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.

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.

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.

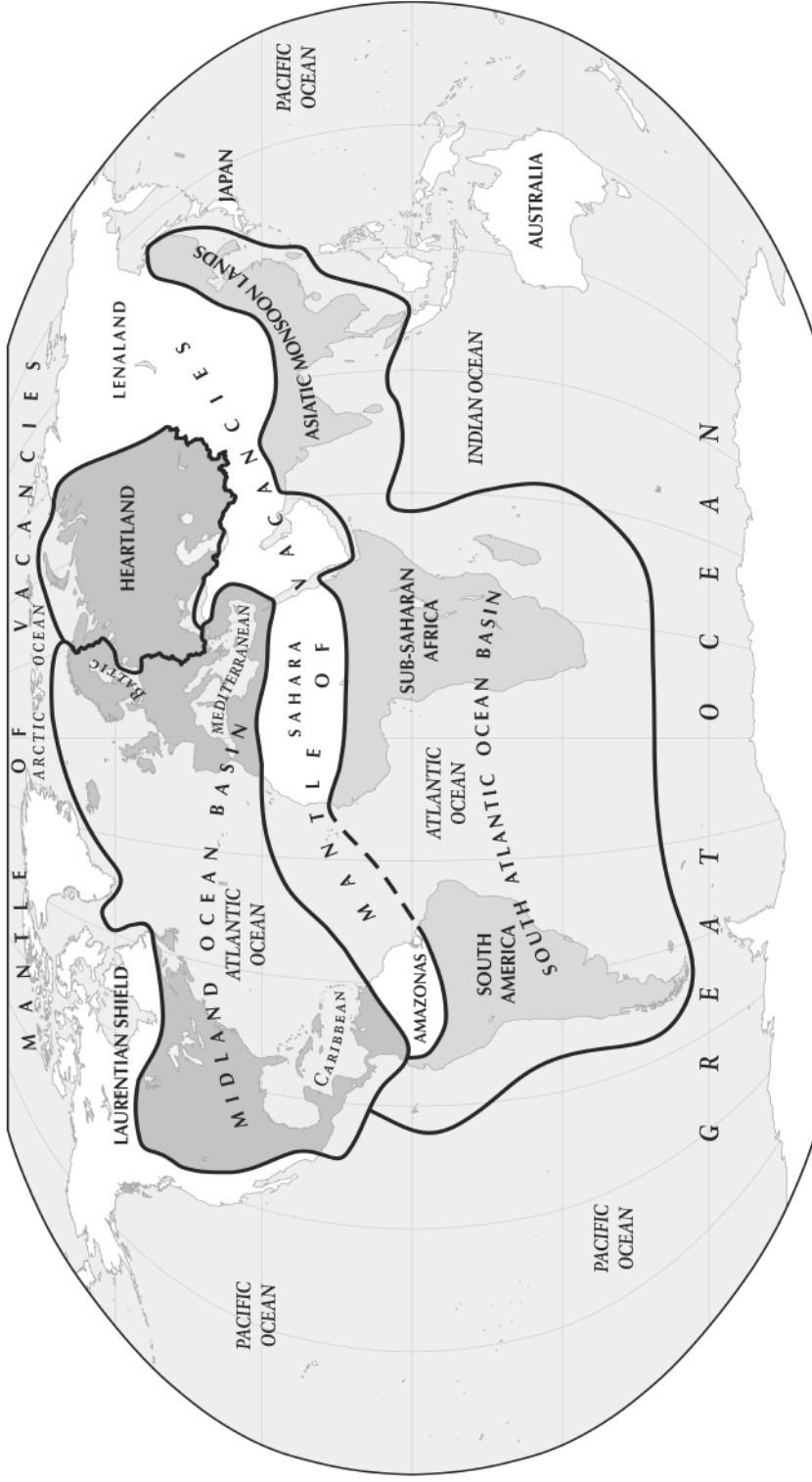**Figure 2.2. Mackinder's World: 1919**
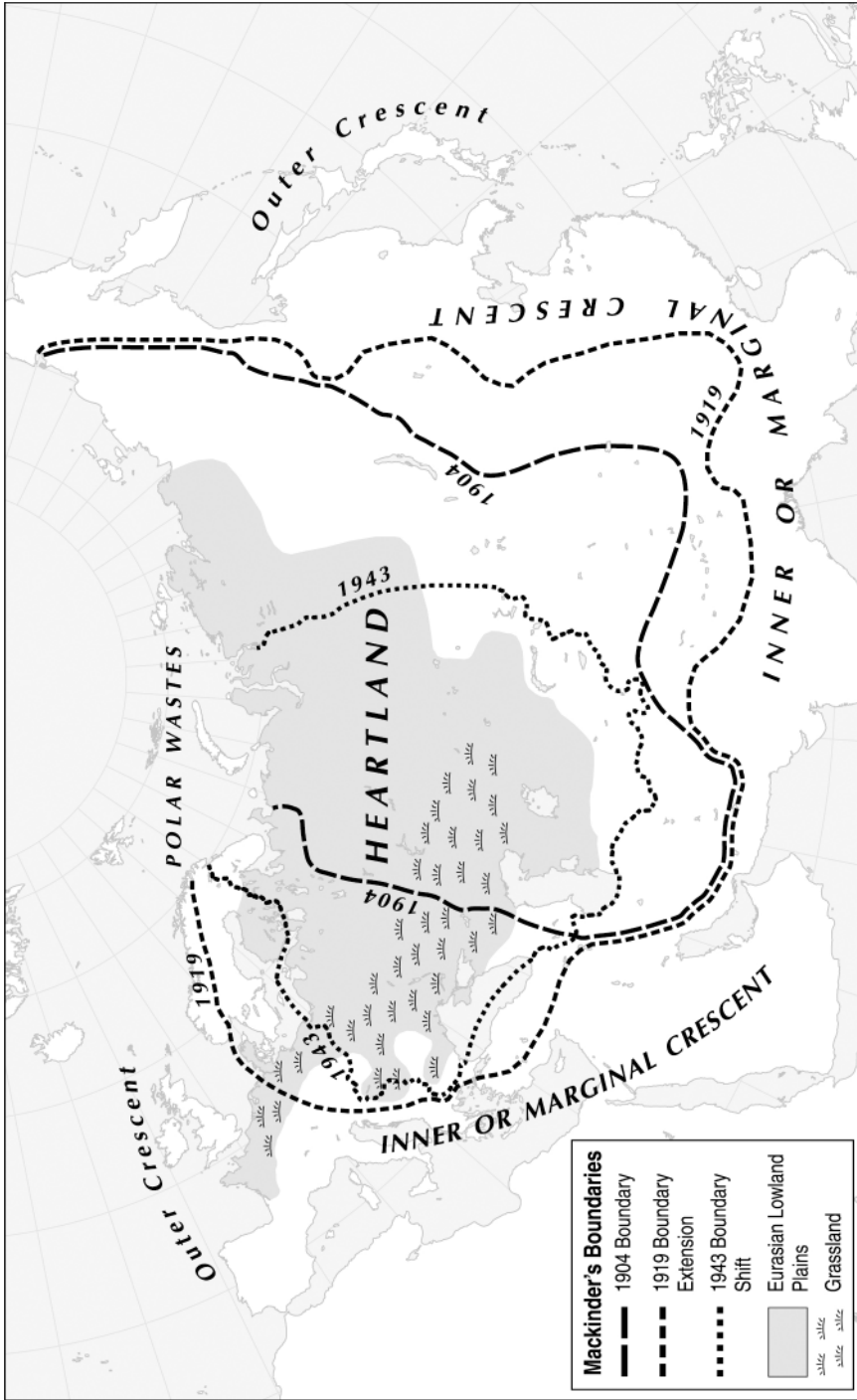
Figure 2.3. Mackinder's World: 1943

Figure 2.4. Changing Heartland Boundaries

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]

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