²⁶ De Seversky’s map of the world, which he presented in 1950, is an azimuthal equidistant projection centered on the North Pole. The western hemisphere lies to the south of the pole, Eurasia and Africa to the north. Here again was an Old World-New World division. North America’s area of “air dominance” (its area of reserve for resources and manufacturing) is Latin America; the Soviet Union’s area of air dominance is South and Southeast Asia and most of Africa south of the Sahara. De Seversky considered the areas where North American and Soviet air dominance overlapped (this includes Anglo-America, the Eurasian heartland, maritime Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East) to be the “Area of Decision.” According to this view, air mastery and, therefore, global control could be gained.²⁷

In one sense, this is an extension of Renner’s air-age view. In another, however, it led to two different and highly questionable conclusions. The first stems from the distortion of the map projection, which suggests that Africa and South America are so widely separated that they are mutually defensible by their respective senior partners, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Second, de Seversky’s view was that air supremacy, and with it control of the northern hemispheric Area of Decision, could be achieved by one power through all-out aerial warfare. While he spoke of only the United States, the USSR, and perhaps the United Kingdom as having the potentialities of being great powers, in theory any country with the necessary military hardware, recuperative strength, and will could achieve dominance. Thus de Seversky’s theories lead to two conclusions: (1) “air isolationism,” which suggested a viable division of the world into two, and (2) “a unitary global view,” suggesting that, in the event of all-out war, the power that led in military hardware, regardless of its location, could dominate the world. De Seversky’s major work, written in 1950, did not anticipate that several powers might achieve the capabilities of mutual destruction.

There are those who held that air power did not add a third dimension to land and sea movement but simply a complementary dimension to each of these channels. Particularly if all-out nuclear warfare is eliminated, this view of what Jones called the “air-first moderates” held that air power could be decisive only as it lends a comparative advantage to land or sea powers. An influential spokesman for this point of view within the North Atlantic Alliance was the British strategist, air force marshal Sir John Slessor. He was a strong advocate of airborne nuclear weapons as the “great deterrent” against total war.²⁸ Thus ruling out total war, he concluded that the role of air power is to supplement sea- or land-based forces. He held that even an invasion of Western Europe could be countered by a limited type of air attack and land defense to arrest invasion without nuclear war. To Slessor, whose strategic doctrine followed a rimland-heartland equilibrium theory, the likely arenas for limited war were the Middle East and Southeast Asia, with air power being the key supplement to sea-supported land actions.

STAGE 4: THE COLD WAR–STATE-CENTERED VERSUS UNIVERSALISTIC APPROACHES

Onset of the Cold War reawakened Western interest in geopolitics. This came from historians, political scientists, and statesmen, not from geographers, who had distanced themselves from

geopolitics because of the taint of German *geopolitik*.

State-Centered Geopolitics

American Cold Warriors embraced geopolitics as a basis for a national policy aimed at confronting the Soviet Union and international Communism. Building on early, geographically derived geopolitical theories and holding static interpretations of global and regional spatial patterns, they introduced such political-strategic concepts as containment, domino theory, balance-of-power linkages, and linchpin states into the lexicon of Cold War geopolitics. In this context, Halford Mackinder's heartland theory played an instrumental role. In 1943, William C. Bullitt, the first US ambassador to the Soviet Union, cited Mackinder in his efforts to persuade Roosevelt that Stalin was not to be trusted owing to Soviet long-range plans for the global conquest by Communism. Roosevelt rejected Bullitt's recommendations that the United States should take measures to block the expansion of Soviet influence into Eastern Europe that Bullitt anticipated.

George Kennan's 1946 warning of the historical imperative of Soviet expansionism from its Russian Asiatic center was embraced by American anti-Communists as the intellectual basis for containment of the USSR around every point of the heartland.²⁹ This was formalized in the Truman Doctrine of 1947. Winston Churchill, in his 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri, also issued a call for containing the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union, coining the expression "Iron Curtain."³⁰

As a member of the policy planning staff of the US Department of State during the Truman administration, Kennan had promoted the idea of containment. He was the first in a long line of US policy makers to embrace the concept. Other early proponents were Dean Acheson, Paul Nitze, John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower, Walt Rostow, and Maxwell Taylor. They were later joined by Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Alexander Haig, and containment became the keystone of American foreign policy.³¹ These versions of the heartland-rimland theory remained a tool for containment strategy long after that strategy had proved wanting, as the Soviet Union and China leaped across the rimland to penetrate parts of the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, and Southeast Asia.

Western foreign policy therefore could not confine itself to containment of the Eurasian continental power along its heartland borders. Instead, it adopted a strategy of checking the spread of Communism throughout the Third World. The idealistic vision that had prompted the United States to support the freedom and democratization of colonial peoples quickly gave way to expedient *realpolitik*—propping up right-wing dictatorships in order to stop the threat of Communism wherever that threat was perceived to exist.

Another popular geopolitical doctrine, "domino theory," was first proposed by William Bullitt in 1947. He feared that Soviet Communist power would spread via China into Southeast Asia. The concept was adopted by both the Kennedy and Nixon administrations, which rationalized American intervention in Vietnam as a measure to "save" the rest of Southeast Asia.³²

The domino theory was an important argument for extending Western containment policy well beyond the Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern shatterbelts into the Horn of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and Cuba, South America, and South Asia. These areas became battlegrounds for the two superpowers, as each supported local surrogates militarily, politically, and economically. The goal was to protect or gain sources of raw materials and markets while denying military bases to the enemy overseas. The imagery of dominos survives. The threat of the spread of Kosovar Albanian irredentism to Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece was one of the factors, along with humanitarian considerations, which precipitated NATO's air war against Yugoslavia in 1998. Without using the term, the George W. Bush administration applied this theory as one of its rationales for toppling Saddam Hussein. It argued that a free, democratic Iraq would foster democracy and peace throughout the Middle East as well as help to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Toward the end of his administration, President Bush shifted course, arguing that American troops had to remain in Iraq to prevent Islamic terrorism from spreading. This argument is also the basis for the efforts of President Obama to retain American military trainers in Afghanistan after withdrawal of nearly all of the US and NATO troops in 2014.

A third principle, "linkage," was introduced into geopolitics by Henry Kissinger in 1979.³³ Indeed, Leslie Hepple suggested that Kissinger almost single-handedly reintroduced the term "geopolitics" as synonymous with global balance-of-power politics.³⁴ Linkage is based upon the theory of a network that connected all parts of the world's trouble spots to the Soviet Union and on the premise that American involvement in any single conflict needed to be viewed for its impact upon overall superpower balance. For Kissinger, display of Western impotence in one part of the world, such as Asia or Africa, would inevitably erode its credibility in other parts of the world, such as the Middle East. Linkage was used to rationalize the Nixon administration's clinging to the war in Vietnam long after the conflict had clearly been lost. The threat of credibility loss continued to resonate with the West, serving as a driving force in NATO's war against Yugoslavia.

Linkage theory was also applied to détente with the Soviet Union and accommodation with China. To maintain the balance of power, the Nixon administration sought Moscow's agreement on strategic arms limitations and mutual nuclear deterrence and tried to play China off against the USSR. The logical consequence of this policy was acquiescing to the Brezhnev Doctrine, which held that military force was justified to keep the socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe within the Soviet camp.

Zbigniew Brzezinski's geopolitical worldview was based on the struggle between Eurasian land power and sea power. For him, the key to containment and preventing Soviet world dominance lay in US control of "linchpin" states. He defined these by their geographical position, which enabled them to exert economic/military influence, or by their militarily significant geostrategic locations. The designated linchpins were Germany, Poland, Iran or Pakistan-Afghanistan, South Korea, and the Philippines. Their dominance by the United States would effectively contain the Russian "imperial" power, protecting Europe and Japan and, in the case of South Korea and the Philippines, preventing encirclement of China.³⁵

For Brzezinski, the US-Soviet conflict was an endless game, and linchpin control was a necessary part of the US geostrategic game plan. In this approach to geopolitics, there is little consideration of the geopolitical complexity of the global system and of the multiplicity of forces beyond superpower reach that had become active agents in the system. It particularly ignored the innate geopolitical positions and strengths of China and India and surely underestimated the costs of superpower alliances with weak and unstable regimes.

Universalistic Geopolitics

When geographers reengaged in geopolitics in the 1960s and 1970s, they introduced theories based upon universalistic/holistic views of the world and the dynamic nature of geographical space. Three approaches predominated: (1) a polycentric international power system; (2) a unitary economically based world system; and (3) an environmentally and socially ordered geopolitics.

Because these fresh geographical theories challenged bipolar Cold War geopolitics, they had little appeal to the Cold Warriors and failed to make their way into popular “political” geopolitics as practiced by statesmen and popularly disseminated through the press. The polycentric or multinodal/multilevel power approach rejected the heartland theory of world domination, as (ironically) had Halford Mackinder in his last published work in 1943.

In 1963, this writer proposed a flexible hierarchy (refined in 1973) of geostrategic realms, geopolitical regions, shatterbelts, national states, and subnational units within a system that evolved through forces of dynamic equilibrium.³⁶ A decade later, a comparative developmental approach was added that drew on the developmental psychology theories of Heinz Werner and the general systems principles of Ludwig von Bertalanffy.³⁷ The expanded geopolitical theory posited that the structural components of the global system evolve from stages of atomization and undifferentiation with relatively few parts to specialized integration with many parts at different geoterritorial scales. Equilibrium is maintained by moving from one stage to another through responses to short-term disturbances. Regionalism, not globalism, is the primary shaper of geopolitical relations—a view reinforced by the current focus of great powers, especially the United States, on regional trade pacts.

In England, G. R. Chrone presented a geopolitical system of ten regional groupings that were also hierarchically ordered and had a historical and cultural basis.³⁸ In Chrone’s view, the world power balance was shifting from Europe and the West toward Asia and the Pacific. He predicted that the Pacific Ocean would become the future arena of confrontation for the USSR, the United States, and China.

Two decades later, Peter Taylor, the English geographer, broke away from the “realistic” approach to power-centered geopolitics when he applied a world-systems approach based upon global economics. He drew upon the 1983 work of Immanuel Wallerstein, who argued that the world economy means a single global society, not competing national economies. Integrating the Wallerstein model with George Modelski’s cycles of world power, Taylor presented power and politics within the context of a cyclical world economy in which nation-states and localities are fitted.³⁹

Both Taylor and Wallerstein viewed global conflict in North-South terms (rich nations versus poor nations) rather than in Mackinder's earlier East-West model. Accepting the thesis that capitalist core areas aggrandize themselves at the expense of the peripheral parts of the world, Taylor's radical perspective was offered as a basis for "informing" the political issues of the day.⁴⁰

An environmentally and socially oriented geopolitics was promoted by Yves Lacoste in France with the establishment of the journal *Hérodote* in 1976. In moving toward a "new" *géopolitique*, Lacoste sought to overcome the national chauvinism of the "old" geopolitics by focusing on the land, not on the state. *Hérodote* linked geopolitics to ecology and broader environmental issues, as well as to such matters as world poverty and resource exhaustion.⁴¹ Much of Lacoste's work was inspired by the French human geographer and political anarchist Élisée Reclus, who believed it essential to reshape the world's political structure by abolishing states and establishing a cooperative global system.⁴² While this French geopolitics did not produce systematic geopolitical theory, it did put the spotlight on applying geopolitics to significant global problems.

STAGE 5: POST-COLD WAR ERA: COMPETITION OR ACCOMMODATION?

The end of the Cold War era has generated a number of new approaches to geopolitics. For Francis Fukuyama, the passing of Marxism-Leninism and the triumph of Western liberal democracy and "free marketism" portended a universal, homogeneous state. In this idealized worldview, geographical differences, and therefore geopolitics, have little role to play. Fukuyama has more recently theorized that for the next couple of decades, authoritarianism will become stronger in much of the world, especially Russia and China, and that the United States cannot do much to arrest it.⁴³

For others, the end of the Cold War has heralded a "new world order" and the geopolitics of US global hegemony. President George H. W. Bush, addressing Congress in 1990, defined the policy behind the war against Iraq as envisaging a new world order led by the United States and "freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace, . . . a world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice."⁴⁴

Still another approach is Robert Kaplan's geopolitics of anarchy. From the perspective of a world divided into the rich North and the poor South, Kaplan concludes that the South, especially Africa, is doomed to anarchy and chaos. His map of the future, dubbed the "last map," is an "ever mutating representation of chaos." He argues that only the United States has the power to stabilize the world system, pushing back the spreading autocratic tide and standing up to Islamic antimodernism.⁴⁵

None of these three scenarios has come to pass. In most cases, the overthrow of Communist regimes has not led to stable, free-market economies. The restraints upon the unilateral application of US military, economic, and political power are evident from the failures to gain US objectives in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Haiti, while a geopolitics of chaos gives

inadequate attention to the systemic regional and global forces that keep turbulence in check and absorb its positive aspects into the system.

The main thrust of post–Cold War geopolitics, however, continues to follow the two streams of the previous era—the nation-centered/political and the universalistic/geographical. Political geopoliticians advocate projection of Western power into Central and Eastern Europe to weaken Russia’s heartland position at its western edge. They also advance strategies for penetrating the Caucasus and Central Asia and for playing China off against Russia.

Brzezinski’s prescription for maintaining US global hegemony is to achieve primacy in three parts of the “Eurasian chessboard”: the West, or Europe; the South, or the Middle East and Central Asia; and the East, or China and Japan.⁴⁶ To this end, he advocates pulling Ukraine and the Black Sea into the Western orbit, strong US engagement in Central Asia and the Caucasus (described as “the Eurasian Balkans”), and support of China’s aspirations for regional dominance in peninsular Southeast Asia and Pakistan. Despite its expanded influences, China would still be limited to regional power status by the globally framed US-Japan strategic alliance. The objective is to prevent Russia from reasserting strategic control over “near abroad” states or from joining with China and Iran in a Eurasian anti-US coalition. Kissinger’s recent oversimplistic foreign policy prescription is for the United States to ensure that no power emerges regionally or globally to unite with others against it.⁴⁷

Advancing a geopolitics of “the West against the rest,” Samuel Huntington argues that world primacy can be maintained by dividing and playing off the other civilizations.⁴⁸ His thesis is that the fundamental sources of conflict in the world will not be ideological. Instead, the great divisions will be cultural, and the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines. In dividing the world into Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations, he makes little allowance for internal religious, ethnic, economic, or strategic divisions. He also assumes the permanence of these cultural fault lines, despite the massive demographic changes brought about by migrations and modernization.

Geographical geopolitical theory also continues to reflect the universalistic approaches advanced during the Cold War. Building on the work of Taylor and Lacoste, the “critical” geopolitics represented in the writings of John Agnew and Gearóid Ó Tuathail applies social scientific critical thinking to ask how power works and might be challenged.⁴⁹ Analyses of discourse—of rhetoric, metaphors, symbolism; of feminist approaches to the subject of national security; and of the geographies of social movements, particularly in relation to newly radicalized and participative democracy—are viewed by Joe Painter as central to geopolitical studies.⁵⁰

Neil Smith offers a vigorous critique of “neocritical” geographers, such as Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift,⁵¹ for abandoning “critical geographic theory for the concept of a flatter earth.” Dubbing the neocritical proponents as the “heterarchical left” that has bought into Thomas Friedman’s neoliberal flat-earth globalization theory, he argues that this “‘de-spatializes’ the globe.” For Smith, the power of class, race, gender, and other hierarchical characteristics of

capitalism remain the reality of society, which must be restructured. He holds that this should continue to be the focus of critical geographical analysis.⁵²

Conclusion

The reality-based geographical geopolitics that is espoused in this volume is based on multipolarity and regionalism. It builds upon the continuous proliferation of the various parts and levels of the world and their geopolitical development. The current number of 200 national states could increase to 250 within the next quarter of a century. As the pace of devolution quickens, some of these new geoterritorial entities will be highly autonomous “quasi states.” In addition, the network of global cities—centers of capital flows and financial services linked ever more closely by cyberspace, tourism, and immigrant communities—will emerge as a major new geopolitical level, promoting policies sometimes contradictory to national interests. International social movements, such as environmentalism, will also become more influential in shaping national and regional policies, including military ones.

Within this framework, radical geopolitical restructuring is a continuing process. Thus, China has emerged as a separate geostrategic realm, while Southeast Asia is no longer a shatterbelt. The Middle East has become even more fractured as a shatterbelt. One prong extends from Iran through Iraq to Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The other extends through Alawite-controlled Syria to Hezbollah-dominated southern Lebanon. Sunni-ruled Gaza was also part of this Iranian bloc but broke with Tehran in 2011 when Hamas supported the Sunni rebels in Syria.

The presently atomized Sub-Saharan Africa could ultimately subdivide into four regional units—east, west, central, and south. The convergence zone that extends from the Baltic through Eastern Europe, the Trans-Caucasus, and Central Asia could either become a new shatterbelt or evolve into a gateway between the West and Russia. Maritime Europe could extend into the Levantine eastern Mediterranean to include Lebanon, Israel, coastal Syria, and Egypt as part of a Euro-Mediterranean geopolitical region.

Whatever the course of geopolitical restructuring, we are entering an era of power sharing among a wide variety of regions, states, and other political territorial entities of different sizes and functions. Reality-based geopolitical theory will continue to be a valuable tool for understanding, predicting, and formulating the structure and direction of the world system.

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