

primary shaper of geopolitical relations—a view reinforced by the current focus of great powers, especially the United States, on regional trade pacts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Still another approach is Robert Kaplan's geopolitics of anarchy. From the perspective of a world divided into the rich North and the poor South, Kaplan concludes that the South,

especially Africa, is doomed to anarchy and chaos. His map of the future, dubbed the “last map,” is an “ever mutating representation of chaos.” He argues that only the United States has the power to stabilize the world system, pushing back the spreading autocratic tide and standing up to Islamic antimodernism.<sup>45</sup>

None of these three scenarios has come to pass. In most cases, the overthrow of Communist regimes has not led to stable, free-market economies. The restraints upon the unilateral application of US military, economic, and political power are evident from the failures to gain US objectives in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Haiti, while a geopolitics of chaos gives inadequate attention to the systemic regional and global forces that keep turbulence in check and absorb its positive aspects into the system.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER 3

# Geopolitical Structure and Theory

The subjects of this chapter are the geopolitical structures that are formed by the interaction of geographical and political forces and the developmental processes that guide the changes that take place within those structures. Geopolitical structures are composed of geopolitical patterns and features. “Pattern” refers to the shape, size, and physical/human geographical characteristics of the geopolitical units and the networks that tie them together, and these distinguish geopolitical units from other units. Features are the political-geographical nodes, areas, and boundaries that contribute to the unit’s uniqueness and influence its cohesiveness and other measures of its structural effectiveness.

For the most part, geopolitical structures are organized along the following hierarchically ordered spatial levels:

1. the geostrategic realm—the most extensive level, or macro level;
2. the geopolitical region—a subdivision of the realm that represents the middle level, or meso level;
3. national states, highly autonomous regions, quasi states, and territorial subdivisions within and across states at the lowest level, or micro level.

Outside of this ordering of structures are regions or clusters of states that are not located within the realm or regional frameworks. These include regions such as shatterbelts, whose internal fragmentation is intensified by pressures of major powers from competing realms; compression zones, which are even more severely torn apart by internal divisions and the interference of neighboring states within the region; and gateways, which serve as bridges between realms, regions, or states. Convergence zones are regions caught between realms and whose ultimate status is yet to be determined.

The maturity of a geopolitical structure is reflected in the extent to which its patterns and features support the unit’s political cohesiveness. The developmental approach posits that structures evolve through successive stages—from atomization/undifferentiation to differentiation, specialization, and, finally, specialized integration. Revolutionary or cataclysmic breaks in the process may result in de-development and the beginning of the cycle anew. Another result of such breaks could be rapid movement to a higher stage.

## Structure

### GEOGRAPHICAL SETTINGS

The earth's two major physical/human geographical settings are the maritime and the continental. These settings provide the arenas for the development of distinctive geopolitical structures. The civilizations, cultures, and political institutions that have evolved within these two settings are fundamentally different in their economies, human cultures and traditions, spirit, and geopolitical outlooks.

Maritime settings are exposed to the open sea, either from coastal reaches or from inland areas with access to the seas. The vast majority of peoples who live there have benefited from climates with moderate temperatures and adequate rainfall and ease of contact with other parts of the world, often behind the protective screen of inland physical barriers. Sea trade and immigration have flourished in such settings, contributing to the diversity of their peoples in terms of race, culture, and language. They have also sped up the process of economic specialization. The trading and other systems of exchange that have emerged from this specialization have had open, politically liberalizing effects. Of the world's major and regional powers, only the United States has direct access to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Caribbean Sea. Much of its interior is linked to these waters by the Great Lakes and the Mississippi and Missouri inland waterway systems.

Continental settings are characterized by extreme climates and vast distances from the open seas. Such settings often suffer from lack of intensive interaction with other parts of the world because of the barrier effects of mountains, deserts, and high plateaus or because of sheer distance. Historically, their economies have been more self-sufficient than maritime ones, while their political systems, more isolated from new influences and ideas, tend to develop as closed and autocratic.

Urbanization and industrialization have come much later to the continental arena than to the maritime one. The lag continues in the present postindustrial age. While maritime areas have forged ahead by generating and diffusing high-technology innovations, many continental areas remain heavily rural or are characterized by aging industrial bases that drag down the economies of their urban areas.

Geopolitical structures are shaped by two forces—the centrifugal and the centripetal. At the national level, both are linked to the psychobiological sense of territoriality.<sup>1</sup> The centrifugal force is the drive for political separation that motivates a people to seek territorial separation from those whom they consider outsiders, who might impose different political systems, languages, cultures, or religions upon them. In this context, space with clear boundaries serves as a defining and a defensive mechanism. The centripetal force promotes the drive for political unity that is reinforced by a people's sense of being inextricably linked to a particular territory. Such territoriality is expressed through symbolic as well as physical ties of a people to a particular land.

At one geographical scale, forces of separation may dominate, while forces for unity may prevail at another scale. Thus, centrifugal forces may drive a people to secede from another state in order to protect their unique identity. Immigration into countries by groups which either resist or are excluded from cultural and national absorption are also likely to have a centrifugal effect. At the same time, centripetal forces may propel nations toward a unity of regional action in such areas as commerce, military defense, or confederation with another state.

While drives for separation and unity are intertwined, they are not always in balance. The imperialist system that kept its form of world balance was destroyed by World War II. Global



disequilibrium then followed. Balance was restored when a unifying Europe and a recovering Japan joined in strategic alliance with the United States to counter the Soviet-Chinese drive for Communist world hegemony.

The flow of ideas, migrations, trade, capital, communications, and arms takes place beyond, as well as within, the different structural levels of realm, region, and state. States may move from one level to another. Such change reflects the interplay of political power and ideological, economic, cultural, racial, religious, and national forces, as well as national security concerns and territorial ambitions. The geopolitical restructuring subsequent to the end of the Cold War is testimony to this dynamism. Demise of the former Soviet Union widened the opportunity for China to emerge as leader of an independent geostrategic realm, combining continental and maritime characteristics, thus enhancing Beijing's role in world affairs. The collapse of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has provided Nigeria with an opening to expand its role as a regional power, thereby extending its influence from West into Central Africa. However, Nigeria has not been able to exploit this opening because of the widening divisions and fighting between its Muslim north and Christian south. The rift has been exacerbated by the terrorist actions of Boko Haram, the Islamist jihadist movement of the north.

The Iraq War has strengthened Iran's position as a regional power, with the potential for becoming the leader of the Shiite eastern half of the Middle East. At the same time, the war in Afghanistan has played a major role in weakening the already vulnerable central government of Pakistan because it has led to the emergence of a Pashtun-based Pakistani Taliban.

## GEOPOLITICAL FEATURES

Despite variations in function and scale, all structures have certain geopolitical features in common:

*Historic or Nuclear Cores.* These are the areas in which states originate and out of which the state idea has developed. The relationship between the physical environment of the core and the political-cultural system that evolves may become embedded and persist as an important element of national or regional identity and ideology.

*Capitals or Political Centers.* Capitals serve as the political and symbolic focus of activities that govern the behavior of people in politically defined territories. While its functions may be essentially administrative, the built landscape of a national capital—its architectural forms, buildings, monuments, and layout—has considerable symbolic value in mobilizing support for the state. Capitals may be selected for a variety of reasons—for their geographic centrality to the rest of the national space, for the defensive qualities of their sites, or for their frontier locations, either as defensive points or springboards for territorial acquisition.

*Ecumenes.* These are the areas of greatest density of population and economic activity. Ecumenes have traditionally been created and expanded by dense transportation networks to reflect economic concentration. In today's postindustrial information age, the boundaries of ecumenes can be expanded to include areas that are linked by modern telecommunications, and therefore ecumenes are less tied to transportation clustering. Because the ecumene is the most advanced portion of the state economically as well as its most populous sector, it is usually the state's most important political area.

*Effective National Territory (ENT) and Effective Regional Territory (ERT).* These are moderately populated areas with favorable resource bases. As areas of high development