

Geopolitics - Great Powers and China

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Abstract.

Geopolitics is the study of the effects of Earth's geography on politics and international relations. The article considers the geopolitics schools of some of the great powers (United Kingdom, USA, Germany, France, Russia). The article states some new realities in geopolitics in XXI century and analyses briefly the strategic aim of Road and Belt initiative of China.

Key words: geopolitics; great powers; China

Introduction

Geopolitics is the study of the effects of Earth's geography on politics and international relations (Devetak et al., 2012). At the level of international relations, geopolitics is a method of studying foreign policy to understand, explain and predict international political behavior through geographical variables. These include area studies, climate, topography, demography, natural resources, and applied science of the region being evaluated (Evans and Newnham, 1998).

Geopolitics focuses on political power linked to geographic space. In particular, territorial waters and land territory in correlation with diplomatic history. Topics of geopolitics include relations between the interests of international political actors and interests focused within an area, a space, or a geographical element; relations which create a geopolitical system (Toncea, 2006).

The term is currently being used to describe a broad spectrum of concepts, in a general sense used as "a synonym for international political relations", but more specifically "to imply the global structure of such relations", which builds on "early-twentieth-century term for a pseudoscience of political geography" and other pseudoscientific theories of historical and geographic determinism (Gogwilt, 2000; Jason and Shar, 2014).

Geopolitics and great powers

United Kingdom. Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory was set out in his article entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History", published in England in 1904. Mackinder's doctrine of geopolitics involved concepts diametrically opposed to the notion of Alfred Thayer Mahan about the significance of navies (he coined the term sea power) in world conflict. He saw navy as a basis of Colombian era empire (roughly from 1492 to the 19th century), and predicted the 20th century to be domain of land power. The Heartland theory hypothesized a huge empire being brought into existence in the Heartland—which wouldn't need to use coastal or transoceanic transport to remain coherent. The basic notions of Mackinder's doctrine involve considering the geography of the Earth as being divided into two sections: the World Island or Core, comprising Eurasia and Africa; and the Peripheral "islands", including the Americas, Australia, Japan, the British Isles, and Oceania. Not only was the Periphery noticeably smaller than the World Island, it necessarily required much sea transport to function at the technological level of the World Island—which contained sufficient natural resources for a developed economy (Sloan, 1999).

Mackinder posited that the industrial centers of the Periphery were necessarily located in widely separated locations. The World Island could send its navy to destroy each one of them in turn, and could locate its own industries in a region further inland than the Periphery (so they would have a longer struggle reaching them, and would face a well-stocked industrial bastion). Mackinder called this region the Heartland. It essentially comprised Central and Eastern Europe: Ukraine, Western Russia. The Heartland contained the grain reserves of Ukraine, and many other natural resources. Mackinder's notion of geopolitics was summed up when he said:

Who rules Central and Eastern Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules the World-Island commands the World (Sloan, 1999).

Nicholas J. Spykman was both a follower and critic of geostrategists Alfred Mahan, and Halford Mackinder. His work was based on assumptions similar to Mackinder's, including the unity of world politics and the world sea. He extends this to include the unity of the air. Spykman adopts Mackinder's divisions of the world, renaming some:

1. The Heartland;
2. The Rimland (analogous to Mackinder's "inner or marginal crescent" also an intermediate region, lying between the Heartland and the marginal sea powers); and
3. The Offshore Islands & Continents (Mackinder's "outer or insular crescent") (Okur, 2014).

Under Spykman's theory, a Rimland separates the Heartland from ports that are usable throughout the year (that is, not frozen up during winter). Spykman suggested this required that attempts by Heartland nations (particularly Russia) to conquer ports in the Rimland must be prevented. Spykman modified Mackinder's formula on the relationship between the Heartland and the Rimland (or the inner crescent), claiming that "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia. Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." This theory can be traced in the origins of Containment, a U.S. policy on preventing the spread of Soviet influence after World War II.

Another famous follower of Mackinder was Karl Haushofer who called Mackinder's Geographical Pivot of History a "genius' scientific tractate" (Haushofer, 2004). He commented on it: "Never have I seen anything greater than those few pages of geopolitical masterwork" (Haushofer, 2004). Haushofer adopted both Mackinder's Heartland thesis and his view of the Russian-German alliance – powers that Mackinder saw as the major contenders for control of Eurasia in the twentieth century. Following Mackinder he suggested an alliance with the Soviet Union and, advancing a step beyond Mackinder, added Japan to his design of the Eurasian Bloc (Haushofer, 2004).

USA. Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), a frequent commentator on world naval strategic and diplomatic affairs, believed that national greatness was associated with the sea—and particularly with its commercial use in peace and its control in war. Mahan's theoretical framework came from Antoine-Henri Jomini, and emphasized that strategic locations (such as chokepoints, canals, and coaling stations), as well as quantifiable levels of fighting power in a fleet, were conducive to control over the sea. He proposed six conditions required for a nation to have sea power:

1. Advantageous geographical position;
2. Serviceable coastlines, abundant natural resources, and favorable climate;
3. Extent of territory
4. Population large enough to defend its territory;
5. Society with an aptitude for the sea and commercial enterprise;
6. Government with the influence and inclination to dominate the sea.

Mahan distinguished a key region of the world in the Eurasian context, namely, the Central Zone of Asia lying between 30° and 40° north and stretching from Asia Minor to Japan (Mahan, 1920a). In this zone independent countries still survived – Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, China, and Japan. Mahan regarded those countries, located between Britain and Russia, as if between "Scylla and Charybdis". Of the two monsters – Britain and Russia – it was the latter that Mahan considered more threatening to the fate of Central Asia. Mahan was impressed by Russia's transcontinental size and strategically favorable position for southward expansion. Therefore, he found it necessary for the Anglo-Saxon "sea power" to resist Russia (Mahan, 1920b).

Lea (1912) described that the entire Anglo-Saxon race faced a threat from German (Teuton), Russian (Slav), and Japanese expansionism: The "fatal" relationship of Russia, Japan, and Germany "has now assumed through the urgency of natural forces a coalition directed against the survival of Saxon supremacy." Lea believed that while Japan moved against Far East and Russia against India, the Germans would strike at England, the center of the British Empire.

Two famous Security Advisors from the cold war period, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, argued to continue the United States geopolitical focus on Eurasia and, particularly on Russia, despite the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War.

Kissinger argued against the belief that with the dissolution of the USSR, hostile intentions had come to an end and traditional foreign policy considerations no longer applied. "They would argue...that Russia, regardless of who govern it, sits astride the territory Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical heartland, and is the heir to one of the most potent imperial traditions." Therefore the United States must "maintain the global balance of power vis-a-vis the country with a long history of expansionism" (Kissinger, 1994).

After Russia, the second geopolitical threat remained was Germany and, as Mackinder had feared ninety years ago, its partnership with Russia. During the Cold War, Kissinger argues, both sides of the Atlantic recognized that, "unless America is organically involved in Europe, it would be obliged to involve itself later under circumstances far less favorable to both sides of the Atlantic. That is even more true today. Germany has

become so strong that existing European institutions cannot by themselves strike a balance between Germany and its European partners. Nor can Europe, even with Germany, manage by itself...Russia." Thus Kissinger belied it is in no country's interest that Germany and Russia should fixate on each other as a principal partner. Without America, Britain and France cannot cope with Germany and Russia; and "without Europe, America could turn...into an island off the shores of Eurasia" (Kissinger, 1994).

Spykman's vision of Eurasia was strongly confirmed: "Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia's two principal spheres—Europe and Asia—remains a good definition of strategic danger for America. Cold War or no Cold War. For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily. The main interest of the American leaders is maintaining the balance of power in Eurasia (Kissinger, 1994).

Zbigniew Brzezinski described the American triumph in the Cold War in terms of control over Eurasia: for the first time ever, a "non-Eurasian" power had emerged as a key arbiter of "Eurasian" power relations and integrated Eurasian geostrategy (Brzezinski, 1997). Although the power configuration underwent a revolutionary change, Brzezinski confirmed three years later, Eurasia was still a megacontinent (Brzezinski, 2000). Like Spykman, Brzezinski acknowledges that: "Cumulatively, Eurasia's power vastly overshadows America's" (Brzezinski, 1997).

"Europe and Asia are politically and economically powerful.... It follows that... American foreign policy must...employ its influence in Eurasia in a manner that creates a stable continental equilibrium, with the United States as the political arbiter.... Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played, and that struggle involves geo-strategy – the strategic management of geopolitical interests.... But in the meantime it is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America... For America the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia...and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained" (Brzezinski, 1997).

Germany. Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), influenced by thinkers such as Darwin and zoologist Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, published several papers, among which was the essay "Lebensraum" (1901) concerning biogeography. Ratzel created a foundation for the German variant of geopolitics, geopolitik. Influenced by the American geostrategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, Ratzel wrote of aspirations for German naval reach, agreeing that sea power was self-sustaining, as the profit from trade would pay for the merchant marine, unlike land power.

The geopolitical theory of Ratzel has been criticized as being too sweeping, and his interpretation of human history and geography being too simple and mechanistic. Critically, he also underestimated the importance of social organization in the development of power (Tuathail, 2006).

France. French geographer and geopolitician Jacques Ancel is considered to be the first theoretician of geopolitics in France, and gave a notable series of lectures at the European Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Paris.

In the mid-1970s, Yves Lacoste, a French geographer who was directly inspired by Ancel, creates a new school of geopolitics (if not so far the first French school of geopolitics as Ancel was very isolated in the 1930s–40s). While rejecting the generalizations and broad abstractions employed by the German and Anglo-American traditions (and the new geographers), this school does focus on spatial dimension of geopolitics affairs on different levels of analysis. This approach emphasises the importance of multi-level (or multi-scales) analysis and maps at the opposite of critical geopolitics which avoid such tools. Lacoste proposed that every conflict (both local or global) can be considered from a perspective grounded in three assumptions:

1. Representation: Each group or individuals is the product of an education and is characterized by specific representations of the world or others groups or individuals. Thus, basic societal beliefs are grounded in their ethnicity or specific location. The study of representation is a common point with the more contemporary critical geopolitics. Both are connected with the work of Henri Lefebvre (*La production de l'espace*, first published in 1974)

2. Diachronie. Conducting an historical analysis confronting "long periods" and short periods as the prominent French historian Fernand Braudel suggested.

3. Diatopie: Conducting a cartographic survey through a multiscale mapping.

Connected with this stream, the French geographer Michel Foucher developed a long term analysis of international borders.

More or less connected with this school, Stephane Rosiere can be quoted as the editor in Chief of the online journal *L'Espace politique* (Devetak et al., 2012). This journal created in 2007 became the most prominent French journal of political geography and Geopolitics with *Hydrodote*.

A much more conservative stream is personified by Francois Thual. Thual was a French expert in geopolitics, and a former official of the Ministry of Civil Defence. Thual taught geopolitics of the religions at the French War College, and has written thirty books devoted mainly to geopolitical method and its application to various parts of the world. He is particularly interested in the Orthodox, Shiite, and Buddhist religions, and in

troubled regions like the Caucasus. Connected with Thual, Aymeric Chauprade, former professor of geopolitics at the French War College and now member of the extreme-right party "Front national", subscribes to a supposed "new" French school of geopolitics which advocates above all a return to realpolitik and "clash of civilization" (Huntington). Chauprade is a supporter of a Europe of nations, he advocates a European Union excluding Turkey, and a policy of compromise with Russia and supports the idea of a multipolar world—including a balanced relationship between China and the U.S.

Russia. In the 1990s a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Vadim Tsymbursky (1957-2009), coined the term "island-Russia" and developed the "Great Limitrophe" concept.

Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov (retired), a Russian geopolitics specialist of the early XXI century, headed the Academy of Geopolitical Problems which analyzes the international and domestic situations and develops geopolitical doctrine. Earlier, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov headed the Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

Vladimir Karyakin, leading researcher at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, has proposed the term "geopolitics of the third wave" (Kariakin, 2013).

Geopolitics today

The author considers that the geopolitics paradigms today are quite different than in XIX and XX century. The most important factors today are: the new economic reality related mainly to the technology development, the new environmental reality related mainly to climate change, diminishing natural resources and over-population, and the new political reality – multi-polar world.

What still remains unchanged is that Eurasia is, as always has been, the geopolitical center of the world and in order USA to keep its world political leadership, it should not allow any Eurasian power to rise. In this scope, USA should always prevent Russia and China the two greatest Eurasian powers from getting too strong. To do this USA rely on its allies and mainly on UK, Japan and EU.

Geopolitics and China – Belt and Road Initiative

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a leading indicator of the scale of China's global ambitions. The intent behind the initiative is economic and political and raised significant concern in Japan and United States.

In the context of the classical geopolitics paradigms of XX century, China's initiative is a trial to gain influence in the direction East Asia-Central Asia-Middle East-Eastern Europe/Africa – which is of great importance for controlling Eurasia. This is an area where Russian influence diminished after the collapse of Soviet Union. In this sense, BRI can be consider a geopolitical strategy of China – to increase influence in Central Asia after withdrawal of Russia in direct rivalry with USA and western powers.

Originally conceptualized as a "going out" strategy to develop productive outlets for domestic overcapacity and to diversify China's foreign asset holdings, Beijing later branded the effort as its "Belt and Road Initiative." While the initiative began with a predominantly economic focus, it has taken on a greater security profile over time.

China's initiative has attracted interest from over 150 countries and international organizations in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. This is due, in part, to the fact that the initiative is meeting a need and filling a void left by international financial institutions (IFI) as they shifted away from hard infrastructure development. But there is a real possibility that the BRI will follow in the footsteps of the IFIs, encounter the same problems, and falter.

The initiative has a blend of economic, political, and strategic agendas that play out differently in different countries, which is illustrated by China's approach to resolving debt, accepting payment in cash, commodities, or the lease of assets. The strategic objectives are particularly apparent when it comes to countries where the investment aligns with China's strategy of developing its access to ports that abut key waterways.

Japan has long played a quiet but leading role in providing alternative options for recipient countries in need of capital-intensive infrastructure investment. Recently, Tokyo has undertaken significant reforms to elevate its ability to both compete with and complement BRI projects.

China's investments in strategically sensitive ports and its development of an overseas military base in Djibouti are of great concern to the United States. U.S. policymakers should adapt American strategy to respond to BRI. Some scholars believe that the right strategy is to multilateralize efforts, while others argue that it is to promote a race-to-the-top dynamic vis-à-vis China.

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