

Introduction to Geopolitics

Introduction to Geopolitics – Study Notes

1. What Is Geopolitics?

Element	Definition
Geopolitics	The analysis of how geographic space (location, resources, physical terrain, climate, demography) influences political power, international relations, and strategic decision-making.
Key Question	<i>How do physical and human landscapes shape the behavior of states, corporations, and other actors on the global stage?</i>

2. Core Concepts & Terminology

Concept	Meaning	Example
Territoriality	The claim and control of a defined space.	Sovereign borders, maritime zones.
Strategic Depth	The distance between a nation's front line and its core industrial/population centers.	Russia's vast interior provides depth against invasion.
Heartland Theory (Halford Mackinder, 1904)	The "World-Island" (Eurasia) contains the "Heartland"; whoever controls it controls the world.	Cold War focus on Central Asia.
Rimland Theory (Nicholas Spykman, 1942)	The coastal fringes of Eurasia (the "Rimland") are the key to controlling the Heartland.	U.S. containment policy in East Asia.
Sea-Power Theory (Alfred Mahan, 1890)	Dominance of the seas enables global influence.	British Empire's naval supremacy.
Geoeconomics	Use of economic tools (trade, investment, sanctions) to achieve geopolitical aims.	China's Belt & Road Initiative.
Geostrategy	The planning of political or military actions based on geographic realities.	NATO's forward-deployed forces in Eastern Europe.

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Spheres of Influence	Regions where a great power exerts dominant political, economic, or military influence.	U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere; Russian influence in the Near Abroad.

3. Major Geographic Variables

Variable	Influence on Power
Location & Proximity	Nearness to rivals, trade routes, and resources.
Size & Shape	Larger territories can support bigger economies & militaries; irregular borders may create security challenges.
Physical Terrain	Mountains, deserts, rivers, and seas affect defense, logistics, and resource extraction.
Natural Resources	Energy (oil, gas, minerals), water, arable land ? economic leverage and conflict drivers.
Climate & Environment	Determines agricultural potential, habitability, and vulnerability to climate? related threats.
Demography	Population size, distribution, and composition affect labor force, market size, and military recruitment.
Infrastructure	Ports, railways, pipelines, digital networks enable power projection and economic integration.

4. Historical Evolution of Geopolitical Thought

Period	Thinker(s)	Main Idea	Impact
Late 19th?–? Early 20th?c.	Halford Mackinder	<i>Heartland</i> – land power dominates world power.	Influenced British and later Soviet strategic planning.
1930s?–?1940s	Nicholas Spykman	<i>Rimland</i> – coastal regions are decisive.	Shaped U.S. containment doctrine during the Cold War.
Late 19th?c.	Alfred Mahan	Sea power determines global dominance.	Prompted naval buildups (e.g., Germany, Japan).
Cold War			