

## Briefing Idea of Geopolitics

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### ABSTRACT

Geopolitical diversity holds an undeniable allure, leading to the categorization of publications into four 'schools': neo-classical geopolitics, subversive geopolitics, non-geopolitics, and critical geopolitics, each exploring different dimensions of geopolitical dynamics. These schools distinguish themselves based on their proximity to the studied object (practical/applied or academic/reflective) and their stance toward the state system (focusing on states as principal actors or acknowledging other political actors and interests). Despite their differences, these studies collectively demonstrate a growing interest in geo-economics. Various thinkers, including Mackinder, Spykman, Collins, and Ratzel, have formulated these theories using terms like Heartland, Rimland, inland, outerland, enclave, and exclave. Notably, Bangladesh, as a developing country, is geopolitically strengthening its position in world politics.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Defining Geopolitics proves challenging, leading to the proposal of two foundational working definitions. According to certain political geographers, Geopolitics encompasses (1) an analytical approach using data on a country's international position in light of its geographical features; (2) a set of rules guiding statecraft based on such analyses; and (3) a discourse that describes and assesses a country's global position, often rooted in these analyses and rule application. Nations commonly adopt popular theories, such as the USA embracing Mahan's theory and Germany aligning with Friedrich Ratzel's Organic improvement theory, to enhance their national image and safeguard their interests.

### **Objectives**

1. Explore different dimensions of geopolitical dynamics.
2. Examine theories formulated by thinkers like Mackinder, Spykman, Collins, and Ratzel, Gray, Mahan, Bush, Haushofer.
3. Understand terms such as Heartland, Rimland, Inland, Sutherland, enclave, exclave, Island, sea power theory, and theory of preemptive strikes.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the four identified schools of geopolitics differ in their approaches to studying geopolitical dynamics?
2. What commonalities and differences exist among the theories formulated by geopolitical thinkers and how do these theories contribute to our understanding of global politics?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Method**

#### *Secondary Data*

Briefings and research reports generated by both national and international research organizations such as IGES, GIGS, PAGEO, IIGS, BIG, Hugo Observatory, books, daily newspapers, etc.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The inception of Geopolitics**

Geopolitics lacks a precise origin, but if we turn to Western holy texts, its roots can be traced back to the early days of humanity. Although it likely

existed among ancient tribes, there is no recorded evidence. Pinpointing an exact beginning is challenging, so let's examine significant historical instances. An intriguing exploration of geopolitics involves the incessant conflicts among Italian city-states millennia ago. While not globally widespread, political disputes and the ambitions of specific leaders led to both alliances and warfare. Surprisingly, during the conquests and expansion of the Roman Empire, geopolitics became less conspicuous. The empire's leaders were not always preoccupied with geopolitical considerations, and even the distant territories under their rule were often entrusted to governors without significantly impacting daily life in Rome. In 1997, Russian political scientist Aleksandr Dugin and military general Nikolai Klokotov co-authored "Foundations of Geopolitics," a significant text outlining Russia's strategy to establish dominance over the Western world. This influential work shaped Russia's international and geopolitical approach for the subsequent two decades. Key themes within the book emphasized the importance of political subtlety over confrontation, the strategic application of "soft" power for global influence, and the infiltration of Western governments and affiliated institutions.

### **Explaining the Meaning of Geo-politics**

Geopolitics involves assessing the strategic significance of land and sea areas in the context of a nation's economic and military strength. It explores the interaction between global political relations and the specific territorial and environmental backdrop in which they unfold. This field encompasses analyzing, prescribing, forecasting, and utilizing political power within a designated territory, employing geographic information and concepts to achieve political objectives. The theory of "Geopolitics" is characterized by its broad scope, romantic obscurity, intellectual laxity, and potential to incite global conflicts. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, geography is the scientific study of Earth's surface, analyzing spatial variations in physical, biological, and human phenomena. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of these elements and their significant regional patterns, with a focus on understanding people and their relationship with the environment, as well as regional analysis that underscores the process of region-building.

### **Geopolitical Component**

Geopolitical variables typically encompass factors such as geographical location, size, climate, topography, demography, natural resources, and technological development of the involved countries. Additionally, considerations extend to political geography, international relations, and the territorial aspects of political science and international law.

### **Geographical Branches and the Study of Geopolitics**

Geography encompasses various branches, including agricultural, anthropogeography, cultural, economic, electoral, historical, human, industrial, Marxist, medical, macro, micro, social, rural, urban, welfare, and political

geography. Consequently, Geopolitics plays a crucial role in international politics.

### **Examining and Analyzing the Practical Aspects of Geopolitics**

Several thoughts and theories exist, with the most significant ones outlined below:

1. Neoclassical Geopolitics
2. Subversive Geopolitics
4. Non-Geopolitics
5. Critical Geopolitics

### **The Heartland Theory by Halford J. Mackinder**

Mackinder presented a conceptualization of the world divided into three strategic zones: 1. Pivot-zone or Heartland, 2. Inner-crescent, and 3. Outer-crescent. He cautioned that dominance over the heartland could serve as the foundation for global control, either by a single continental power or a coalition. Post-World War I, Mackinder refined his 1904 ideas, formulating a concise expression: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules World-Island commands the world." In this context, the heartland represents the central point of Eurasia, the outer is a seaport, and the inner denotes another part of the continent.



Figure 1. Central Point of Eurasia  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

### **The Rimland Theory by Nicolas Spykman**

He underscores the interconnectedness of global politics and the unity of the world's oceans. Spykman adjusted Mackinder's framework regarding the Heartland and Rimland relationship, asserting that "Control of the Rimland dictates Eurasia's fate, and mastery of Eurasia shapes global destinies." This concept is evident in the genesis of Containment, a post-World War II U.S. strategy aimed at halting the expansion of Soviet influence.

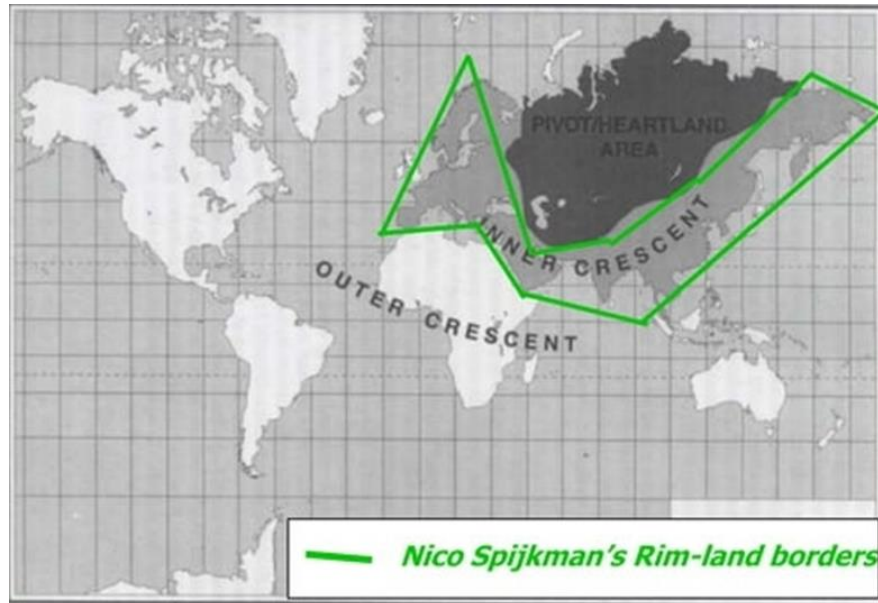


Figure 2. The concept is Evident in the Genesis of Containment  
Source: GIGS

### Island Theory proposed by Gray

He expressed the idea that dominion over the World-Island of Eurasia-Africa by a sole power equates to control over both land and sea powers converging in the Eurasian-African Rimlands and marginal seas. While ruling these areas doesn't signify mastery over the entire World Island, it does imply preventing eventual global dominance by the Heartland power, namely the Soviet Union.

### Expansion Theory by Randall Collins

His most recent Geopolitical theory underscores five key principles concerning the causal process: 1) territorial expansion is favored by size and resource advantage; 2) territorial expansion is favored by Geopolitical or 'marchland' advantage; 3) overextension leads to disintegration; 4) the interaction of geopolitical disadvantages; and 5) interconnectedness driven by a cumulative dynamic. In this context, expansion refers to strengthening control over neighboring countries.

### Organic Theory by Friedrich Ratzel

German Geopolitik is characterized by the notion that a state's existence mirrors that of living beings, guided by scientific determinism and Social Darwinism. It extensively explores the concept of Lebensraum (living space), positing it as essential for a nation's development, akin to the importance of a favorable natural environment for animals. Ratzel formulated the organic theory of the state, treating it as a biological organism with its territory as its body, suggesting that states follow biological laws in their behavior and existence. Ratzel's Swiss disciple, Rudolf Kjellen, expanded on these ideas, proposing that states must adopt five complementary policy types – Economik, Demopolitik, Sociopolitik, Kratopolitik, and Geopolitik – to become powerful.

Unfortunately, Hitler's drastic misapplication of this theory during WWII in Germany led to extensive destruction.



Figure 3. Organic Theory  
Source: BIG

### **The Sea Power Theory by Alfred Thayer Mahan**

Sea power, beyond its military aspect, denotes a nation's capacity to safeguard its political, economic, and military interests by asserting control over the sea. It encompasses naval power, ocean science, ocean industry, and ocean commerce. In peacetime, sea power involves commercial competition, while in wartime, it involves diplomatic strategies and fleet confrontations. Mahan's theoretical foundation, influenced by Antoine-Henri Jomini, focuses on strategic locations and measurable fleet fighting power. He identified six prerequisites for a nation to possess sea power: advantageous geography, viable coastlines, abundant resources, favorable climate, sufficient territory, a sizable population for defense, a maritime-savvy society, and a government capable of sea dominance.

### **Theory of Preemptive Strikes by Bush**

George Walker Bush's doctrine advocates safeguarding national interests in Geopolitics through: 1. Employing preemptive strikes against potential foes, 2. Facilitating democratic regime change aligned with similar ideologies, 3. Engaging in preventive wars, 4. Deposing foreign regimes perceived as potential threats, and 5. Pursuing U.S. military interests unilaterally. These principles were applied in conflicts involving Iraq and Afghanistan, and there are attempts to apply them to Iran. Similarly, Israel has utilized this approach against Lebanon and Palestine.



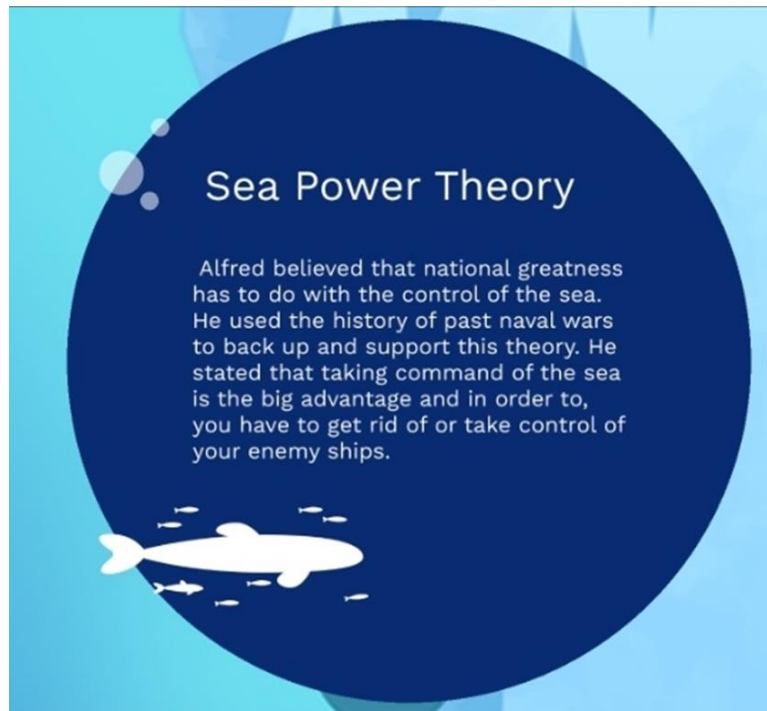


Figure 4. Sea Power Theory  
Source: PAGEO

### **The Geopolitics of Haushofer**

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), a military general, geographer, geologist, and historian, played a significant role in shaping German Geopolitics. Drawing inspiration from Mackinder's Heartland theory and incorporating ideas from Ratzel and Kjellen about space and the organic state, Haushofer founded the "Institute of Geopolitics" in Munich after World War I. As a key figure in the Third Reich, he saw German control of the Heartland as crucial for Nazi global dominance. Haushofer's geopolitical principles guided Nazi leaders in expanding their influence, leading to specific applications during World War II, as Germany pursued world command according to Mackinder's formula.

### **Nazi Geopolitics**

Gain control over the Heartland by first conquering Eastern Europe and then launching an attack on Russia. The significance of Britain and America is diminished. Japan served as a crucial ally in the conquest of China and Southeast Asia. The leaders of Nazi Germany held a misguided perception of the strength of Russia.

### **Cold War Geopolitics**

The Soviet Union exerted influence over Eastern Europe and the Heartland, leading to concerns in the Western world about the potential domino effect of communism spreading. This influenced the formulation of the Rim-Land theory by Spijkman, the containment policy by Kennan, and the development of Realpolitik by Kissinger.

### **Post-Cold War Geopolitics**

Zbigniew Brzezinski asserts that the Soviet Union's downfall resulted from its ineffective economic system rather than benefiting from its strategic position. Certain former Soviet states, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, boast abundant natural resources, particularly in oil and gas. He predicts that Eurasia will continue to be a zone marked by resource conflicts. Additionally, the destruction of the Soviet Union is viewed as a psychological disaster for Russia.

### **Critical Geopolitics**

Intellectuals in statecraft shape perceptions of places, influencing political behaviors and policy choices, thereby shaping public views of place and politics. The state's strategic positioning, whether on land, sea, or in space, is crucial for achieving its objectives. Why is Geopolitics significant in state policy? The discussion emphasizes that Geopolitics is pivotal in crafting a national image on the global stage. Mastering Geopolitics ensures security, peace, and triumph; for instance, the United States must dominate the seas to safeguard its security.

### **World Geopolitical Order**

Interstate policy experiences temporary periods of stability in Geopolitics, where global politics unfold. The Geopolitical power controller can manifest as Unipolar (unilateralism), Bipolar, or Multi-polar. Despite changes, individual states remain pivotal in shaping the future Geopolitical world order. The Cold War, a key feature of the bipolar era, pitted the U.S.A. and allies against the Soviet Union and its satellite states, defining foreign policy for five decades. Post-Soviet Union collapse, a new Geopolitical order emerged, emphasizing connections between states, exemplified by entities like the EU. Cooperation prevailed over confrontation, reducing the nuclear war threat. While the state remained central, non-spatial forces like international terrorist organizations also gained significance.

### **Unilateralism**

The United States stands as the lone superpower, occasionally labeled a hyperpower. Allies often align with the U.S., deferring to its political decisions. Resentment towards the U.S. stems from its tendency to act unilaterally, asserting dominance across global politics through supreme command in sea power, air, space, and a modern free-market economy.

### **Bangladesh's Geopolitical Perspective on the World Stage**

Bangladesh, despite its small size and large population, holds significant geopolitical importance in both international and regional politics within the South Asian block. Situated at a crucial naval point for India, Myanmar, China, Japan, Europe, and the United States, Bangladesh's strategic location in the Bay of Bengal enhances its influence in sea power, economics, commerce, and naval affairs. Leveraging its skilled and efficient workforce, particularly in labor, services, and garments, Bangladesh can foster strong relations with global



superpowers and their allies. Additionally, the country enjoys a positive image in the Western world, being perceived as a "moderate Muslim country" due to its commitment to peace. Cultural contributions, exemplified by prominent figures like the top cricketer Sakib Al Hasan, further elevate Bangladesh's standing in international and global politics.

### **Geopolitics & War**

Following World War II, geopolitics fell out of favor in geography due to its association with Nazi Germany's policy execution. Although recent years have seen a rekindled interest in geopolitics, particularly in historical-geographical thought and contemporary international relations, the term's post-war decline was evident. Historical geographers have focused on the causes of war, international diplomatic affairs, and the influence of geography on warfare. Geopolitics, originating from Greek terms for Earth and city-state, explores the connection between humanity's terrestrial home and political organization. While Rudolf Kjellén is credited with coining geopolitics, the foundational figure is Friedrich Ratzel. Initially a natural scientist, Ratzel viewed geography as a synthesis of natural and human elements. His 1897 work, "Politische Geographie," asserted that a state was akin to an organism, subject to territorial growth laws. Ratzel's ideas laid the groundwork for subsequent geopolitical theories, influencing figures like Mackinder, Bowman, and Haushofer. Examining their biographies and contexts, scholars have contributed to critical geopolitics, challenging traditional views of conflict by emphasizing the role of discourse in war presentation.

### **Understanding the Mechanisms of Geopolitics**

Geography plays a crucial role in shaping geopolitical policies, with countries often prioritizing their interests. While some policies aim for the common good, others seek to enhance the power of specific groups. Key elements of geopolitics include a nation's power and influence, territorial cohesion, resolutions, and agreements on various issues such as trade, pollution, business, education, cultural influences, and conflict resolution. Geopolitical dynamics are driven by the relationships between nations, and the more powerful a nation is, the greater its impact on global efforts. The initial geopolitical concerns often centered around borders and territories, essential for maintaining peace. Alliances between groups, especially during times of war, frequently prompt the implementation of geopolitical policies. The ongoing maintenance of positive relationships between political entities remains crucial for the effectiveness of such policies.

### **Geopolitics Examples**

As mentioned earlier, numerous instances from global history exemplify geopolitics. Geopolitical dynamics manifest in treaties, international bodies, trade and economic pacts, climate-related accords, and conflicts. Two additional notable and contemporary instances illustrating geopolitics are the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Kyoto Protocol.

### **Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific, home to rapidly growing economies, plays a pivotal geostrategic role by linking the Atlantic Ocean and the Asia-Pacific region. China, over the past decade, has expanded its maritime influence, notably through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and tensions with Taiwan, altering the region's security landscape. India, alarmed by China's heightened presence in the Indian Ocean and strengthened ties with Pakistan, has responded by actively engaging in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The US, sharing concerns about China's actions, has raised alarms on both bilateral and international fronts, including within NATO's Strategic Concept. Amidst these strategic dynamics, critical sea trade routes connecting the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia to Europe and the US face potential disruption, impacting global trade and oil transportation. The EU, despite being China's second-largest trading partner, has maintained a consistent stance since March 2019. In its March 2022 Strategic Compass, the EU expressed serious concerns about China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, following up with its first Indo-Pacific strategy on September 16, 2021.

### **New Geopolitics**

We find ourselves amidst a period of global instability and change. The years from 1815 to 1914 marked British hegemony, followed by tumultuous events like two world wars and the Great Depression between 1914 and 1945. Post-World War II, the United States emerged as the new hegemon, initiating the Cold War with the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1989. The era from 1989 to around 2008 was considered a unipolar world, with the U.S. as the dominant superpower. Currently, we are navigating a new geopolitical landscape, and various theories attempt to explain it. There are five major theories on present geopolitics. The Hegemonic Stability Theory suggests the U.S. is the dominant power, challenged by rising China and Russia. The Hegemonic Competition Theory, or Thucydides' Trap theory, likens the U.S.-China rivalry to ancient Sparta and Athens. Hegemonic Decline theory posits that the U.S. is no longer a global stabilizer, echoing the British decline after World War I. Realist theory sees global politics as shaped by great powers, including China, the U.S., the EU, Russia, and India. Lastly, Multilateralist theory advocates global cooperation, often seen as idealistic but argued to be more realistic than Realist theory. While there are other geopolitical approaches, like Marxist theories, core-periphery theory, and clash-of-civilizations theory, for brevity, I'll focus on the three hegemonic theories, realism, and multilateralism.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In essence, "Geopolitics" pertains to the political geography on a grand scale, focusing on nations and international relations. The theories of Mackinder's Heartland or Rimland and Mahan's Sea Power, while conflicting, play a role in shaping the geopolitical perspective, which has evolved from supporting conquest to a more inclusive understanding of diverse cultures and their interaction with political elements at national and state levels. The relationship between nations and states, often uneasy, leads to political

tensions, especially when enclaves or exclaves with culturally similar populations are involved, giving rise to movements such as "nationalism".

### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations so further research on the topic is still needed "Briefing Idea of Geopolitics."

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