

Geopolitics

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter will tell the tale of geopolitics in IR as one of lost and regained salience in its journey from imperialist geopolitics through the Cold War geopolitics to critical/postmodern geopolitics. Its first rise to relevance owed to 'an obsession with physical possession and control of territory, along with generally unchallenged assumptions about benefits to be derived from that control', since the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. To historicize and theorize the loss of relevance, Biersteker said that while in the early 20th century, 'physical control and occupation of territory' were the goal of the 'imperial state' or 'great power with colonies', and in the mid-20th century, 'hard boundaries with nuclear vulnerability' was the worry of the 'nation state', in the late 20th century, 'soft

boundaries' with 'control over networks' and the 'region state' remained the focus of the 'self-restrained state'. He seems to suggest that owing to 'changes in the salience of territory, the meaning and significance of boundaries', the emergence of the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' boundaries and 'the declining salience of physical territorial possession and control of borders', geopolitics is no longer a valid theory.¹

But as we shall see, well into the 2010s, ever new interpretations of geopolitics have steadily been coming out, and its popularity from 1945 to the present has been 'rather like the hemline on a woman's skirt', falling or rising 'with the vagaries of fashion'.² In this section, our purpose will be to show the evolution of imperial or Cold War geopolitical theories, and their close relationship with the realist paradigm. Connotatively, the term is allied to but distinct from descriptive, flat and static political geography in portraying the dynamic relationship between space and power. Its roots are traceable to the coinages of *anthropogeographie* by German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (describing a synthesis of geography, anthropology and politics), and of *geopolitics* by Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellén (spelling out the geopolitical bases of national power). Kjellén upheld an organic theory of the state, which claimed that states, like Darwin's animals, are locked in a relentless struggle for survival and must expand in space or perish. But writings of three strategists mostly laid the basis of classical geopolitics: Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), American rear admiral; Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), British geographer; and Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), German general and strategist.³ In the formulations of them and their successors in the next hundred years and more, geopolitics continued to acquire new meanings and overtones. Ó Tuathail says that for 'Kjellén and other imperialist thinkers', it was 'that part of Western imperial knowledge that dealt with the relationship between physical earth and politics'. In the writings of German strategists, it was associated with the infamous Nazi search for *Lebensraum* (habitat or breathing space). After being discredited and shelved for long, the concept revived again in the later period of the Cold War to signify the global competition for the control of the land masses, water bodies and strategic resources of the world; and in the post-Cold War period, it meant 'comprehensive visions of the World political map...the "big picture"' that 'offers a way of relating local and regional dynamics to the global system as a whole'. But does geopolitics have any common meaning beyond 'its historical and discursive context of use', which Ó Tuathail advises us to take into reckoning.⁴ Let us review a few definitions to retrieve this meaning.

[G]eopolitics is not geographical determinism, but is based on 'the assumption that geography defines limits and opportunities in international politics: states can realize their geopolitical opportunities or become the victim of their geopolitical situation. One purpose of grand strategy is to exploit one's own geographical attributes and an adversary's geographical vulnerabilities.'⁵

Geopolitics is...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...are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequence of this interaction.⁶

Geopolitics is a word that conjures up images...provokes ideas of war, empire and diplomacy...the practice of states controlling and competing for territory. There is another sense

by which...geopolitics, in theory, language, and practice, classifies swathes of territory and masses of people...we must note the connection between geopolitics and statesmanship: 'the practices and representation of territorial strategies'...geopolitics is a way of 'seeing' the world.⁷

The term 'geopolitics' has long been used to refer to the study of geographical representations, rhetoric and practices that underpin world politics. ...now used freely to refer to such phenomena as international boundary disputes, the structure of global finance, and geographical patterns of election results. *One expropriation of the term* ascribes it to a more specific meaning: examination of the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world politics.⁸

Plainly, Mackubin's definition is geographical (although moderately); Cohen's definition mixes geography and politics; but by foregrounding representation (as shown in the last two definitions of postmodern geopolitics), Flint's and Agnew's definitions decry the term's undue realist-geographical expropriation in line with Ó Tuathail's charge against the realist 'proclivity to find "geography" as a singularly important element in foreign policy conceptualization and practice'.⁹ To understand the import of this charge, let us look at the initial expositions of imperialist geopolitics.

MAHAN AND OCEANIC GEOPOLITICS

Writing at the time of the final major burst of great European imperial expansion and the emergence of the USA as a world power with her frontier history coming full circle, Mahan gave the 'science' of geopolitics an oceanic twist, inducing the country to cast its vision of a world power beyond her continental limits. His writings had a great impact on President Theodore Roosevelt's vision of US naval supremacy. Mahan published his first book, *The Gulf and the Inland Waters*, in 1883, followed by *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (1890), *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812* (1892), *Lessons of the War with Spain* (1899) and so on.

From his reading of maritime history and the upward curve of Britain's global influence, Mahan argued that together with Britain's control of the main sea routes of the world, her geographical position of sufficient proximity to Continental Europe to assault potential enemies, and yet adequate distance from it for reasonable safety from invasion, contributed to her power. It helped her focus on naval power in the North-eastern Atlantic and the Channel and, thus, dominate European commerce, an option France with her obligation to defend her eastern frontier and Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines could not avail. In Mahan's logic, the length of the coastline and the quality of harbours were more important determinants of power than the size of territory, and a nation with a sizeable population adept in maritime pursuits and trade had a greater chance of being a great power than a bigger landlocked state; reasonable thinking in those pre-railroad days when transportation over land was inferior to smoother movement over 'frictionless' water bodies.

Mahan's global perspective was Eurocentric, where the northern land hemisphere, with its far-flung parts linked through waterways provided by the Panama and the Suez canals, was the key to world power, its most vital constituent being Eurasia.

This made Russia the dominant 'Asian' land power and its location unassailable. Russia's only disadvantage was her landlocked position. So world dominance could be conquered and maintained only by an Anglo-American alliance operating from key naval bases surrounding Eurasia. Mahan predicted that in the foreseeable future, an alliance of the USA, Britain, Germany and Japan would have to cross swords with Russia and China. Since the USA was an outlier of the European power and civilization, its Pacific shore and islands being extensions of the Atlantic-European realm, Mahan wanted the USA to shed its isolationism and adopt a 'blue water strategy', comprising annexation of the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam and Puerto Rico, together with control of the Panama Canal Zone, and tutelage over Cuba. So he pleaded for a larger navy for patrolling and defending the Gulf and Caribbean coasts; wanted a canal to penetrate Central America, which would beckon global merchant and naval shipping in these areas; and advocated establishment of an eastern Pacific naval perimeter to prevent Japan or any other country from building naval presence within 3,000 miles of San Francisco.

Mahan's crucial differences from Mackinder lay in his divergent assessment of the potential of sea power against land power.¹⁰ Otherwise, his naval expansionist creed and social Darwinian ideology that regarded all states, peoples and the so-called 'races' locked in a struggle for survival with one another and in which 'only the fittest and most aggressive survived' as much befitted the epithet 'imperialist geopolitics'¹¹ as did Mackinder's.

MACKINDER AND HIS IMPREGNABLE LANDMASS

Modern geopolitics, however, remembers Mackinder more than Mahan because Mackinder's vision was more compatible with modern technology, which privileged the mobility of land power over sea power in the early 20th century, first because of the railroad and later because of the internal combustion engine, and modern highways and road networks, all of which made movement over land much faster. Clearly foreseeing the end of the Victorian era and empire, Mackinder worried about how to maintain Britain's political, commercial and industrial eminence in an era in which command over the seas no longer ensured world supremacy and transcontinental railroad systems turned European continental states into greater threats to British world hegemony. The travails of the British army before finally winning the Boer War (1899–1902) testified to Britain's decline. A supporter of the imperial reform movement of Joseph Chamberlain and wary of the rise of German power on the European continent, Mackinder wanted to use geographical knowledge as an important tool in competing for 'relative efficiency' among the great powers, educating the average low-witted British citizens to think imperially and sensitizing the Empire's leaders to geographical factors and extended connections that had influenced human history and statecraft.¹²

However, technology outsmarted Mackinder's land-based ideas too. Just three weeks before Mackinder delivered an address before the Royal Geographical Society in London,¹³ stressing the importance of vast landmasses buttressed by railroad connections, Wilbur and Orville Wright made four brief flights with their first powered aircraft, and later airplanes proved the bane of Mackinder's projections about the

power of inaccessible landmasses. But I will talk of that later. Mackinder's contentions about geopolitics in this address were initially mostly ignored. But of the five diagrams supporting the lecture, the fifth, on 'The Natural Seats of Power', proved one of the most controversial maps of the 20th century, by audaciously changing the conventional European centre and demonstrating the Americas on the edge of each side of Africa, Europe and Asia. This novel holistic picture of an earth-girdling oval dramatically divided the natural seats of power into three areas: (a) a 'pivot' area, wholly continental; (b) a wholly oceanic 'outer crescent' and (c) an 'inner crescent', partly continental, partly oceanic. Mackinder struck hard at the obsolescent and complacent pictures of the relations between the continents and the relations between sea power and land power. While given scant attention at home, the words captivated German strategists and Hitler narrowly missed his goal of destroying sea power by capturing their controlling land bases.

The two most crucial ideas in Mackinder's 1904 lecture are of 'closed space' and of the 'pivot area', constituting a 'closed political system', though of 'world-wide scope'. Mackinder said that 'instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos', each 'explosion of social forces will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe', shattering 'weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world consequence'. Geographers were showing this, being for the first time equipped 'to attempt, with some degree of completeness, a correlation between the larger geographical and the larger historical generalizations'; being capable of perceiving 'something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world'; and seeking a formula which will capture at least partially, 'geographical causation in universal history'.¹⁴

The fifth diagram illustrated this formula by foregrounding the eternal pressure emanating from the 'pivot area' and bearing on the rest of the world, making Europe and European history 'subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history', since it was in a very profound sense, an offshoot of the 'secular struggle against Asiatic invasion'. The diagram revealed the 'most remarkable contrast in the political map of modern Europe...presented by the vast area of Russia occupying half the Continent and the group of smaller territories tenanted by the Western Powers'.¹⁵ With the help of four other diagrams, Mackinder claimed how 'all the settled margins of the Old World sooner or later felt the expansive force of mobile power originating in the steppe'; and how this was a running thread of geographical relationship decipherable from broader currents of history.¹⁶

For Mackinder, 'the pivot region of the world's politics' was constituted by the huge swathes of land in Euro-Asia which were inaccessible to ships but were in olden days penetrable to horse-riding nomads and were in his time criss-crossed by a network of railways, providing tremendous potentials of mobility of military and economic power. Having already succeeded to the Mongol Empire, Russia was now supplanting raids of Mongol steppe men to pressurize Finland, Scandinavia, Poland, Turkey, Persia, India and China. On the world stage, Russia was in command of a central strategic position, comparable to Germany's in Europe, and sure to be further strengthened after full development of her modern railway network shortly. Mackinder did not believe that any possible social revolution would alter her basic attitude to the geographical limits of her existence. Since Germany, Austria, Turkey, India and China were located just outside the pivot area, in a great inner crescent, while the countries Britain, South Africa, Australia, the USA, Canada and Japan lay in an outer crescent,

any small shift in the BOP in favour of the pivot state, allowing it to expand over the peripheral lands of Euro-Asia, would surely help it deploy the vast continental resources for fleet building. This in turn would bring the empire of the world in its grasp, a likelier contingency if Germany allied herself with Russia. A Eurasian land power, whether Russia, Germany or even China, and more deadening an alliance between the first two, whenever it gained control of the Pivot Area, was perfectly capable of defeating the maritime world. In 1915, English geographer James Fairgrieve, coiner of the term 'heartland', stated that even China was capable of dominating Eurasia as a land power.

Mackinder urged political leaders of the British Empire to anyhow avert this fearful possibility, through curbing any alliance between Germany and pivotal Czarist Russia. In Mackinder's later and more famous book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919), aiming to guide Versailles Peace negotiations, his strategic recommendations were made more explicit in a slogan form. The pivot area was renamed 'Heartland', after Fairgrieve, taking into reckoning recent advances in land transportation, increases in population and industrialization, and its map was accordingly enlarged to encompass Eastern Europe through the Baltic through the Black Sea; the message was expressed in a triplet:

Who rules East Europe commands the 'Heartland';
Who rules the 'Heartland' commands the World Island;
Who rules the World Island commands the world.

The triplet was a warning rather than a prediction, penned 'for the sons of light against the black forces', 'enlisting geography as an aid to statecraft and strategy', and showing that the way to world domination went through the middle tier of Germanic and Slavic states, a region equally accessible to Germans and Russians. Had the German general staff endured the hardships in the Western Front a little longer, to attack the Eastern in full vigour, Germany could have possessed the 'Heartland', and anyway it was a close shave for the Allies. Mackinder wanted the victorious Allies to realize the profound significance of constructing an effective barrier of independent nations between Germany and Russia. Fortunately, in the two World Wars, they were on opposite sides, but may not always be so. But while Mackinder himself was adequately recognized after his 1919 book, his ideas were given far less importance in his homeland than in Germany.

Questioned in 1943 about the relevance of the concept of 'heartland', given the changes in the modalities of modern warfare, Mackinder said in an article, 'The Round World and the Winning of the Peace' (*Foreign Affairs*, July 1943), that the concept was more valid then than before. It was equivalent to the territory occupied by the USSR, further strengthened by the area which he called 'Lenaland', the catchment area of the river Lena, flowing northwards from Mongolia to the Arctic Ocean. It will help the USSR emerge the greatest land power on the earth out of the war. He did not agree that air power had revolutionized military strategy, because its impact depended on the efficiency of its ground organization. There was no reason why air fighting, like all previous kinds of warfare, will not present 'alternations of offensive and defensive tactical superiority, meanwhile effecting few permanent changes in strategical [*sic*] conditions'. Believing, against all juridical claims of equality of sovereign states, that

world rule is based on force, Mackinder described himself as a 'democratic idealist', inasmuch as he wanted equality of opportunity of nations in their development aspirations, and a 'realist' because of his worry about the League of Nations degenerating into an unbalanced big power club of two or more. He pleaded that smaller powers unite to prevent any two-power hegemony, condominium or oligopoly, shaping up in it. Smelling the decline of Britain as the pre-eminent power of the world, he called upon Western Europe and North America to form a single community of nations in a prophetic anticipation of the North Atlantic Community.

In his abiding commitment to the concept of balance, Mackinder looked in his 1943 article at the contours of the post-Second World War world and envisaged the new potential geopolitical balances as this: (a) a primary combination of the North Atlantic (Midland Ocean) and Asian 'Heartland' powers, able to withstand ambitious German pressure; (b) a balancing unit evolving in the Monsoonal lands of India and China; (c) another future-balancing unit in the continental masses off the South Atlantic; and (d) the 'Mantle of Vacancies', a barrier region running from the Sahara through the Central Asian deserts, all the more valuable as a provider of solar energy for supplementing exhaustible resources. In a new map, cut off from the Lenaland or the central Siberian tableland, the 'Heartland' was now composed of the deforested and steppe portions of Eurasia. And from the original meaning of the 'pivot area' as a source of movement for land forces, it had been transformed into a power stronghold, an outcome of population, resources and interior lines of communication.¹⁷

KARL HAUSHOFER AND MACKINDER IN GERMANY

It was Haushofer who brought Mackinder's ideas to Germany. Author of *Western Pacific Ocean Geopolitics* (1925), *World Politics Today* (1934) and *Japan Builds Its Empire* (1941); editor of *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* between 1924 and 1944; University Professor at Munich (1921–1939); President of the prestigious German Academy (1934–1937) and German military commander and major general during the Second World War, Haushofer's geopolitical ideas were heard in Nazi policymaking forums. Haushofer was, however, less of an original thinker than a synthesizer of existing geopolitical ideas and doctrines of Mackinder and others. Three ballasts of his geopolitics were: Ratzel's large states, Mackinder's world island, and pan-regions. While organic westward and eastward growth of Germany was inexorable, it was a key to the mastery of the world island, which was essential to the domination of the USSR and destruction of British sea power. German control over pan-Europe, particularly of Eastern Europe, would compel the Asian power Russia to capitulate.

All through the 1920s and the 1930s, Haushofer advocated various pan-regionalisms, such as pan-America, pan-Eur-Africa and pan-Asia, with the USA, Germany and Japan providing the respective fulcrums. He prevaricated about how to accommodate the USSR in the picture, advocating first a German-Russian alliance, then a pan-Russia-South Asian conglomeration and finally a Japan-China-Russia bloc.

In its bones, Haushofer's view of geopolitics was an effort to justify aggressive wars first in the name of 'autarky' and then of *Lebensraum*, all of this distorting Mackinder. As early as in 1921, he used (or abused) Mackinder's idea of 'closed space' as the rationale of his theory of German encirclement in a booklet titled *The Japanese*

Empire in Its Geographical Development. There he produced a contention of Mackinder depicting a medieval situation completely out of context: 'Thus the settled people of Europe lay gripped between two pressures—that of the Asiatic nomads from the East, and on the other three sides that of the pirates from the sea', contending that the depiction was still relevant in 1920. The booklet's cover flaunted a virtual map of Japan, showing Germany's diminution and containing geopolitical power lines portraying Japan's plausible southward expansion up to Hawaii. His perversion of Mackinder's 1904 lecture in *Concerning the Battle for Liberty in South-East Asia* (1923) became more brazen in a 1924 map, 'The Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean', in an eponymous book, containing an angry warning about '900 million south-east Asiatics', who were Germany's 'companions of disaster' and who needed to join hands with Germany to fight their ruthless enemies and oppressors. Haushofer's inverted map sought to show how landlocked powers faced the menace of encirclement by offshore powers and sea power was a way out of it.

After the signing of the 10-year non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR on 23 August 1939, *The New Statesman and Nation* highlighted Haushofer's role in bringing it about. Haushofer conceded his debt to Mackinder's books of 1904 and 1919 for this geopolitical statesmanship in the *Zeitschrift* of October 1939 admitted to 'purloining' ideas 'from the intellectual arsenal of British imperialism' and justified it by the Roman dictum of *Fas est ab hoste doceri* (must be taught by the enemy). He opposed Hitler's subsequent invasion of the Soviet Union and fell from grace.¹⁸ Faced with charges of 'possible influence' of his teachings 'on Nazi foreign policy' and question about why he should not be tried for war crimes, Haushofer claimed that much of what he wrote was 'legitimate' geopolitics, like the stuff taught in British and American universities and institutes.¹⁹

SPYKMAN'S GEOPOLITICAL REALISM

The affinity between geopolitics and realist IR best comes out in the writings of Spykman. The sharp division in American public opinion before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 about the desirable role of the USA in 'distant' conflicts in Europe and Asia continued even after the end of the Second World War. Now, it was about the extent to which America should engage with the post-war international order. Guidance came from Spykman's two articles written in the late 1930s and his iconic book: 'Geography and Foreign Policy' (1938), co-authored 'Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy' (1939) and posthumous *The Geography of the Peace* (1944).²⁰ Amidst complete American disgust for German *geopolitik*, Spykman doggedly stuck to geopolitics, thinking that in downgrading the geographic factor, the US national security thinking was unrealistically overlooking many facts and insights brought out by early geopolitics. His articles appeared at the time of rampant German, Italian and Japanese expansionisms in Europe, North Africa and Asian Mainland, and Franklin Roosevelt's subtle tinkering with the Neutrality Act to send materials and other aids to Britain and China with repeated assurances of American non-involvement.

To give suggestions about what the USA should do, in his first article, Spykman compared the benefits of size, world location and regional location for foreign policies

of nations. Size was important in providing a state's 'territorial base' both for wartime and peacetime activities. But although historically strong states have been large states, the exceptions of Venice, Holland and Great Britain, rulers of large empires through the control of the sea, proved that large size 'is not strength but potential strength', and could be both an asset or liability depending on 'technical, social, moral and ideological development,...the dynamic forces within a state,...the political constellation of the past, and...the personality of individuals'. Size needed strengthening through 'effective centralized control', predicated on 'existence of an effective system of communications from the centre to the periphery' and necessitating construction of highways, roads and canals, and railroads and airports to knit together larger areas. Location was more important than size inasmuch as 'facts of location' do not change, though their significance does, with 'every shift in the means of communication...routes of communication...techniques of war, and in the centres of world power'. The full import of location was assessable only by placing it at the intersection of two systems of reference: (a) geographic, providing facts and (b) historical, providing their evaluative criteria.

Spykman's geopolitical world comprised of the great Eurasian and North American landmasses; the islands of South America, Africa and Australia; and the water bodies of the South Polar Sea, North Polar Sea, and the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The location of the world centre of powers had shifted from the Middle East, through the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, Western Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, to the 1938 situation where four 'spheres' of world power were controlled from different centres: the Americas from the USA, the Far East from Japan, the Heartland-backed Eurasia from Russia and the Eastern Atlantic and Indian Ocean from Europe. Among them, the USA was the most advantaged location wise for her direct access to the Atlantic and Pacific basins.

The regional dimension of location classified most states into three types: 'landlocked states', 'island states' and states with both land and sea frontiers. Location determined their security threats from immediate neighbours, other naval powers or multiple sources. France, Germany and Russia were primarily land-oriented powers, albeit with both land and sea frontiers, and faced their security problems from their land neighbours. These did not exist for Great Britain, Japan and the USA, which could also pass off as an island, being unencumbered with any security problems from her immediate land-based neighbours, Canada and Mexico. But China and Italy, because of their joint sea and land frontiers, possessed a mixed land-sea perspective. The League of Nations and its collective security system was infructuous, lacking harmony with 'basic geographic or political realities'. States could never ignore geography, what with diplomatic skills or military resource, because 'geography does not argue. It simply is'. Thus arguing, Spykman remarkably prophesied that after 50 years, the world will be dominated by China, India, the USA and the USSR.

Spykman's second article presents states as 'struggling power organizations' by identifying patterns of expansion of states, both geographically and historically: (a) for routes of communication along nearby river valleys (Egypt on the Nile, Mesopotamia on the Tigris and Euphrates, China on the Huang Ho, and the USA on the Mississippi and Missouri); (b) for access to the seas and oceans (landlocked states Babylon and Assyria for the Mediterranean, Balkan powers for the Adriatic, Russia for ice-free ports); (c) for conquest, of island states, of nearby coastal regions (Great Britain in the western coast of Europe, Japan in the eastern coast of China); (d) for gaining control

of sea routes for economic and strategic purposes (Great Britain, Japan, Holland and the USA); (e) 'circumferential and transmarine expansion' for dominating marginal or inland seas (Greece for the Aegean, Rome for the Mediterranean, America for the Caribbean); and (f) for rectification and control of frontiers for further expansion (Russia, Roman Empire, Mongol Empire, Germany and the USA). These expansionary patterns, now exemplified by Hitler, Mussolini and Imperial Japan, were not going to change just because some international organization was watching. Actually, just a few months after this article was published, Hitler's invasion of Poland started the European phase of the Second World War and its subsequent internationalization. And when the War was in full swing and America had started throwing her weight about, Spykman wrote *America's Strategy* to chart the course of America's foreign policy from the perspective of geopolitical realism. I am for the moment focusing on the geopolitical contents of this and the latter book, reserving its realist contentions for the next chapter.

While analysing the geopolitical position of the USA in the Western Hemisphere, the trans-Atlantic zone, the trans-Pacific zone and the world at large, Spykman showed that America was placed in the trans-Atlantic zone in much the same way as Great Britain was positioned in regard to the Eurasian continent—the interested third party. Through ages, Britain opposed any power threatening the continental balance and traditionally anchored coalitions of European powers that counterbalance any one of them. It was only in the First World War that Europe elicited the intervention of a non-European power to thwart Germany's ambitions for continental hegemony and was not even in the 1930s a self-balancing geopolitical system. In the backdrop of this 'political collapse of Europe', Spykman questioned America's isolationism, and later, going round her Neutrality Act. Being abreast of Germany's challenge to the European BOP, and Haushofer and his associates' vision of *geopolitik*, Spykman explained how Germany was going about reorganizing the European landmass stretching from the North Sea to the Ural Mountains 'on a continental basis as the economic heart of the great "living space" and the foundation of the war potential' and how the Near East, key to the routes to the Indian Ocean and the oilfields on which European economic life was dependent, was going to be recast as semi-independent states controlled by Germany. Even Africa was part of the plan of economic management and political control, as provider of strategic raw materials and link across the Atlantic to South America. If Germany achieved control of the continent and defeated Britain, she could add to the economic resources of the entire European mainland the easy access to the oceans that could make the Western Hemisphere and the USA vulnerable. So the USA had no option to place her entire economic resources, materiel of war and manpower to tilt the scales of a predominantly 'European power struggle'.

According to Spykman, America's security concerns in the 'trans-Pacific zone' were affected by the following factors: (a) annexation of Hawaii and acquisition of the Philippine Islands after the Spanish-American War in 1898; (b) the 'Open Door' policy launched in the following year, seeking commercial access to China; (c) presence of Russia and Japan, their estrangement since the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–1905 ended by a treaty mediated by Theodore Roosevelt and (d) Japan's ascendancy in Asia and the Pacific in the space provided by European powers' and America's preoccupation with German threat in Europe and demilitarization of their possessions in the Western Pacific after the Washington Naval Conference. This allowed Japan 'naval

supremacy in the marginal seas between the Asiatic mainland and the Pacific and in the western part of that ocean'. These security concerns acquired salience after Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, military occupying China's Northern provinces in 1937; France surrendered to Germany in 1940; Japan's troops entered in Indochina, subsequently occupying naval and air bases there; and Japan subsequently mounted pressure on Dutch East Indies. For Spykman, these initiatives ultimately presaged 'loss of the Philippines, Guam and possibly Samoa, and end of the "Open Door" in China'. The materialization of the 'Japanese Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' threatened to incalculably damage the balance in the 'transpacific zone', with inevitable reverberations of it in the Western Sphere. Spykman considered America's and League's responses before the Pearl Harbor incident as puny. To reckon the implications of these happenings for the USA, Spykman drew on the ideas of British geographers Mackinder, Fairgrieve and Mahan to conceptualize geopolitical regions of his own. Europe, Asia and the Middle East were the fulcrum of Eurasia, whose 'inner zone' was the 'heartland', a resource and manpower rich stronghold that could independently support a formidable 20th-century war machine. All through history, nomadic horsemen from the innermost reaches of north-central Asian landmass pushed into the settled agricultural periphery in Europe, the Middle East, South-west Asia and China. After getting firmly entrenched in the Heartland, Russia tried to press on the 'encircling ring of border states for outlets to oceans' but found solid resistance from sea power represented by Britain. Spykman called this continuing struggle the 'Great Game' in history.

The maritime region encircling Eurasia, termed by Spykman as 'the great circumferential maritime highway of the world', encompassed 'the Baltic and North Seas, the marginal seas of Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Red Seas, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the marginal seas of the Far East and Indochina'. The area between this 'highway' and the 'Heartland' is the 'great concentric buffer zone', within which fall Europe, Persia and the Middle East, South-west Asia, China, Indochina and Eastern Siberia. Of these, the Middle East-Persian Gulf-Southwest Asia region was especially important because of the oil reserves of the Eurasian landmass and the overland routes to Heartland. Were Germany and Japan victorious in the War, their control over the two great landmasses would have turned 'the geographic embrace of the Western Hemisphere by the Old World into political strangulation'. In these circumstances, America could neither leave the oceans to defend the Western Hemisphere nor attempt to completely smash the power potential of the Germans and the Japanese. For a Russia extending from the Urals to the North Sea was no better than a Germany extending from the North Sea to the Urals. In the same way, Japan's defeat was not to signify its total demolition, transferring the Western Pacific on a platter to China or Russia, and disturb the Asian balance.

True to its title, *The Geography of the Peace* offered a geopolitical vision for the post-Second World War world by extending Mackinder's ideas rather than critiquing them. Spykman accepted Mackinder's Heartland but considered the region's power potential exaggerated, since the coastal region surrounding it, 'inner or marginal crescent' in Mackinder's parlance, was a greater reserve of power. Rechristened as 'Rimland' by Spykman, it comprised Western Europe, the Middle East, South-west Asia, China and the Far East, and its total industrial and manpower resources, buttressed by those of Britain and Japan, outweighed those of the Heartland through possessing both sea and land power. While all the three recent claimants of world

hegemony (namely Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine Germany and Hitler's Germany) emanated from Rimland, in each case an alliance Rimland, offshore islands, Heartland powers and (in the last two instances) North America withstood the attacking Rimland power. The US security had its worst threat from any single power in full control of the Rimland regions of the Eurasian land mass. That is why Spykman changed Mackinder's triplet to:

Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia;

Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.

Spykman forecast that the post-war world would see China as the dominant power in the Far East and Soviet Russia as the strongest land power on the continent. To prevent any single power achieving full control of the coveted zone, Germany was to be balanced with France and Eastern Europe (including Russia), while the USA and Great Britain were to keep their sea and air access to Eurasia intact. The embattled areas of the Second World War would remain the most crucial regions after the War too; and it was 'peacetime relationships between the power factors in these regions' that were the most vital requirements of the security of the world, and for America that of the Western Hemisphere.²¹

CRITICISMS AND EVALUATION OF TRADITIONAL GEOPOLITICS

Starting from Mackinder to Spykman and beyond, criticism of geopolitics has revolved around geographical spaces and their technological (re)assessments. Leopold Amery, later to become Secretary of State for India, quipped, problematizing Heartland, that a seagoing ship is nearly irreplaceable. For a bulk-and-troop carrier outdoes '15 or 20 parallel lines of railway', and the arrival of air transportation would greatly reduce the geographical invincibility of the Heartland army.²² Gordon East questioned the impregnability of the Heartland in terms of possible discrepancies between 'certain important and inescapable realities' in 'Mackinder's conception', and their deduction from 'inert facts of physical geography'. He said Mackinder's finding in history of the 'recurrent theme of the movements of nomad horsemen from the steppes of Asia into the adjoining lands of Europe, Asia Minor, India, Manchuria and China', evidencing 'the pressure extended from the Heartland into the settled agricultural periphery' had been perhaps 'overemphasized'. For there have been 'forceful movements into the Heartland'. These are: 'the expansion of China under the Han dynasty (202 BC–226 AD) to Sinkiang and beyond the Pamirs to the shores of the Caspian Sea, and the penetration of the Russian boatmen, seeking furs, which started the Russification of Siberia'; and the entry of some of the native peoples of North-west Siberia there from northern Russia or Finland rather than the Ural–Altai region; and in more recent times, Japanese expansion into Inner Mongolia, marking 'a successful approach at least to the threshold of the Heartland'—all of which problematize the myth of Heartland's impenetrability.²³

Spykman's concept of Rimland, with its overtones of revival of Mahan's sea power, is also criticized. Cohen accepts that huge container ships, aircraft carriers and submarines have accorded ocean basin powers a new mobility and facility of

movement of provisions and material that is unavailable to fixed land bases. But from strategic aspects, the concept's most glaring inadequacy is that no united maritime Europe would be 'capable of organizing all of Rimland because of the vulnerability of the Rimland to both the Heartland and Offshore powers', particularly when it would require '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'. Besides, in later times, the interior lines of land communication even between parts of Rimland have assumed far greater importance, as proven by China's ability to assist North Korea and North Vietnam against control of seas and air by offshore powers including the USA, making use of internal networks of rails and modern highways, buttressed by jungle and mountain trails in South China and North Vietnam.²⁴

Geopolitics has also been critiqued on the count of its determinism. Cohen brands it as 'a set of geographically determined laws governing a state's strategic destinies', which evolved as geographical underpinnings of *realpolitik*; neglected 'empirically based principles' while building doctrines that catered to 'singular needs of particular states', with scant regard for any moral or ethical basis; degenerated into 'a distorted pseudoscience' in Nazi German hands; and during and since the Cold War got bifurcated into two opposing schools of thought, the first nation-centric, the second universalistic.²⁵ The Sprouts branded the theories of both Mahan and Mackinder as outdated because of significant changes in military technologies and 'paramilitary and non-military forms of political interaction', although later they recognized the importance of the actors' perception of environmental factors and limitations of human activity stemming from environment. Strausz-Hupé pointed out that even if geographic conditions determine the location of history making, it is only man who makes it; and even if the Heartland was a valid concept, modern technology is inexorably negating it. Whittlesey found Haushofer's rationale for lebensraum grounded in distorted demographic statistics. Kristof critiques geopoliticians for 'marshalling facts and laws of the physical world' to buttress pet demands and justify political opinions, and for offering patently contradictory demands akin to 'natural boundary' and the 'harmonic state'.²⁶

Henrikson criticizes geopoliticians' maps and the distortions introduced by Mercator equator-based projections, which failed to convey the picture of the earth as a globe, messed up geographical unities and continuities and gave mistaken ideas of distances, whereas an azimuthal equidistant projection will show that the capital of Argentina is more distant from the USA than all European capitals including Moscow. Arrival and fast development of air power, together with its great contribution to Allied victory in the Second World War, have been a convenient plank to attack these Mercator-type conceptions of geography, since the shortest distance between two places lies along a line following the spherical shape of the earth. The subjective and constructed nature of the maps made them 'pure subjective ideographs', necessitating alternative ones.²⁷ Harrison and Strausz-Hupé made deficiencies of maps responsible for America's 'psychological isolationism'. Parker thought Mackinder's God-like maps were not physical or political maps as found in an Atlas, but 'a mental map' in which 'horizontal distinctions and movements of global phenomena' have been provided vertical integration in dynamic interaction and are replaceable by new strategic maps.²⁸

Other criticisms of geopolitics have been about its controversial intellectual roots and objectives. As Ó Tuathail puts it:

As a form of power/knowledge, geopolitics was clearly complicitous with many racist and imperialist ideologies in the first half of the twentieth century. It justified oppressive European colonial empires that were premised on white supremacist assumptions, imperialist interventionism, and in Hitler's geopolitics, brought imperialist thinking and racist brutality to the European continent. It encouraged statesmen to play god with the world political map and justified appalling state violence, the culmination of which was World War II.²⁹

THE ENVIRONMENTAL TURN: SPROUTS' MAN–MILIEU RELATIONSHIPS AND AFTER

Among many transformations that conventional geopolitics underwent, one was the ecological twist given by the Sprouts, focusing on the environment or milieu as a multidimensional system, in which perceptions of key political leaders about environmental conditions or their 'psychomilieu', as well as objective conditions, are explored. This is expected to help analyse the *interrelationship* of geography, demography, technology and resources, while giving equal importance to perceptual variables and quantitative factors. The concept of psychomilieu is important, because milieu can be influential for human decisions only when humans perceive these environmental factors as relevant. For the Sprouts, geography is basically about 'the arrangements of things on the face of the earth' and about 'the association of things that give character to particular places'. It has impacts on all 'human and non-human, tangible and intangible phenomena which have 'areal dimensions...in relation to the earth's surface'. Consequently, transactions among nations have geographical underpinnings, discernible in 'patterns of coercion and submission, influence and deference' in international statecraft.

This is a position of cognitive behaviouralism in which a person can respond to his milieu *only* through perception. But from here the Sprouts proceed to a somewhat arbitrary distinction between the environment the observer perceives and the environment that actually is, arbitrary because this one too can only be perceived. Since the decisional entity formed within the complex interaction between psychomilieu and the operational milieu, and the resultant envired organism should be studied in IR, instead of an abstraction like the state, words like the 'state's motivation' or the 'state's needs' are avoidable imputations of human attributes to social organizations.

Aware that even if political decisions are grounded in statesmen's perceptions of the psychomilieu, the outcomes of these decisions are shaped by the objective nature of the operational milieu, the Sprouts underscore the crucial role technology and social change play in environmental relationships. Although unable to alter the physical chart of lands and seas, technology has imparted new dimensions to them,³⁰ leaving the relations between man and his non-human environment 'decidedly in flux'.³¹

The Sprouts criticized the inability of most of the geopoliticians to foresee the rate of these changes, and their insensitivity to the ecological principle that sizable readjustment in any part of the milieu will produce 'significant, often unsettling,

sometimes utterly disruptive consequences in other sectors'. In a situation where geography, environed organisms, the psychomilieu, technology, the operational milieu and beliefs all impact each other, significant 'changes either in the environment or the genetic make-up of the organisms involved' would initiate widespread and ramifying derivative effects throughout the 'biotic community'. The escalating complexity of modern society has so much heightened the interrelatedness of the ecological element that any classification of 'human political events' into either 'domestic matters' or 'foreign affairs' has become difficult and rendered irrelevant the 'time honoured distinction between domestic and international questions', thereby making it one of the 'major datum points in the ecological perspective on international politics'.³²

The Sprouts' ecological paradigm is rich in examining such limiting factors on environmentalism as available level of technology, cognition of essential factors and the deficit or surplus of available resources to commitments. They wanted to enrich geographical insights in IR theorizing by bringing in relevant theories and data from geography, psychology, sociology and other disciplines.³³

The environmental twist is also manifest in geopolitical theorizing of George Liska. In the late 1970s, he tried to explain the dynamics of equilibrium in the international system through the geostrategic positioning of states in the global system.³⁴ In the late 1990s, he showed how the foreign policy of America faces a dilemma: a twin challenge to 'gravitate towards informal free-trade imperialism' geared to the 'economics-first bias of a newly permissive and spontaneously regionalized global environment tending to pluralism' and simultaneously 'adjust a to-be-developed statist potential in tandem with high foreign politics to the revised imperatives and expanded latitudes of BOP in the residually constraining Eurasian sector of the environment'.³⁵

Apart from such modifications, conventional geopolitics temporarily disappeared from writings of stalwarts, its vestiges surviving in studies like the impact of insularity on foreign policies of different countries (such as of Britain, Ceylon and Japan by Robert Holt and John Turner), work on the impact of non-contiguity on integration of political units (by Richard Merritt) and so on.³⁶ The tale of its revival is gripping.

REVIVAL OF GEOPOLITICS: REALIST, NEW/CRITICAL/ POSTMODERN STRANDS

In mainstream realism, Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of State as well as well-known realist thinker, exhumed and revived the term almost single-handedly by employing it in the 1970s as a synonym for the USA-USSR global competition for a favourable balance.³⁷ He famously said that even in the 'absence of a commonly perceived unifying threat, geopolitics has not disappeared as an element of international politics', embodied in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 'as an insurance policy against a new Russian imperialism'. Without geopolitics, and the USA as its underwriter, 'Europe would be a peninsular extension, even a hostage of Eurasia, drawn into the vortex of its conflicts, and the prime target of its radical and revolutionary currents sweeping so many adjacent regions' and Germany would lack 'an anchor to restrain national impulses (even as a member of the European Union)'. He even deplored the development that the 'new dispensation in [US] foreign policy combined

a rejection of history with a turning away from traditional notions of security and geopolitics'.³⁸

This meaning of geopolitics continued well into the later years of the Cold War, with the global contest between the USA and the USSR for supremacy over the states and the strategic resources of the world being subsumed in its new connotation. But what happened after the Cold War ended and globalization started in full steam? Indication that the ostracism of geopolitics was finally over came from two international conferences, namely 'Europe between Political Geography and Geopolitics' (Trieste, December 1997) and 'Geopolitics and Globalization in a Postmodern World' (Israel, January 1998). The launch of a rechristened journal *Geopolitics* (from *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* (1996–1997)³⁹ by Taylor and Francis in 1998 had already shown the renascent status of the tradition. Ó Tuathail first listed the factors that are commonly given credit for the revival of geopolitics. Its: (a) 'big picture'; (b) 'a spatial way thinking that arranges different actors, elements, and locations simultaneously on a global chessboard' despite its 'unavoidably textual' nature; (c) 'multidimensional global cachet', both geographically (worldwide) and conceptually (inclusive), conveying a look of objectivity and credibility; and (d) capacity to provide 'crystal ball visions of the future' transcending 'the beclouded confusion of the immediate'. But then he added another more important factor linked with globalization and postmodernism: 'In a shrinking and speeding world of intense time–place compression wrought by telecommunication revolutions and globalizing economic networks and webs, the desire for perspective offering "timeless insights" is stronger than ever'. So 'in complex post-modern times, in sum, geopolitical visions and visionaries seem to thrive'.

But Ó Tuathail warns that what is getting revived is not the detested imperialist or the Cold War geopolitics, but a 'new geopolitics', an outgrowth of the post-Cold War world, which seeks to apply a Mackinder-like 'God's-eye-view' to the emerging geopolitical order 'dominated by geo-economic questions and issues' and to a world in which 'the globalization of economic activity and the global flows of trade, investment commodities and images are remaking states, sovereignty and the geographical structure of the planet'. In one sense, the gaze is shifted away from obsolete territorial struggles of states to vexing transnational problems of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, clash of civilizations and so on, in another sense, to the politics of the spaceship earth around the problems of 'environmental degradation, resource depletion, transnational pollution and global warming', equating geopolitics with ecopolitics. In still another sense, the 'new geopolitics' has replaced 'international geopolitics from above' of hegemonic states with a 'localized geopolitics from below', being also 'critical geopolitics' in good measure in seeking to expose the 'hidden politics' of geopolitical knowledge. Rather than presenting geopolitics as 'an unproblematic description of the world political map', it wants to present its discourse, which is 'a culturally varied way of describing, representing and writing about geography and international politics'.⁴⁰ Apart from highlighting the 'changing function of state sovereignty' amidst globalization, and the 'deterritorialization of the state and the associated changing roles and functions of international boundaries', the new geopolitics wants to re-examine 'geopolitical texts, narratives and traditions', and the 'geopolitical imagination', whereby the relative location of states in the global system is apportioned to capture the 're-territorialization of states and the emergence of new ethnic, national and territorial identities'.⁴¹

It is seen from the previous paragraph that Ó Tuathail's and Newman's 'new geopolitics' is a very broad category and subsumes 'critical' (with both large 'C' and small 'c')⁴² and specifically 'postmodern' geopolitics. It should not be weakly defined, reducing the difference between 'old' and 'new geopolitics' to the role of geography from 'a determining variable' to simply 'one of the many conditioning factors' having 'a "facilitative" rather than a pure effect',⁴³ a difference that is non-existent since the times of the Sprouts and was negated long back by 'geographical possibilism' since Paul Vidal de La Blache (1845–1918) in France up to Isaiah Bowman (1878–1950) and Carl Sauer (1889–1975) in the USA.⁴⁴

I urge my readers to remember that the critical brand of geopolitics of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, as spearheaded by the writings of scholars such as Taylor and LaCoste, and carried forward by Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, was multifaceted. English geographer Taylor disentangled himself from the realistic approach to power-centred geopolitics to apply a world-systems approach geared to world economics after Immanuel Wallerstein (discussed in Chapter 18). French geographer LaCoste offered an environmentally and socially enriched 'new' *geopolitique*, above national chauvinism, and focused on the land rather than the state in his journal *Hérodote*.⁴⁵ Their geopolitics was suffused with the realization of the inherently political nature of geographic knowledge. It was concerned less with discovering usable truths for states and more with showing how geographic 'truths' became common sense. It was critical not orientation to negativity, but in allergy to *a priori* concepts.⁴⁶ This emphasis on flow of geopolitical discourse into common sense is explicable by linking critical geopolitics to the 'cultural turn' in the disciplines of geography and IR. Instead of treating geography as the source of the analysable 'reality', it saw language as 'the building blocks from which reality emerged' and thought geopolitics as 'a discourse through which the world is made understandable and amenable to foreign policy intervention'. Ó Tuathail showed how geopolitical discourse operated in its three branches: formal (textual), practical (politico-military) and popular (representational in printed and online media).⁴⁷

Closely allied postmodern geopolitics is explicitly informed by the Foucauldian insistence on the exploration of the power–knowledge nexus in discourse,⁴⁸ engaged in by Dodds, Dalby and Ó Tuathail among others. Its foundational premise is 'the contention that geography is a social and historical discourse...which is a form of power/knowledge itself'.⁴⁹ Ó Tuathail has presented 'immanent postmodern' geopolitics, distinguished from 'a purified modern' one, in a tabular form, 'organized around five key questions central to the problems of geopolitics' in the practices of dominant states in world politics with two sets of distinctions encapsulated in questions devoted to each. The questions relate to the modes in which (a) global space is imagined and represented, and 'divided into essential blocs or zones of identity and difference', (b) global power is conceptualized, (c) global threats are spatialized and strategies of response conceptualized and (d) major actors shaping geopolitics are identified and conceptualized. The distinctions are given in Table 3.1.

Ó Tuathail explicates the distinction between modern and postmodern geopolitics in terms of 10 binaries, woven around these five questions.⁵⁰ Sadly, I do not have enough space to replicate his reasoning. Advanced readers may look up to the original. But their difference revolves around Henri Lefebvre's distinction between 'spatial practices and representations of space'. If spatial practices of modern geopolitics were

TABLE 3.1 Modern versus Postmodern Geopolitics

<i>Modern Geopolitics</i>	<i>Postmodern Geopolitics</i>
Cartographic visualizations, maps	Telemetrical visualizations, GIS
Perspectivist theatre	Post-perspectivist simulations
Inside/outside, domestic/international	Global webs, glocalization
East/West	Jihad/McWorld
Territorial power	Telemetrical power
Hardware ascendant	Software ascendant
Territorial enemies	Deterritorialized dangers
Fixed, rigid posture	Flexible, rapid response
Geopolitical man	Cyborg collectives
States/Leaders	Networks/Cyborgs

Source: Adapted from Ó Tuathail, 'Postmodern Geopolitics?', 27.

marked by a 'pre-discursive materiality', postmodern geopolitics is marked by 'representations of space' as 'ideology and discourse'.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

We have shown in this chapter how the meaning of geopolitics has changed since the imperialist geopolitics of Mahan, Mackinder and Haushofer; Cold War geopolitics of Spykman and Kissinger; all of the realist provenance and its temporary demise, till it had regeneration in 'new'/'critical'/'postmodern' geopolitics. In Chapter 4, we will focus on three iconic post-war realists.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Trace the origins of geopolitics.
2. Define geopolitics from its geographical, political realist and critical perspectives.
3. Bring out the commonalities and differences between Mahan's and Mackinder's geopolitics and attempt a common critique of them.
4. Is Mackinder's concept of 'Heartland' historically inaccurate? What are the weaknesses of Mackinder's 'Heartland'?
5. Why would you call Spykman's geopolitics quintessentially realist? How does he mix Mahan with Mackinder?
6. Write a critical note on the rise of critical geopolitics and its contours.

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