

Week 1 - What is Geopolitics?

FIRST HOUR

Geographical metaphors

- **Global North** - industrialised countries
- Cold war - **1st (West), 2nd (Soviet) & 3rd worlds** (developing countries)
- Ronald Regan - **evil empire** of 2nd world
- George Bush junior - axis of evil - Iran, Iraq & North Korea- rogue states

Some key issues in this course

- Geopolitical conflicts from the late 1800s to present (and beyond-towards Astropolitics?)
- Ebbs and flows: Global territorialisation and de-territorialisation from the 1800s through the '30 Years war' and the Cold War in the 20th C. (1st & 2nd world war connected)
- Rise of China as a Great Power: towards a bipolar world? Tensions re India and Japan? **(Chinese & Indian maritime rivalry)**
- **The War on Terrorism**: the post-CW US architecture and the **'clash of civilisations'?** (Samuel Huntington)
- American Grand Strategy: **The Asia-Pacific Pivot** and the 'New Great Game'
- Globalisation and Migrants and Refugees
- **Nationalism, State Secession**: Australian Foreign and Defence Policy?
- The Geopolitics of Climate Change & Genuine Sustainability
- The Struggle for Resources: Oil and Gas reserves. Water, Arable Land (Michael Klare says its all about oil, but what about water, arable land?)
- The Geopolitics of the Oceans and Space (fish)

What's in the news this week?

- **Israel - Palestine** peace talks
- Geopolitics about maps, contest of territory, religious significance of land, clash of civilisations of Islam and Judaism, historical dimensions, conflict over resources (water & energy), return of Palestinian refugees
- Geography, history, contests over space
- **Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands** China & Japan contesting possession of Island
- Gas near the island
- **Sth China Sea- territorial claims** food security, fish, oil and gas fields (claims of ownership by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Philippines)
- Geopolitically much trade comes through, codes of conduct developed
- **Spratlys & Scarborough shoal** becoming militarised, to reinstate their claim
- **Ice shrinkage in the Arctic** North pole claimed by Russia, Canada & Greenland
- **Gaza and Eastern Ukraine 14** want independence from Ukraine

This week

- **Syria Refugee Crisis** Want to create an IS free zone
- Kurds fighting for independence, consider PKK of Turkish govt a terrorist organisation

Week 1 - What is Geopolitics?

What is Geopolitics?

“Inescapable Geography”-Colin Grey

- All politics is geopolitics
- All strategy is geo-strategy
- Geography is ‘out there’ objectively as **environment or ‘terrain’**
- Geography is also ‘within us’ in here, as **imagined spatial relationships** (Middle East - oil, desert) - knowing what is in that area
- A geography of time
- The map - the **God’s eye view of the world**
- Growing of what was on the other side of the planet w maps which encouraged geopolitics

What is geopolitics? An introduction

- Derives from the study of human geography
- **(Human geography)** “as a **description and synthesis of the physical and social aspects of a region**” (Flint 2006, in your reader p 12)
- (Human geography) “**Systematic study of what makes places unique and the connections and interactions between places**” (Knox and Marston, 1998, 2. in Flint 2006)
- **Interaction betw humans & land:** sources or destinations of capital, race to the bottom in Bangladesh

Physical and cultural geography

- **Physical geography** covers the topics relating to the **surface of the earth - the landforms and continents, glaciers, rivers, climate, oceans, earth-sun interaction, hazards, and more**
- Physical geography can be changed through economic and/or political intervention (Geopolitics)
- **Cultural geography** covers **human interaction with the land.**
- Cultural geography can include language, religion, medicine, cities, economics, entertainment
- Relationship between physical geography and cultural geography political (Geopolitics)

Places and spaces (Geopolitics)

- Three key factors re places: (Agnew 1987)
- **Location**
- **Locale** (institutions)
- **Sense of Place** (identity function of multiple membership - gender, race, social class, nationality to give sense of belonging)

Two key factors re geopolitics

- **Spaces- (Human Geography)** “ **The study of the spatial organisation of human activity**” (Knox and Marston, 1998, 2 in Flint 2006) [economic, political and social] **not having a rowdy party in the library**

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- **Politics of Scale (geopolitics)** politics between states and within communities

Spaces & Places

- **Three key points re geopolitical places and spaces**
- **1) Products of human activity**, they are socially constructed. Functions of a place, institutions within it, and its character stem from what people do.
- **2) They are dynamic**, change over time. Peoples preferences, perspective and aspirations change, translated into projects that make and remake places.
- **3) Places can really only be fully understood through their interaction with other places globally.**

Gadigal people of the Eora Nation

- Acknowledging land - geopolitical statement
- Australia considered terra nullius by Britain, now steps to recognise land, places change and identity change over time

Straight lines on maps

- **Socially constructed by British and French to divide peoples**
- Create arbitrary boundaries
- IS primarily in Sunni areas

Geopolitical borders

- Essential to Westphalian state model
- Provide identity, sense of place, borders matter even in face of globalisation
- **BORDERS EXIST AT ALL LEVELS:**
- **GATED COMMUNITIES**
- **GHETTOS**
- **NATIONS – BORDER PATROL (e.g Operation Sovereign Borders)**
- **REGIONS e.g. EU, ASEAN**

Geopolitics –Basic Themes

- People guard territory and at the same time move beyond territorial boundaries
- Boundaries are inherent in the behaviour of people whether in the form of a community, a state, or a region
- Even under globalisation or nationalism these boundary making activities continue

What is Geopolitics?

- **Geopolitics is about place and location – and about the relationships between these places and locations and the communities that occupy these places**
- **It is about borders, resources, flows, territories and identities**
- **Most importantly, it is about how these places and the interests of the communities that occupy these places influence the course of world politics.** (Spaces-politics of scale)

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*“Geopolitics refers to the theory and practice of politics at the global scale, with a specific emphasis on the geographies that both shape and result from that politics. In other words it is more than just the study of global politics (which might be in political science or international relations) it is the study of **how geography is implicated in that politics**”*

Ditmer J. and Shap, J. 2014 “Geopolitics” p3

Theories of geopolitics - origins

- From the 1600s onwards the ‘discovery’ and incorporation of the world as a single unit and the development of the territorial state as the political ideal came together to create the context for modern world Geopolitics. (Globalisation)
- “Geopolitics” began in 1899 when first coined by **Rudolf Kjellen...thinking globally on behalf of particular states was explicitly connected by formal geopolitical reasoning to their potential for acting globally.** [States naturally grow; more advanced their culture, more rights to expand its domain].

“For the first time we can perceive something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world and may seek a formula which shall express certain aspects...of geographical causation in history”

(Mackinder 1904:421 in O’Tuathail et al. 2006, 19)

[If you call the pivot area of Eurasia, can control the world]

The ‘Discovery of the world’ -Russian Imperial expansion and the ‘Great Game’ in Eurasia

- Railways to internalise communication
- Alliance betw Germany, Japan & USSR

The ‘Discovery of the world’ and the ‘scramble for Africa’ : -Colonial Africa late 1800s

- Africa claimed as Euro sovereign territory, ‘place in the sun’

Example of spatialisation- Cold War 1980

- A walled world - geopolitical territorialisation

Four Elements of Geopolitics- (S.E.C.T.)

- 1) The politics of **Sovereignty** – role of nations and states
- 2) The distribution of **Economics** – especially control of natural resources
- 3) The role of symbolic **Culture** – geographic icons (natural or constructed)
- 4) The contests around physical space – struggle for **Territory** internal and external

Three APPROACHES to Geopolitics

- **FORMAL GEOPOLITICS** – strategic studies, bureaucratic reports, foreign policy/ defence policy documents, academic studies

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- **PRACTICAL GEOPOLITICS** – political speeches, actions by state and non-state actors
- **POPULAR GEOPOLITICS** – media, culture, public opinion (critical analysis of rhetoric & statements).
- All bound by geography – geopolitics not necessarily centered on individual states (local, minority nationalisms, regional issues are all geopolitical)

Geopolitical Rhetoric Video

- **Churchill the Iron Curtain** - Iron Curtain descended on continent, Warsaw, Berlin, etc lie in the Soviet Sphere
- **Truman Doctrine** - communist policy of containment, over time capitalism would prevail
- Truman put fwd Marshall plan to rebuild Europe
- **Reagan and the Evil Empire** - morality evil empire, strong rhetoric as political cover
- **Bush and the axis of evil** - justice will be done (revenge)
- Widened scope to North Korea & Iraq constitute an axis of evil, threatening peace of world (cover going after Iraq)

Geopolitical perspectives -summary

- From a geopolitical perspective the ‘world’ is actively ‘spatialised’, divided up, labeled and sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater and lesser ‘importance’ by political leaders and others (be critical here re scale of ‘importance’, its’ a matter of perspective)
- This process provides geopolitical framing within which political leaders, political elites, academics, and mass publics act in the world in pursuit of their own identities and interests
- The modern geopolitical imagination has provided meaning and rationalisation to practice by political elites (and hegemonic powers), It has defined the “ideological space” (Wallerstein, 1991)¹
- from which the geographic categories upon which the world is organised and ‘how it works’ (how the ‘global system’ is derived).
- Historically, the geopolitical imagination was **Eurocentric** because Europe and its offshoots (Russia and US) came to dominate the world, but that may now be changing?

¹ Consider times and perspective of author - context.