Geopolitics - Exam Notes

Definitions
- Gottman defines geopolitics as “the influence of geographical factors on political action”
- Physical geography: relates to the surface of the earth
- Cultural geography: relates to human interaction with the land (language, religion, economics)
  - There is a relationship between the two
- Theories: abstractions that are systematically developed and convincing
- Geopolitical actors: international organisations and nation-states
- Deterritorialisation: doing away with territory
- Reterritorialisation: creation of new territory – redefining

Summaries

Introduction
Elements of geopolitics – SECT (a framework through which to analyse geopolitical issues)
1. The politics of sovereignty: role of nations and states
2. The distribution of economics: esp. 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

Critical geopolitics
1. Formal geopolitics: foreign policy, academic studies
2. Practical geopolitics: political speeches, actions by state and non-state actors
3. Popular geopolitics: media, culture, public opinion

Origins
- Associated with Hitler, Lebensraum and Geopolitics institute
- Karl Haushofer – leader
- Largely disappeared after WWII as was associated with Nazism

Geopolitics argues that:
- Human beings interact within a territorial dimension → territory is key
- At its most extreme it argues that globalisation doesn’t exist
- Deterritorialisation results in some form of reterritorialisation

What is Geopolitics?

Geopolitics vs. International Relations
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Geopolitics</th>
<th>IR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintains that geography/territory are central to world politics</td>
<td>Largely excludes political geography (geopolitics) and often fails to take territory into account when examining conflicts</td>
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<td>History is important</td>
<td>Places theories and methods within grand paradigms to explain world politics e.g. liberalism, Marxism, realism, constructivism</td>
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*Geopolitics looks at the contributing factors to the politics between geopolitical actors – e.g. geography

Geopolitical theories

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<th>Sir Halford Mackinder – Heartland (territory)</th>
<th>1861-1947</th>
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- “Who Rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; who rules the World Island commands the World” (in O’Tuaithaill)
- Heartland = Eurasia ➔ abundance of resources
- Control of Heartland means able to contest for world domination
- Asserts that the pivot area (Siberia and Central Asia) is key to controlling Eurasia (Dodds)
- Dodds states that he “overestimated the strategic significance of the Russian ‘heartland’” ➔ his theory is a threat against the Western World
  - Propagated a US anxiety about possible Eurasian power ➔ fuelled US’ strategy of containment in CW

Michael Klare – New Geopolitics (resources)

- 2008
- He states the world is theorised according to “the struggle over vital resources, rather than ideology or balance-of-power politics,” ➔ referred to as ‘New Geopolitics”
- Geopolitics is determined by nations trying to secure themselves natural resources, these resources yield economic and political power
- Makes us consider the motives behind political moves ➔ e.g. as Middle East has 56% of world’s oil it can be argued that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was partly to establish US presence in a world that is characterised by the looming threat of peak oil
- Klare – “whoever controls the Persian Gulf oil controls the world economy”
- Shows the need to prevent a new ‘Great Game’ from occurring by developing alternative energy resources

John A. Agnew – Place and Politics (nationalism)

- 2003
- Asserts that the world is structured according to the nationalism associated with places
- Place: location (“the role a place plays in the world”), locale (“the institutions that organise activity, politics and identity in a place”) and sense of place (“a collective identity tied to a particular place”)
- Because places have lots of different institutions “collective identity is usually multi-dimensional” and therefore the source of nationalistic driven tensions and conflicts
- He says that to understand the world we need to understand all the place sin the world – but Pringle states this gives his theory large flaws as there are many places in the world and they are “continuously evolving into something different”
- Globalisation (Shelley) – will nationalism become obsolete? ➔ Agnew says it would as globalisation is more geographically differentiating than homogenising in its effects” e.g. development of growth of Islamic Fundamentalism in wake of spread of American culture

**Thirty Years War – 1915-45**

- WWI
  - Germany wanted to rebuild empire – gain more territory
  - Germany’s two largest goals (unconquerable) were Russia and Britain
  - Competition for colonies and economic rivalry in Europe
  - New nationalism evolved ➔ due to popular education
- WWII
- Japan – subject to US oil embargo from August 1941 → 80% came from US → Pearl Harbour (7th Fleet) → wanted to cripple US in Pacific and gain oil resources elsewhere
- Only with attack on Pearl Harbour did US decide to commit forces

**Geopolitical approach**
- Geopolitical environment is dominated by this struggle for power in Eurasia – politics (war and diplomacy)
- Geopolitics is largely about control of oil resources (primarily in Eurasia)
- Most nations/localities have been touched and orientated towards Eurasia
- The effects of power operating within this zone have led to the est. of cultural and national identities, nation-states and regions

**Nationalism / nation-state**
- Nationalism: desire for a nation-state
  - Concepts that underlie it: religion, language, race, ethnicity, heritage, geography
- Ben Anderson has a theory of nationalism – “imagined communities” → popular imagination can encompass an entire nation (men go to war and fight for this “imagined community” without actually knowing, or indeed caring, for a large majority of their nation)
- Patterns of nationalism can change according to: technology, alliance systems and changes in economic power
- Nation-state emerges when nationalism and statehood come together and sovereignty is recognised
- Nation-state: a central organisation that rules over a well-defined continuous territory and claims the monopoly of force

**Required reading: Klaus Dodds, Geopolitics, ch.1**
- “How people and places are interconnected with one another”
- It is crucial to think geopolitically: the relevance of territory, international boundaries and claims to sovereignty remain pressing.
- Two distinct understandings of geopolitics
  - A reliable guide of the global landscape using geographical descriptions, metaphors and templates; helps to generate a simple model of the world
  - Focus upon how geopolitics is applied in an academic and popular practice (evocation of terminology: iron curtain, Third World)
- Terms such as ‘iron curtain’ and ‘axis of evil’ help to legitimate subsequent expressions of statesmanship and foreign policy decision making. Geographical descriptions continue to provide an essential element in the implementation of foreign and security policies.
- Geopolitics can also concern itself with the implicit geographical understandings of world politics mobilized every day by political leaders, journalists and experts.
- Edward Said: articulated an interest in how places continue to be imagined and represented in art, literature, music and western foreign policy making.
- Graphical representation help to inform people’s understandings of the world and in that sense we are all geopolitical theorists.
- Critically, however, our geographical understandings of the world may differ radically and for a host of reasons – religious, ethnic, political, and so on.
- Linking geopolitics to popular culture: 2002 State of the Union Address (G Bush)
  - Unstable period following 9/11 attacks
  - Explicit geopolitical evaluation: axis of evil, weapons of mass destruction
  - The relevance of the media factor: overwhelming support of the Bush administration
  - American presidents have often used simple geographical descriptions and terms to convey a sense of geopolitical difference between their country and others, such as contemporary Iran or the Soviet Union
- The link between the pronouncements of political leaders and their audiences is an important component of our examination of geopolitics.
★ Required reading: Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*

**Geopolitics – component of human geography**
- Geopolitics is a component of human geography (e.g. what human geographers do)
- Geographers look at the world through spatial or geographical perspective

**Geography and places**
- Human geography: systematic study of what makes places unique and the connection and interactions between places → they seem to focus on particular neighbourhoods, towns, cities, countries
- Whereas political geographers are interested in topics like one that looks at how cities are organised to allow for political control
- Places are not isolated units → you need to understand them in relation to ROW

**Geography and spaces**
- Another definition of human geography: the study of spatial organisation of human activity → here space is emphasised rather than place
- Space gives greater weight to functional issues such as control of territory, objects (e.g. nuclear power stations)
- Spatial organisation of a society reflects its politics or relationships of power

**Places and politics**
- Agnew – places are a combination of three related aspects: location, locale and sense of place
- The function of a place, which social groups have control of the institutions within a place, and the identity of a place, are contested
- Alternative view – one of globalisation
  - Globalisation has created a class of global citizens who are attached to no particular place

**Politics of scale**
- Actions of individuals and groups range in their geographic scope or reach

**What is geopolitics?**
1) Connection between geopolitics and statesmanship → struggles for resources and territory among nations
2) Geopolitics is a way of seeing the world – geopolitical theoreticians have made claims they can view and understand the whole world
3) Identification of ‘situated knowledge’ – geopolitics is not just a matter of countries competing against others for territory, there are lots of other situations → can also include racial conflicts in certain areas of a city, restricted movement of women, diplomacy over greenhouse gas emissions. Geopolitics is not reserved to states – NGOs are also engaged
4) Geopolitics has come to include critical geopolitics → practice of identifying the power rel’ships within geopolitical statements (these are the phrases that are commonly used to justify state practices – which try to promote limited number of policies)

**Brief history of geopolitics**
- Initially understood as the realm of interstate conflict
- Sir Halford Mackinder – end of 19th century
  - Concerned about the relative decline in Great Britain’s power as it faced challenges from Germany
  - His goal was to maintain both Britain’s power and its land gentry through strong imperial bloc
  - Saw global politics as a closed system – the actions of different countries were necessarily interconnected and major axis of conflicts were b/w land and sea powers
  - Core of Eurasia = Heartland → history of world pivoted around the sequence of invasions out of this region into the surrounding areas that were more oriented to the sea
  - Intellectual basis for Cold War strategists and proponents of NATO
- Alfred Thayer Mahan
Believed that countries who were insular and had an easily defensible coast – were able to develop a secure base (with help of land powers) of sea power → national and global power could be attained/enhanced

- Ratzel and Kjellen
  - Two German geopoliticians
  - Ratzel – zoological notions
  - Kjellen – states were dynamic entities that naturally grew with greater strength; the more vigorous and advanced cultures were the better able they were to expand into the territory of lesser cultures
  - Catchphrase – Lebensraum or living space → superior cultures deserved more territory as they would use the land in a better way

- General Karl Haushofer
  - When Nazi Party was rising in 1920s – he began to disseminate geopolitical ideas to the German public
  - He was able to create a geopolitical vision that unified the land aristocrats who wanted to expand German borders eastwards to Russia and new industry owners who wanted to establish German colonies for raw materials
  - This was his definition of pan-regions (large regions that were dominated by a core power); US dominated Americas and Germany dominated Eurasia and controlled Africa
  - This allowed for territorial grow and colonial acquisition – without conflict with US
  - His emphasis on geographic or spatial rel’ships was different from Hitler’s racist views
  - Since geopolitics was equated with the Germans it was largely disbanded after WWII

Geopolitical Agents: making and doing geopolitics

- Agents cannot act freely but they are able to make their own choices
- Agents act within structures
  - Structures limit or constrain the possible actions of the agent
  - Also enable them to attain their goals
  - An agent can also be a structure
- No conflict is separate from its spatial setting


- The future combat is a “struggle over vital resources, rather than ideology or balance-of-power politics”
- Control of land and certain regions fuels political divisions, tensions, wars and conflicts
- US could be in conflict with China over Taiwan
- “The major industrial powers are becoming more desperate in their drive to gain control over what remains of the planet’s untapped resources”
- Eisenhower Doctrine 1957 and Carter Doctrine 1980 (US will not allow a hostile power in the Persian Gulf that may take control of oil and energy) → largely intended to ensure US access to Persian Gulf’s oil reserves
- Klare asserts that you can’t separate the problem of Middle Eastern terrorism (and Iraq) from the history of Western oil extraction from this region
- West’s desire for oil → Islamic extremism
- Concern that this struggle will enter military realm – especially as the intensified production of oil is “itself a source of instability” → new Cold War or Great Game
- US, China and Russia have already become involved in local conflicts → could increase
- More cooperation needed

Second article

- Iraq War
  - Iraq War has reconfigured the global geopolitical landscape – esp. US rel’ship w/ Europe and Middle East