

Grounding World Politics Anew

Reflections on the continued relevance of Geopolitics to the study of today's international relations

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Abstract

The central question and debate to which this chapter wants to contribute touches the core: how and in what way can various schools of thought in Geopolitics increase the explanatory power of analyses which study international phenomena? At the core lies the role of territorially embedded variables (location, physical geography, human geography, spatial) in international relations, in their various manifestations (material, cognitive and discursive). Some reflections are being developed on the 'unique selling proposition' of Geopolitics to the study of today's international relations. A number of concepts, theories and methods are identified which are highly relevant to understand today's international relations. In what way do Geopolitics and IR differ as fields, and how can their respective schools of thought strengthen each other? It is argued that neoclassical geopolitical analyses could be augmented via Cognitive Geopolitics (dating back to Harold and Margaret Sprout) and Analytical Geopolitics (which stems from a critique to Critical Geopolitics and tries to bridge material and discursive variables, as developed by Antonios Nestoras). Furthermore, geostrategy and geo-economics have become much more closely intertwined (Gyula Csurgai). In addition, French geopolitical scholarship contributed greatly to geopolitical analyses 'below' and 'above' the traditional state level. Geopolitics, as a field of research, could also play an important role in understanding how environmental challenges such as climate change or energy transition can affect the foreign policy of nations. After having been ignored for some decades, it seems as though environmental variables are back with a vengeance within the study of Geopolitics. Finally, the concept of 're-territorialisation' and its application to, for instance, the study of the diplomatic activities of sub-state entities such as regions, cities or even harbors, offers us a way to better grasp the transformative impact of territorially embedded factors. The chapter makes a plea for Geopolitics and IR to learn more actively from each other's insights, theories and methods.

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Introduction

Those who study international relations these days are increasingly confronted with a return of geopolitics in academic language. Although geopolitics has never really gone away after 1945 or 1991, an increasing number of scholars are referring to it in some fashion. The problem is however that many do not actively engage with the wide and rich schools of thought in Geopolitics itself. The central question and debate to which this chapter wants to contribute touches the very core of this workshop; *how and in what way can various schools of thought in Geopolitics increase the explanatory power of analyses which study international phenomena?* At the core lies the role territorially embedded variables (location, physical geography, human geography, spatial) play in international relations, in their various manifestations (material, cognitive and discursive). Innovative approaches could help us to better unlock the geopolitical realities which exist at the same time. Schools of thought in Geopolitics and mainstream International Relations could also be combined so as to better grasp that reality.

Geopolitics was developed as an academic field in 1899 in another period of rapid changes in the global shift of power. At that time, the world was dominated by European powers which encompassed the whole world, in the wake of the colonial age and industrialization. At the time, European powers were vying for geo-economic and geostrategic power. Moreover, the world had become in 1904 – in the words of the British geographer Halford John Mackinder – a ‘*closed political system*’ (Mackinder, 1904). Since most territories all belonged to some kind of sphere of influence, border skirmishes in faraway Africa had an immediate effect upon the power balance among the European powers. Geopolitics was developed by the Swedish scholar Rudolf Kjellén from a perspective to develop a scientifically based instrument that could also advise key decision-makers in foreign policy and defense to avoid war.

Quite interestingly, International Relations (IR) as a field of science was only established after the First World War. It had an initial mission to study the causes of war. It was engaged in the sense that it attempted to avoid new disasters in the future. The first academic chairs in IR were set up in Aberystwyth (Wales) in 1918 and in Geneva (Switzerland) in 1920. That mission already failed dramatically in the 1930s, which produced the ontological first debate in IR between Idealists and Realists. Around that same time, Halford John Mackinder was part of the British delegation at the Versailles treaty negotiations in Paris. Afterwards, he became very pessimistic about the future because he thought ‘Versailles’ had not solved the geopolitical imbalance in the world system, in particular on how to deal with the ‘Heartland’ in Eurasia. As early as 1919, he referred to this dilemma in his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study of the Politics of Reconstruction* (Mackinder, 1919). Mainstream IR, as it developed, seemed to have difficulty with grasping and integrating the importance and

influence of territorially embedded explanatory variables or the 'bigger picture'. The dichotomic debate between Idealism/Liberalism and Realism also inhibited at a basic conceptual level, and in terms of the operationalisation of research designs, to see how the overall geo-economic, geostrategic and geopolitical aims which nations pursue are mutually supporting one another. The failure by some, though definitely not all, to deal with territorially embedded factors left IR often with incomplete analyses. Geopolitics itself became contested during the 1940s, when some scholars in the German geopolitical school under Karl Haushofer associated themselves with the Nazi regime. However, geopolitical thinking did not go away, but was encapsulated in (American) geostrategic thinking during and after the Second World War (Crikemans, 2022a). But what was apparent, was that territorially embedded factors seemed to be less prominent in analyses in International Relations after 1945. It was as if most scholars believed that a combination of technological advances combined with open borders would make these variables less relevant in explaining international relations.

In earlier publications, the realist author Hans Morgenthau had labeled 'Geopolitics' to be a 'pseudo science'. In his book *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau described it under the heading "the fallacy of the single factor" (Morgenthau, 1973: 158-159). However, contemporaries such as Robert Strausz-Hupé believed a distinction needed to be made between Geopolitics as a discipline and its application (Strausz-Hupé, 1942; Strausz-Hupé, 1943: 4; Strausz-Hupé, 1945). Henry Kissinger later equated geopolitics with balance of power-thinking, almost deriving it from its physical geographical and human geographical dimensions (Kissinger, 1994). Colin Gray sought to combine insights of geostrategy with conceptual innovations such as Cognitive Geopolitics (Gray, 1979; Gray, 1991; Gray, 1996; Gray, 2004; Gray, 2009). In more recent publications of the last few decades, a kind of 'revenge of Geography' (Robert D. Kaplan) has materialized in publications about climate change or energy security (Kaplan, 1994; Kaplan, 2012). At the same time, geopolitical problems have not gone away after 1991, to the contrary. Some of the most fundamental and difficult problems in international relations entail problems about territoriality; location, physical geography and human geography.

Building upon earlier work in the edited book *Geopolitics and International Relations. Grounding World Politics Anew* (Crikemans, 2022a), we argue for research designs and innovative approaches which combine or even integrate some of the insights of respective schools of thought in Geopolitics and International Relations.

In this chapter, the following questions will be addressed:

- *First*, we will go into the 'unique selling proposition' of Geopolitics to the study of today's international relations. A number of concepts, theories and methods are identified which are highly relevant. This will bring us to the question in what way

Geopolitics and IR differ as fields, and how can their respective schools of thought strengthen each other.

- *Second*, It is argued that neoclassical geopolitical analyses could be augmented via Cognitive Geopolitics (dating back to Harold and Margaret Sprout) and Analytical Geopolitics (which stems from a critique to Critical Geopolitics and tries to bridge material and discursive variables, as developed by Antonios Nestoras).
- *Third*, geostrategy and geo-economics have become much more closely intertwined.
- *Fourth*, French geopolitical scholarship contributed greatly to geopolitical analyses 'below' and 'above' the traditional state level.
- *Fifth*, Geopolitics, as a field of research, could also play an important role in understanding how environmental challenges such as climate change or energy transition can affect the foreign policy of nations. After having been ignored for some decades, it seems as though environmental variables are back with a vengeance within the study of Geopolitics.
- *Sixth*, the concept of 're-territorialisation' and its application to, for instance, the study of the diplomatic activities of sub-state entities such as regions, cities or even harbors, offers us a way to better grasp the transformative impact of territorially embedded factors.
- *In conclusion*, this chapter makes a plea for Geopolitics and IR to learn more actively from each other's insights, theories and methods.

1. The 'unique selling proposition' of Geopolitics to the study of today's international relations

If we try to define 'Geopolitics' and its relation to International Relations, it remains important to keep in mind that there exist many different schools of thought in each field. A comprehensive overview is offered in the recent book *'Geopolitics and International Relations. Grounding World Politics Anew.'* (Criekemans, 2022a). As indicated earlier, 'Geopolitics' as a body of academic endeavour is exactly 20 years older than 'International Relations'. Geopolitics was created as a field of science around 1899 by the Swedish political geographer Rudolf Kjellén. He understood the relevance of territorially embedded factors. Geopolitics was devised by Kjellén as an instrument which also could help the state in steering a safe course for the country in a world that was becoming more and more competitive. Geopolitics thus was designed as an academic body of literature which applied the insights

of Political Geography to the European state system. Kjellén claimed the physical character, size and relative location of the territory of the state was central to its power position in the international system (Holdar 1992, p. 319). From the very beginning, the location of natural resources above and beneath the ground, or the lack thereof, was already considered to be essential in order to understand the geopolitical context. However, this *fin de siècle* geopolitical literature only saw the state as the most relevant actor. Inspired by the work of Friedrich Ratzel, the state was likened to a living organism locked in a social Darwinist struggle of the fittest (Ratzel, 1896; Ratzel, 1897; Ratzel, et al. 1969 [1896]). These ontological assumptions led to what later in International Relations would grow into the school of thought of Realism, although including also other ontological variables (Crickemans, 2007). Kjellén underlined that States as ‘living organisms’ in relation to one another spoke a wholly different language: the concept of ‘**power**’ stood central in this. In their role as ‘powers’, national states should be understood as geographical entities (Thermænius, 1938, p. 166). Kjellén’s analysis in 1914 was that he believed that the future would lie with those land powers that succeeded in achieving **autarky** within their own territory (Kjellén, 1924; Kjellén, 1944 [1924]). The railways over land would considerably reinforce the *capacity for ‘internal communication and power concentration’* (Holdar, 1992, p. 314; Herwig, 1999, p. 220, p. 226; Ó Tuathail, 2001, p. 21). Eventually, only a few world powers would last (Dolman, 2002, p. 51). Kjellén suggested in 1897 that in the long run only three big continental political and economic zones would remain: a *pan-American system* under the leadership of the United States of America, a *Middle-European system* (possibly even a *Eurafrican system*) under the leadership of Germany and an *Eastern system* under the leadership of Japan (Holdar, 1992, p. 314).

The British geographer **Halford John Mackinder** echoed some of the thinking of Kjellén. His ‘*New Geography*’ wanted to offer a comprehensive framework to place human events in a broader perspective (Ó Tuathail, 1996, pp. 86-88), a conceptual bridge between the natural and social sciences (Heffernan, 1998, pp. 63-66) that tried to provide an answer to the problem that ‘power’ had become more difficult to measure in an industrializing world in which the ‘natural seats of power’ also were affected by the introduction of new technologies. Mackinder believed that in the post-Columbian epoch, the dominance of sea power (e.g. Great Britain) could come to an end as a result of a combination of new technologies (in particular railways) and demographic trends (to be more concrete, Russia’s growing population). He predicted that the area which later would turn out to be the Soviet Union, constituted ‘the geographical pivot of history’, a potential new world power which could eventually force the other naval powers (especially Britain) out of their positions in e.g. Asia. Amongst others, that ‘pivot area’ (1904) or ‘heartland’ (1919, 1943) was endowed with vast natural resources which could now be extracted via railways and ‘*man power*’ (read: a growing human geographical demography). Russia would become a power, potentially challenging the *British Empire* – first in Asia, later in Central Europe (Mackinder, 1887; Mackinder, 1919; Mackinder, 1943; Mackinder, 1994 [1904]).

The American naval historian and Captain (later Rear Admiral) **Alfred Thayer Mahan** can be considered as one of the fathers of American geostrategic thinking. **Social Darwinism** constituted an inherent dimension in Mahan's thinking: he conceptualized the international relations as a dynamic condition of a *continuing battle between nations in which acquiring 'sea power' is decisive* (Sloan, 1988, p. 90; Raffestin, Lopreno et al., 1995, p. 104, p. 107). Driven by social Darwinist thinking, Mahan believed (in comparable neo-Lamarckian terms as Ratzel) that a nation should expand territorially, or else be ruined (Sprout & Sprout, 1944 [1939], p. 214) (Crickemans, 2022c, p. 105). But Mahan also included the changing power base of the world into his models; the switch from sailing ships to coal as the basis for a new to-be-built *US Navy* with new ships from the Industrial Age. Such US leapfrogging meant that every 2,000 nautical miles so-called 'coaling stations' became essential for Navy power projection. In a world without free trade, one of the future roles of the Navy would be to protect trade overseas, in particular towards Asia where Japan constituted a potential competitor. Mahan deemed it crucial that the US would need to possess some of the strategic islands in the Pacific, which constituted a highway to the future markets in Asia, with coaling stations built along the way (Mahan, 1890; Mahan, 1898; Mahan, 1900; Mahan, 1957 [1890]).

These authors in 'Classical Geopolitics' thus believed in a social Darwinist world of competition, whereby material forms of power including energy sources and technology would play a major role to defend both the geo-economic and geostrategic interests of nations (Crickemans, 2022a). There are some interesting indications that this literature also affected the thinking in more realist schools of thought later in the 1930s and 1940s, both directly and indirectly (Crickemans, 2007). Also in Realist strands of theory within IR, the material capabilities of states including their resource bases or abilities to project power in order to get access to (power) resources played a role. Later scholars such as Harold and Margaret Sprout were more interested in the uneven distribution of physical and human resources including energy, and the potential for technologies to overcome some of these problems (Crickemans, 2022c, p. 125; Sprout & Sprout, 1971 [1965]).

Next to 'Classical Geopolitics', many forget that there also existed a **'Possibilistic Geopolitics'** as developed and exercised by the French geographers during the interbellum period. In this approach, the environment is conceived as being both *'constraining'* and *'enabling'*, and man is considered to be able to make choices (Vidal de la Blache, 1898; Vidal de la Blache, 1926). The environment provides a number of parameters or limitations to the whole spectrum of foreign policy actions which can be undertaken by an entity ('constraining'), but the environment also provides a political entity with a number of important opportunities (Sprout, 1971 [1965], p. 83). 'Man' or human agency stood central in 'Possibilist Geopolitics' because in the end the political decision-makers try to maximise the opportunities, and to minimise the limitations with which they are confronted. Thus, nature only laid the foundation for human development; the actual cultural and political

progress depended on ‘man’ himself. Hence ‘strategies’ were needed (Crikemans, 2022a, p. 117).

Later schools of thought in the 1990s such as ‘Critical Geopolitics’ started from the assumption that ‘geography’ does not constitute an innocent product of nature. On the contrary, it is the result of the history of the battle between competing authorities about the power to organise, occupy and manage space. Via discourse analysis, ‘Critical Geopolitics’ tries to achieve insight into the way in which foreign policy-elites of territorial entities think about the relation of this entity vis-à-vis the “external environment” (Crikemans, 2022c, p. 130-137). This critical analysis of the geopolitical reasoning about central variables such as energy and climate, were studied over the years by authors such as Simon Dalby (1991, 1998, 2020) and Klaus Dodds (2015, 2021), and more recently by books appeared by Moore (2020) and Wehrmann (2021). An author who more explicitly applied Critical Geopolitics to resources is Phillippe Le Billon (2013). In his book on *‘Environmental Geopolitics’*, Shannon O’Lear discusses scholarship on Critical Geopolitics and environmental issues (O’Lear, 2018, pp. 19-21). This school of thought also has connections with Constructivism in IR, but then focuses more on how territorial factors are ‘imagined’, fitting a wider (geo)political agenda.

Geopolitics can be seen as constituting a *joint project* or *common field* of study between Political Geography on the one hand, and International Relations on the other.

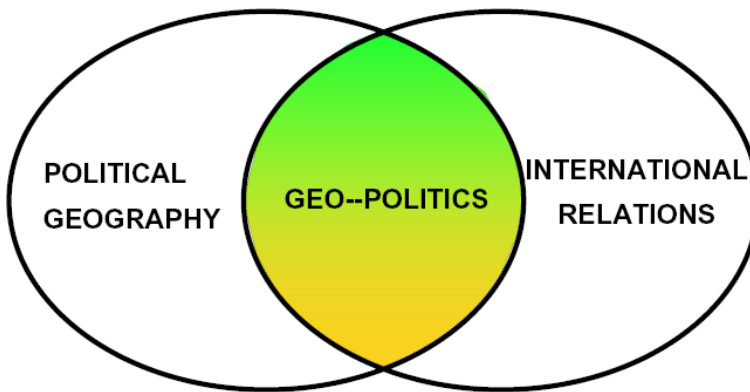


Figure 1: Geopolitics as a ‘joint project’ of both Political Geography (PG) and International Relations (IR).

One could define it as follows (Crikemans, 2007; Crikemans, 2022a, pp. 99-100):

“Geopolitics is the scientific field of study belonging to both Political Geography and International Relations, which investigates the interaction between politically acting

(wo)men and their surrounding territoriality (in its three dimensions; physical-geographical, human-geographical and spatial).”

2. Routes to augment neoclassical geopolitical analysis: Cognitive Geopolitics and Analytical Geopolitics

In neoclassical geopolitical analyses, scholars will mostly focus on the relevance of material explanatory factors and/or be interested to analyze the balance of power (or what neo-realists would term the ‘power distribution’). Whilst having the advantage to produce a parsimonious explanation, these approaches also have some limitations. There are however also two other potential theoretical routes which could augment neoclassical geopolitical analyses; **Cognitive Geopolitics** and **Analytical Geopolitics**.

Harold and Margaret Sprout can be seen as some of the American political scientists who – throughout their career– showed a continued interest in & influence upon geopolitical thinking, in the period between the 1930s and the 1970s (Fox, 1985, p. 27). Amongst other contributions, they can be considered the key authors who developed what we label as **‘Cognitive Geopolitics’**. From the 1950s onwards, Harold and Margaret Sprout distanced themselves from the ‘national power’-approach in favour of the more tangible level of analysis of the individual decision maker. With this position, they can be regarded as among the first IR-specialists to make a plea for a “more balanced” approach to international relations, in which they wanted to spend more attention to the ‘relative weight’ of the ‘different categories of potential explanatory variables in international politics’ (Baldwin, 2002, p. 179). Moreover, their ‘unit of analysis’ changed from the rather abstract ‘national interest’ in the direction of the more tangible level of the political decision maker. One of the main reasons for this reversal seems to lie with the more nuanced appreciation that the Sprouts developed on the relation between ‘geopolitical’ environmental variables *on the one hand* and foreign policy *on the other hand*. In this context, the crucial book *‘The Ecological Perspective on Human Relations with Special Reference to International Politics’* deserves some special attention (Sprout & Sprout, 1971 [1965]).² In the 1950s and ‘60s, the Sprouts also published a host of important scientific articles in the most prestigious American IR journals. Among these, the following publications can be mentioned: *‘Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics’* (Sprout & Sprout, 1957), *‘Geopolitical hypotheses in technological perspective’* (Sprout, 1963) & *‘Geography and International Politics in an Era of Revolutionary Change’* (Sprout &

² In 1962, the Sprouts also published *‘Foundations of International Politics’*. Chapter 1 consists of an analysis of the field of International Relations. The next three chapters contain an overview of the components of the ‘international system’, in which new visions were developed based upon such terms as ‘power’, ‘power potential’ and ‘capacities’. The rest of this book contained a revision of material from their earlier book *‘Foundations of National Power’* (Sprout & Sprout, 1967 [1962]).

Sprout, 1964). Further building upon this work, the Sprouts published in 1968 the pioneering '*An Ecological Paradigm for the Study of International Politics*' (Sprout & Sprout, 1968).

The Sprouts did not like the term 'environment'. Especially in the US, there existed a tendency to interpret 'environmental variables' too much in non-human, or –to put it differently– in restrictive physical-geographical terms (Sprout & Sprout 1957, p. 311; Sprout & Sprout 1968, p. 17). This is the reason why the Sprouts used the French concept of '*milieu*' (Rosenau, Davis et al. 1972, p. 6), because the link with the 'social' is more clear (Sprout & Sprout, 1968, 17).³ '*Milieu*' thus entail the whole spectrum of environmental factors; both human and non-human, tangible and non-tangible (Sprout & Sprout, 1971 [1965], p. 27).

The contribution of the Sprouts in 1956 brought a new vitality in the debate on the relation between 'geography' and 'politics', which was gradually becoming rather banal and repetitive (Muir, 1997, p. 185). The first 'breakthrough' the Sprouts made, was at first instance a conceptual one, but also had far-reaching ontological, epistemological and methodological consequences. This first step of the Sprouts was the introduction of their concept of the '**ecological triad**'. This triad consists of: (1°) *an entity ('enviromed unit')*, (2°) *his/ her environment*, and (3°) *the relation between the entity & his/ her environment*. The relation between an 'entity' and his/her environment always entails a combination of the properties of the entity with the surrounding conditions. If there is a change in one of both, then also a different relationship develops. From this, the Sprouts deduced the proposition that *change and transformation are typical for the ecological perspective (to international relations)* (Sprout & Sprout, 1968, pp. 17-18). In other words, the stress lies with the interdependence, which even seems to increase as a result of technological development, population growth and the increase of the urban nature of human societies. Just like the 'classical' geopolitical scientists of the 1930s and '40s, the Sprouts stress that there exists a fundamental problem; on earth, there exists an unequal distribution of these physical and human '*resources*' (cf. climate patterns, topology, available resources, human communities, etc.). From this, the Sprouts postulated the proposition that *this unequal distribution influences in a significant way all human enterprise, interactions, relations and inter-state relations* (Sprout & Sprout, 1968, p. 21). The concept of the '*ecological triad*' states that the attention of the IR scholar, or of the FPA analyst, should focus on the study of a three-part whole; (1°) **the processes of policy choices within an entity**, (2°) **(the nature of the) environment**, and (3°) **the interaction between the entity & the environment** (Sprout & Sprout, 1968, pp. 11-21; Starr, 1992, p. 3). The next step the Sprouts took, was the further refinement of the concept 'environment' or '*milieu*'.

³ The Sprouts formulated it as follows (Sprout & Sprout, 1968: p. 17): "*So used, milieu includes social as well as nonhuman phenomena to which human activities may be relatable. Since the French language contains no adjectival form of milieu, we shall continue to use the English adjective environmental.*"

Harold and Margaret Sprout stated in their central hypothesis that environmental variables can only influence human activities in two ways. First, such factors can be perceived by individuals, who take these into account in their 'foreign policy decisions' and responses. Only in such cases can one speak of a form of 'influence' of human preferences & decisions by the environment, '*mediated*' by perception. Second, environmental variables can be approached as a kind of 'matrix' that possibly limits the results of foreign policy decisions ('foreign policy outcomes'), even if these environmental variables are not perceived. According to the Sprouts two usable explanatory frameworks could be distinguished; the '**psychological milieu**' or '**psycho-milieu**' (*'the environment as perceived by the decision maker & upon which he/she bases his/her reaction'*) on the one hand, and the '**operational environment**' (*'the true environment in which the chosen policy is executed'*) on the other hand. The Sprouts formulated it as follows (Sprout & Sprout, 1968, pp. 33-34):

"We desire to make this distinction between psycho-milieu and operational milieu as explicit as possible, since failure to do so has been the source of endless confused and muddy thinking. Psycho-milieu denotes a human individual's perceived image of a situation, an image that may or may not correspond to reality. Operational milieu denotes that the situation as it actually exists and affects the achievements and capabilities of the entity in question (whether a single individual, group or community as a whole)."

The conceptual distinction between '*psycho-milieu*' and the '*operational environment*' in fact means a fundamental break with the Realist school, which (still) believed that decisionmakers in foreign policy can perceive their environment in a 'correct' way. This 'amendment' by the Sprouts had important consequences *for the FPA scholar and for the decision maker in foreign policy*:

- First, the consequences for the **FPA scholar**. In case a researcher is trying to explain why certain decisions are taken in foreign policy, then one should try to analyse the 'psychological environment' of the decision maker. However, in case the analyst is more interested in the 'operational results' of a specific decision, then the 'operational (or geographical) environment' should be used as an explanatory framework (see figure 1). Especially the *first of these two analyses* is certainly not easy for the FPA analyst. He/she then should try to work out how the involved (group of) decision maker(s) perceived the world, and which opportunities or limitations they saw for themselves. For the researcher, this task entails many obstacles; one has to develop a reconstruction based upon 'second hand'-material (what the decision maker said and did). Even the most 'neutral' analyst is not free of introducing his/her own linguistic or ideologically biased ideas. Moreover, one has to work with incomplete and sometimes even openly contradictory information (Sprout & Sprout, 1957, pp. 319-320). In the *second kind of 'analyses'*, the researcher tries to illustrate how the 'reality on the ground' changes as a result of decisions which were taken earlier, and how the 'characteristic properties' of the environment

‘enforce’ possible limitations on the ‘operational results’ of foreign policy decisions which were taken earlier.

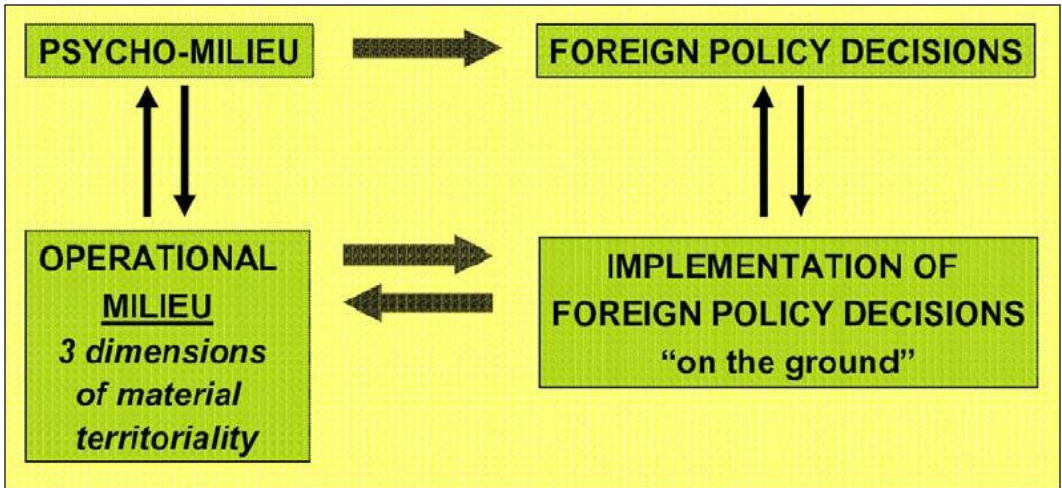


Figure 2: The conceptual revolution of Harold and Margaret Sprout

- Second, the consequences for the **decision maker in foreign policy**. The decision maker should try to keep the gap between the ‘objective’ and the ‘perceived’ environment as small as possible (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1981, p. 67). One could state that too big a gap between both is ‘lethal’ for foreign policy, and in some extreme cases even for the very existence of the nation.

Many examples exist, for instance mentioned by the Sprouts; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 could only take place because the American military and political elite did not (want to) realize that a Japanese *‘task force’* so far from home could be used in an offensive operation (Sprout & Sprout, 1957, p. 318; Sprout & Sprout 1971 [1965], p. 12). Often, decision makers take refuge in a form of thinking in analogies, in which one refers to history in order to make the case for a certain policy choice in foreign policy. However, the same conditions never really repeat themselves because the meaning of geography and technology changes through time (see also: Houghton, 1996). The Sprouts also asked the following question: *“To what extent is a top-level executive a virtual prisoner of the civil and military officials who provide data for him?”* (Sprout & Sprout 1957, p. 321). The civil and military officials provide the decision makers in foreign policy with data on the ‘operational environment’, but these data are often prepared in a way “in which the official thinks the president would like to see the world” (cf. *‘psycho-milieu’*). This forms one of the most important difficulties with which intelligence agencies struggle. The gap between the ‘operational’ and the

'psychological' environment forms a powerful conceptual tool in order to approach the subtle interaction between environment & politics in a more nuanced way.

From this framework of reference, Harold and Margaret Sprout developed in 1957 seven theses, which they tried to defend in this publication (Sprout & Sprout, 1957, p. 310):

1. Environmental factors become related to the attitudes and decisions which, in the aggregate, comprise a state's foreign policy *only* by being apperceived and taken into account by those who participate in the policy-forming process.
2. Conclusions as to the manner in which apperceived environmental factors are dealt with in foreign policy making depend on the theory or theories of decision making which the analyst brings to bear on the case under consideration.
3. Hypotheses as to the manner in which apperceived environmental factors enter into the decision making process can provide fruitful linkages between ecological and behavioural approaches to the study of international politics.
4. Environmental factors can be significantly related to the operational results of policy decisions, even though such factors are not apperceived and taken into account in the policy making process.
5. What is called analysis of state power or international power relations or (preferably, in our view) analysis of state capabilities consists essentially of calculating opportunities and limitations latent, or implicit, in the milieu of the state under consideration.
6. Capability calculations or estimates are always carried out within some framework of assumptions regarding the policy objectives, operational strategy, and political relations of the state under consideration.
7. Conclusions as to the opportunities and limitations which are implicit in a state's milieu and which may affect the operational results of its policy decisions depend on the ecological theory and the topical explanatory premises which the analyst brings to bear in the specific case under consideration.

The explanatory power that analysts attribute to the 'milieu', largely depends on the way in which their proposed *man-milieu-hypotheses* are embedded in a certain epistemology with regards to the feasibility of scientific knowledge about the relationship territoriality–politics. Each geopolitical formulation of a theory rests on such initial assumptions.

Another potential approach is that of Antonios Nestoras; Analytical Geopolitics. In his work on geopolitical myths and Greece, Nestoras has sought to bridge material and identity

factors (Nestoras, 2022; Nestoras, 2024 forthcoming in the Brill book series “Geopolitics and International Relations”). The author states that the shift from Classical Geopolitics to Critical Geopolitics in the literature was largely ontological and epistemological in nature. It replicated the standard dualisms previously introduced in the discipline of IR with the advent of the postmodern condition. In ontological terms, the scientific materialism of Classical Geopolitics (i.e. the belief that there is a material reality that has essential properties) was overturned by the social constructivism of Critical Geopolitics (i.e. reality has no essential properties, only relative, socially constructed properties). In epistemological terms, the positivism of Classical Geopolitics (i.e. through geographical survey and philosophical reflection we can know the essential properties of the material reality) was replaced with the interpretivist stance of Critical Geopolitics (i.e. without fixed essential properties, reality is relative to the ideological interpretation of the observer) (Criekemans 2022). According to Antonios Nestoras, these dualisms – materialism vs. idealism and positivism vs. interpretivism – outline a Classical/Critical divide in geopolitics that diverts scholarly attention from important research questions. Moreover it puts the field in an unfavourable position and reduces its potential to understand and explain patterns of behaviour in IR that may be grounded in geography. Nestoras reviews the philosophical assumptions that underline geopolitics through the prisms of New Materialism and Critical Realism and, drawing from the growing literature on political myth, attempts to initiate a discussion on possible new research directions for geopolitics (Nestoras 2022). The proposed approach is called ‘Analytic Geopolitics’. It tries to offer a structural analysis of geopolitical myths into their constitutive elements, their historical emergence and their effect on patterns of state behaviour. This contribution suggests yet another, new ‘grounding’ of the discipline of IR, not only in geography, but also in history, culture and politics. Nestoras believes that a critical reflection on myth, politics, and geography might show that geopolitics never left in the first place (Nestoras, 2024 forthcoming). Simply deconstructing myths and exposing them as fantasies or immoral instruments of power politics (as the school of Critical Geopolitics did) does not mean that they are no longer active ingredients in the everyday life of a society, or in the government of the modern state. Myths do affect material reality. Hence the research agenda of an Analytical Geopolitics could bridge material and constructive approaches to the geopolitical reality in innovative ways.

3. Geostrategy and geo-economics: closely intertwined

At the beginning of the 1990s, some authors suggested that as a result of the end of the Cold War and the globalisation of the economy, competition between states was shifting *from the political-military to the economic-technological field* (Labohm, 1998, p. 54). Richard Rosecrance was an early proponent of this idea; in his 1986 book *Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*. He predicted that leaders would increasingly realise that material

production and trade were a more effective method of increasing a state's power potential than military conquest and occupation (van Staden, 1999, p. 613). Rosecrance drew a very optimistic conclusion; the chances of interstate conflict would, in his view, largely or almost entirely disappear (Labohm 1998, p. 54). Ten years later, Rosecrance published an article entitled *'The Rise of the Virtual State' in Foreign Affairs*, in which he turned his prediction into a conclusion (Rosecrance, 1996). It is no longer the geographical size of a state that determines the success of a country, he argues (*'territory becomes passé'*), but the size of the market. The more open the economy, the bigger the market (as long as it exceeds that of the country). Small countries in particular can therefore benefit from this situation. Instead of accumulating territory, capital and labour, *'virtual states'* (i.e., states that have dismantled their territorially embedded production capacity and reorganised it elsewhere) emphasise *strategy* (e.g., attracting foreign direct investment), as well as *investing in people*, Rosecrance believed. Other authors such as Lester Thurow and Edward Luttwak argued that this 'economisation' of international relations is taking us into a new phase of interstate and interregional conflict, this time focused on the control of markets and capital. In this context, the American Edward Luttwak believed that there would be an evolution "*from geopolitics to geo-economics*"⁴, or as he likes to put it "*from violence to money*". As a former strategic thinker, Luttwak associated geopolitics with military strategies, which may partly explain his preference during the 1990s for the paradigm of geo-economics. According to Luttwak, there is still competition in the international political arena, but it is now mainly settled through an economic struggle between nation states (as opposed to the paradigm of *borderless capitalism*, as suggested by Kenniche Ohmae during the same period) (Ohmae, 1993; Ohmae, 1996).

In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington wrote an essay, *'Why International Primacy Matters'* in the journal *International Security* (Huntington, 1993). This analysis was fairly close to Luttwak's. Huntington expanded on Daniel Bell's assertion: "*economics is the continuation of war by other means*" (Bell, 1990). Samuel P. Huntington asserted that in the coming years, the main conflict of interest between the US and the great powers would probably be over economic issues (especially the relationship with Japan and the European Union). Huntington believed that economists are blind to the fact that economic activity is a source of power, as well as "well-being". In the realm of economic competition, the instruments of power are productive efficiency, market control, trade surplus, strong currencies, foreign exchange reserves, ownership of foreign companies, factories and technology (Baru, 2012).

⁴ About the term '*geo-economy*', Luttwak writes: "*This neologism is the best term I can think of to describe the admixture of the logic of conflict with the methods of commerce - or, as Clausewitz would have written, the logic of war in the grammar of commerce.*" (Luttwak, 1998, p. 126) (our underlining). However, the concept of '*geo-economics*' is not new. The political scientist Kristof used it as early as 1960: "*Contemporary geopolitics [...] rejecting the theory of nature-molded human character [...] has concentrated on geostrategy and the foreign-policy implications of geo-economics.*" (Kristof, 1960, pp 19-20).

A third author worth mentioning in this context is Mark P. Thirwell. He too examined the interrelationship between geo-economics and national security, stating in 2010 that if one is to “understand many of the key strategic developments facing the world in the coming decades, then one will need to spend a reasonable amount of time thinking about what is going on in the international economy.” (Thirwell, 2010, p. 2). Thirwell lists a number of reasons why geo-economics has made a *come-back* since Luttwak’s time: the evolution towards a multipolar global economy, the possible degradation of Washington’s willingness to continue to provide international public goods needed to sustain a (relatively) smoothly functioning global economy, the rise of the dark side of globalisation such as transnational crime, the rise of state capitalism, the financial and economic crisis since 2008 and the era of scarcity (Thirwell, 2010). Earlier, Luttwak almost seemed to suggest that in the post-Cold War era, the geo-strategic struggle would be subordinate to the geo-economic struggle. In a case study on EU-Russia natural gas relations between 2013 and 2016, Crikemans argued however that geo-economic and geostrategic competition can exist simultaneously, and can reinforce each other. It could even be argued that those actors in international relations who manage to align their geo-economic and geostrategic strategies have a greater chance of achieving their goals in a timely manner. As a unitary actor, the Russian Federation seemed much more capable of integrating both than the European Union. This led to a situation in Ukraine where Russia was effectively waiting for the West to blink first. A similar scenario developed later in the war in Syria (Crikemans, 2017).

The thesis of ‘geo-economics’ received increasing support since the end of the 1990s. For example, the success of the neologism ‘*géo-économie*’ in France is striking, and even somewhat contradictory. After all, in 1997, a new journal was founded that tried to investigate the geo-economic thesis: the ‘*Revue française de Géoéconomie*’ (now called simply ‘*Géoéconomie*’). Its founders are people like Pascal Lorot, previously known for their popular science books on geopolitics, such as ‘*Histoire de la géopolitique*’ (Lorot, 1995) and ‘*La géopolitique*’ (Lorot & Thual, 1997). In this sense, the success of the geo-economic paradigm in France is somewhat contradictory; Lorot had made interesting contributions to the French geopolitical literature as an author, but now switched to geo-economics. The fact that he was trained as a political economist might have something to do with that. The first issue of the journal ‘*Revue française de Géoéconomie*’ contains an interview with the French geopolitical writer, Lacoste. ‘*Géo-économie*’ is presented here as complementary to *géopolitique*, an idea that also appeared in Lorot’s books from the mid-1990s. Lorot defines geoeconomics as follows;

“the analysis of economic strategies –notably commercial–, decided upon by states in a political setting aiming to protect their own economies or certain well-identified sectors of it, to help their national enterprises acquire technology or to capture certain segments of the world market relative to production or commercialization of a product. The possession or control of such a share confers to the entity –state or national enterprise– an element of

power and international influence and helps to reinforce its economic and social potential.”

(Lorot, 1999, p. 15)

The question arises whether the economisation thesis can be empirically “proved”. After all, as the Dutch IR specialist van Staden rightly points out, this thesis seems to be at odds with what we observe in the world on a daily basis (van Staden, 1999, p. 615). Although the number of armed conflicts may have decreased since the fall of the Wall, the conflicts that remain or resurface are of a more profound and long-term nature, and often have an *intra-state* character. Moreover, van Staden rightly notes that (van Staden, 1999: 615): *“By far the most important and potentially most dangerous disputes that we face in the world today are precisely those that have a clear territorial dimension”* (e.g. Israel & the Palestinians, India & Pakistan, but also Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.). Aside from this, a second, more important reservation can be formulated with regard to the economisation thesis, according to van Staden: *“the suggestion that one could conceive of security and economy as separate compartments should be particularly objected to.”* (van Staden, 1999: 615). This remark is very justified. Economy and politics cannot be regarded as separate spheres. It may be true that nowadays in the West relatively more attention is being paid to territorial political themes of a predominantly economic nature (e.g. impact of the Eurozone, geo-economic integration along the borders of Europe, etc.), but the question remains whether there are no questions of politics involved. Who has the “last word” in such international questions; economics or politics? As political scientists, we would tend to choose the latter option. Economists may have a different view... The division between geopolitics and geoeconomics may therefore be artificial. The proposition can be defended that Geopolitics originally also took account of the politicisation of “(geo-)economic issues”, but that this is not always (anymore) recognised by the current authors. Kjellén’s ideal type in the economic realm was for instance for the state to achieve ‘autarky’ in key essentials such as food and resources.

Nevertheless, some contemporary authors have in recent years pleaded for a reintegration of geopolitics & geo-economics into one whole. More recent authors such as Braz Baracuhy come to quite similar conclusions. In his book chapter *‘Geo-economics as a dimension of grand strategy. Notes on the concept and its evolution’*, Baracuhy stresses that geo-economics and geopolitics constitute two sides of the same coin. Although they are different in terms of their instrumental and operative logics, they both constitute expressions of the geostrategic competition among great powers, acquiring relevance and meaning in foreign policy” (Baracuhy, 2019, pp. 14-15). What does remain striking is that geo-economics is often associated in the Anglo-American literature with great power politics, whereas some French authors and also others seem to be more open to the idea that also smaller territorial entities such as regions or even cities could play a geo-economic role (see *infra*; 6).

In his book chapter *‘The Increasing Importance of Geoeconomics in Power Rivalries: from the Past to the Present’*, Gyula Csurgai underlines that relations between states in the post-Cold War period

have been shaped by an increased economic competition. This includes *Non-Market* factors such as intelligence sharing between state agencies and private businesses, successful economic diplomacy and different techniques to influence and manipulate non-governmental organisations to weaken an economic adversary, among other things. The considerable influence of these *Non-Market* factors illustrates the limits of the liberal economic theories that emphasise the dominant role of market forces and the rather limited role of the state in economics (Csurgai, 2022b, p. 244). One could apply these thoughts also to the energy domain; in the Western world over the past decades, the main investment decisions have been left to the private sector, with the national capitals by the end of the 1990s realising that they had to guide behind the scenes the main decisions of these large energy multinationals, as energy comes very close to the national sovereignty of a state. This explains why for instance in France the Presidential *Élysée* has played such a major role in matters of energy policy.

This brings us to another often forgotten concept in geopolitics and geo-economics; the **‘geo-technical ensemble’**. In our recent book chapter *“Geotechnical ensembles”: how new technologies change geopolitical factors and contexts in economy, energy and security*, the interaction between technology and geopolitics is discussed at length (Crikemans, 2022b). The evolution towards a world increasingly run on renewable energy will also mean that the needs of many countries will shift; from conventional oil over natural gas towards the critical materials that will power a renewable energy future. This could lead to scarcity & supply problems and geopolitical competition over key resources such as nickel, cobalt, copper, silver, scandium, lithium and rare earth elements (Crikemans, 2018). In summary, the interaction between technologies and geopolitical factors may also have consequences for the foreign policy and diplomacy of nations; patterns of conflict and cooperation may be affected.⁵ The thesis which we developed in this recent publication states that *territorial entities (states, regions or cities) which invest in ground-breaking technological know-how, both fundamental and applied innovation, as well as in the industrial base that comes with it, will in many ways be able to shape tomorrow’s world in its geo-economic, geopolitical and geostrategic dimensions* (Crikemans, 2022b). Already many authors in Classical Geopolitics (e.g. Mackinder, Spykman, Sprout) developed hypotheses with regard to the impact that new technologies could have upon geopolitical and geo-economic relations. Geopolitical hypotheses in this context were defined by Sprout as *“propositions that purport to explain or to forecast the geographical distribution and patterning of political potential (power)”* (Sprout, 1963, p. 190). One of the types of geopolitical hypotheses in

⁵ In their book chapter *‘Technologies for the Global Energy Transition’* in the book *‘The Geopolitics of the Global Energy Transition’*, Manfred Hafner and Michel Noussan offer an interesting overview of some of the more recent technological developments (Hafner & Noussan, 2020), but do not always explicitly link to geographically embedded opportunities and limitations. This however is essential to also more explicitly connect to a ‘geopolitical analysis’ in the body of literature, and can be approached in many different ways.

technological perspective dealt with the *uneven distribution of natural resources*. According to Harold Sprout, these geopolitical hypotheses generally start from the proposition that a nation's political position in international politics is significantly related to its capacity to provide military instrumentalities (Sprout, 1963, p. 201). That may have been true in the decades after the Second World War. However, today's literature also investigates how (the changing demand for) resources impacts the geo-economic and overall geopolitical position of territorial entities *other* than the state; sub-state entities such as a region, or for instance the European Union as an emerging foreign policy actor. More recent emanations of this body of literature tackle a wide range of issues. One can think of publications on resource war and the scramble for resources (Klare, 2001; Klare, 2012), oil geopolitics (Yergin, 1992), natural gas geopolitics (Grigas, 2017), the geopolitics of renewables (Crickemans, 2018b), the interconnection between energy and climate (Yergin, 2020) or even the geopolitics of the deep oceans (Hannigan, 2016). Technological advances may change once again the geo-economic and geopolitical situation and consequences. Harold Sprout had already referred to '*geo-technic politics*' (Sprout, 1963, p. 192). Daniel Deudney believed geopolitical scholars should describe the base or infrastructure as *combinations of particular geographic features and technological capabilities*. He termed these **"geotechnical ensembles"**. Whereas 'global geopoliticians' treated combinations of geographical and technological factors as *exogeneous* factors acting upon or shaping human institutions, IR scholars primarily saw technology as *derivative* of human and political choice (Deudney, 1989, p. 13). Deudney believed that by incorporating technology, with some changes, into their concept of the base or non-social environment, 'global geopoliticians' were able to advance beyond the impasse of the naturalist theories (Deudney, 1989, p. 14). They were all theorists of change, looking at the impact of new technological forces and new aspects of geography. 'Classical Geopolitics' *"inferred that the existing natural resource base was fixed, subject only to the question of distribution – which might grow in a zero-sum environment"*. Deudney believed this inference was flawed. The continued growth of scientific knowledge and technical know-how has altered in many important ways the effective uses to which human institutions can put materials and energies drawn from the fixed or closed Earth (Deudney, 1989, p. 627). The same can be said of technologies today. How can this be applied to questions of energy transition in today's world? *First*, changes to existing energy mixes might provoke geo-economic and geopolitical 'fall out'. Conventional oil will in the coming decades diminish in *relative* importance. This may provoke crises in the business models of traditional oil producers such as in the Middle East, which could produce societal instability. *Second*, a growing need to get access to the critical materials that will power a renewable energy future could lead to scarcity & supply problems and geopolitical competition over key resources such as nickel, cobalt, copper, silver, scandium, lithium and rare earth elements. *Third*, a race over technological advances and intellectual property in the energy domain could erupt, most notably in the field of battery efficiency & recycling technologies. *In conclusion*, the debate in the West on 'strategic

autonomy' may also be relevant for the domain of energy. The interaction between technology and geopolitics changes also the economic relations, both on the supply side, the demand side, and the dimension of transit countries. If electrification further grows to connect for instance more windy or sunny regions with lesser endowed ones, then those territories through which power lines pass may be able to develop a new business model, hence rising in geopolitical importance (Crickemans, 2021).

4. Some lessons that can be drawn from French geopolitical scholarship

In future literature, authors could again be inspired by the Environmental Possibilism of the French geopolitical schools pre-1945, the so-called '*Possibilists*' (Crickemans, 2022c, pp. 116-117). These scholars argued, in contrast to the German geographical determinists of the interbellum, that the environment should be approached as being both '*constraining*' and '*enabling*', and man is considered to be able to make choices (Vidal de la Blache, 1898; Vidal de la Blache, 1926). The environment provides a number of parameters or limitations to the whole spectrum of foreign policy actions which can be undertaken by an entity ('constraining'), but the environment also provides a political entity with a number of important opportunities (Sprout, 1971 [1965], p. 83). As stated earlier, '*man*' stood central in 'Possibilist Geopolitics' because in the end the political decision-makers try to maximize the opportunities, and to minimize the limitations with which they are confronted. In addition, Possibilism makes active connections between elements of physical geography (again relevant in energy transition in terms of resources or ideal locations to pursue solar or wind power), human geography (think about social acceptance of these technologies), and spatial factors (needed to take into account for instance in the development of power lines and grid infrastructure over longer distances). Good statesmanship maximizes the opportunities, and minimizes the disadvantages. Also in complex questions of energy transition these lessons still are very relevant indeed (Crickemans, 2022b, pp. 116-117), and await further exploration.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the literature in Geopolitics underwent a revival in France. One of the leading figures became Yves Lacoste and the journal '*Hérodote*'. The objective was not to simply leave geopolitical discourse exclusively to "certain groups", the "strategic elites" who had dominated Cold War thinking, and had consequently narrowed the conceptualisation of "geopolitics" to mere "strategic issues" (Lacoste, 1983: 4). Lacoste wanted to show that there were many different ways in which geographical and geopolitical problems could be studied. Lacoste believed that the 'geo' aspect should not be reduced to mere "natural phenomena" (Lacoste, 1993: 9; Lacoste, 2000: 127). "Geo" should be more broadly defined to include ALL factors that are territorially "embedded". One can think of the quantitative & qualitative characteristics of a territory (e.g. territorial size & available resources) or of its geographical position & borders. Nevertheless, there are also other

'geopolitical variables' such as demographics, transport-economic situation, language & culture, and so on. The Hérodote school pays much attention to geographic/geopolitical reasoning at different spatial levels of analysis (e.g. local, regional, national, macro-regional, global) (Hepple, 2000: 279-280). This school paid a lot of attention to identity. It believed the object of Geopolitics lies essentially in the study of territorial rivalries between actors, and their repercussions on public opinion (Lacoste, 2000: 155). In his impressive *'Dictionnaire de géopolitique'* (1993), Lacoste-'Hérodote' concentrated more and more on the analysis of the 'representations' of territoriality (or expressed differently; the way in which 'territoriality' is presented); *"the set of ideas and perceptions of the political, religious or other order that drive social groups, and structure their vision of the world."* (Lorot, 1997: 44). Indeed, it is through the analysis of different representations about territoriality that Yves Lacoste hopes to better understand the strategic importance or symbolic value; attached to it in situations of rivalry (Lacoste, 2000: 155). According to French lecturers in Geopolitics and International Relations Pascal Lorot and François Thual, the main contribution of the group around Lacoste now lies precisely in bringing the notion of 'representation' into geopolitical analyses. To this very day the French literature in *Geopolitique* can be seen as an inspiration. Innovative as well was there distinction between *'géopolitique externe'* and *'géopolitique interne'*. French scholars in Geopolitics also devoted attention to the political levels 'below' and 'above' the national state, as additional carriers of geopolitical action.

5. Geopolitics, energy transition and climate change

When one takes a long view at the ontological assumptions of many schools of thought in academic fields such as Geopolitics and International Relations, one realizes that most of the foundational academic work conducted in each of them saw the daylight in a world of centrally state-controlled, fossil energy sources such as coal, oil and later natural gas. That world gradually took shape in the latter part of the nineteenth century and speeded up into the twentieth century. One could say that academic work in this long time period has been 'fueled' by the 'energy building blocks' of each phase of human development in this new era.

The literature on 'energy geopolitics' and 'energy security' has a long tradition and connection (Biresselioglu, 2011). The earliest concerns around these issues date back to a century ago (Prontera, 2017, p. 4), in the midst of an earlier energy transition we sketched in the introduction of this chapter. Academic literature on energy security theory started to develop in the 1970s, as a result of the oil crises. These were 'artificial' supply side crises whereby OPEC countries pressurized Western governments' support of Israel by 'turning the tap' several times. It was not a coincidence that the International Energy Agency (IEA) was set up in 1973 within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to study supply and demand issues, and the impact of new technologies in the

energy sector. This helped western countries to deal with the major impact of the energy crises of the 1970s.

In 1979, David Deese defined 'energy security' in the journal *International Security*: "*a condition in which a country perceives a high probability that it will have adequate energy supplies at affordable prices*" (Deese, 1979, p. 140). There were two principal economic and political components of energy security. First, the set of all behaviours which are affected by the reliability and quantity of energy supplies. Second, the set of all behaviours which are affected by external energy supplies, and more in particular the relationship between demand and supply. But until then the geopolitical or geostrategic dimension remained underexplored.

This changed radically only a year later via the so-called '*Carter Doctrine*'. On 23 January 1980, the then US President Jimmy Carter declared in his State of the Union Address that the United States would use military force, if necessary, to defend its national interests in the Persian Gulf. This statement was geopolitical and geostrategic in nature, a response to the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. It was intended to deter the Soviet Union from seeking further influence in the Persian Gulf. 'Energy geopolitics' and 'energy security' now seemed to become extensions of each other. However, the definition of 'energy security' in practice still remained somewhat unclear.

During the 1980's, David Deese (MIT) and Joseph Nye (Harvard) contributed to a broader conceptualization of 'energy security' (Deese & Nye, 1981; Biresselioglu, 2011). They focused on the energy security threats that consumer governments face; demand reduction and restructuring, stockpiles and emergency plans, development of alternative domestic supplies, development and diversification of sources of external supply, as well as diplomatic, industrial and military measures. During those years, western literature became deeply entrenched in a Cold War East-West context; the risk of the dependency of the 'West' on the 'East' – most notably via oil and natural gas.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990's, increasingly authors started to talk about the eclipse of the 'oil age' and the 'geopolitics of oil', the structural shortages between demand and supply, and their geopolitical consequences. Michael T. Klare can be considered as one of the authors who was quoted often and who also managed to open up a broader public debate, together with many other contributions from think tanks around the world. Especially Klare's *Resource Wars. The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (Klare, 2001) and *The Race for What's Left. The Global Scramble for the World's Last Resources* (Klare, 2012) can be mentioned in this regard. From conventional oil and gas, over to unconventional oil and gas (shales, tar sand) into rare earths and other critical materials, Klare sounded the alarm bells that countries needed to prepare for what was coming. The author seemed to lean more towards the *scarcity* side of the spectrum, whereas others would later predict an age of *abundance* due to technological revolutions. However, Klare did realise that also energy

innovation would become a major factor in a 'clean energy race' in which China and perhaps the United States would become major players or competitors (Klare, 2012, pp. 230-234).

From mid-2001 till July 2008, the oil price rose from 20 US dollar a barrel to 147.50 US dollar. This created a new dynamic in the literature on the Geopolitics of Energy, discussing the need for alternative supplies and demand reduction via energy efficiency. One year earlier, in 2007, Mathew Burrows and Gregory Treverton developed a new energy paradigm in the journal *'Survival'* (Burrows & Treverton, 2007). They discussed a much more nuanced definition and approach of 'energy security'. Taking into account the latest societal and international developments, Burrows and Treverton saw the concept more as a set of complex "trade offs" that decision-makers had to make between three sides of a triangle; security and foreign policy objectives, economic objectives and now also environmental objectives. Many different technologies and forms of energy ticked one but not always necessarily all three of these boxes. Political choices sometimes had to be made as a consequence. In the middle of the triangle however, Burrows and Treverton placed 'energy efficiency'. The best energy that ticks all three sides of the triangle at the same time, is the energy which you do not consume.

From the years 2000 onwards, the debate on 'energy security' gradually came of age. Academia produced certain criteria which together could make up a good definition of 'energy security'. In 2005, Barton, Redgwell, Rønne and Zillman, hence defined the concept as follows: *"A condition in which a country or several, or most of its citizens and businesses have access to sufficient energy resources at reasonable prices for the foreseeable future, free from any serious risk of major disruption of service"* (Barton et al., 2005, p. 5). Next to security of supply issues (important for consumer countries and territories), there existed also security of demand (important for producer countries and territories). The reliability of supply was closely connected to the functioning of energy markets. The only actors which this definition of 'energy security' did not completely address were transit countries and regions, for instance the predicament of countries such as Ukraine, which had already in the past major pipelines (Brotherhood, Yamal) running over its territory from the East (Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation) towards the markets in the West.

In a recent book on *'The New Politics of Energy Security in the European Union and Beyond'*, Prontera uses the traditional definition of 'energy security', referring to such matters as *"long term security of supply and its connection to international politics in the areas of diversification, infrastructure, investments and market governance"* (Prontera, 2021, p. 7). A recent, two-part book is *'The changing world of energy and the geopolitical challenges'* by Samuel Furfari. Its second volume is solely devoted to the 'geopolitics of energy'. He sees geopolitics as *"a methodology based on multidisciplinary analysis"*, which brings together variables as geography, demography, history,

economic and financial power, transport routes, technology, etc. (Furfari, 2017, p. 45-48). His approach comes quite close to the 'geopolitical method of analysis' as explained and developed by Gyula Csurgai at the Geneva Institute of Geopolitical Studies in Switzerland (Csurgai, 2022a).

Yet other authors emphasize ecological issues and crises that "threaten to radically alter the very nature of international relations" (Ó Tuathail, 1997, p. 36). According to Mustafa Tolba, *executive director of the United Nation Environment Program*, a transition needs to be made "*from geopolitics to ecopolitics*" (Tolba, 1990). According to Simon Dalby, ecological issues have been regarded as having a fundamental, 'global' dimension since the 1970s. Dalby and more recently O'Lear rather use the term '**environmental geopolitics**' (Dalby, 1998; O'Lear, 2018), which partly reflects the fact that the term '*ecopolitics*' has never really gained a foothold in the literature. According to Dalby, the new element lies in the fact that, since the mid-1990s, the 'global environment' has been increasingly explicitly regarded as both an object of research and the object of prescriptive policy recommendations. Also outside of this, in the more "popular" IR literature of the mid-1990s, "ecological degradation" was identified as one of the causes of state disintegration and chaos. Consider, for example, the well-known article '*The Coming Anarchy*' by the American foreign correspondent and writer on international relations Robert D. Kaplan, in the magazine '*The Atlantic Monthly*' (February 1994). In it, the author argued that the microcosm of *failed states* in Africa foreshadows what awaits us internationally as a result of disruptive global demographic, economic and ecological dissolution processes. Kaplan's ideas are an archetype of what is often referred to in textbooks on international relations as the 'anarchy model'. From a geopolitical perspective, however, it becomes more difficult to maintain the classic assumption that only states play a role in global ecological issues; multinational corporations & grass roots movements also fulfil their function (Dalby, 1998, p. 184-185). In more recent literature on energy geopolitics, it has become apparent that this can no longer be seen separately from climate politics (Faye, 2022; Yergin, 2020). In her study on '*Geopolitics of Climate Change and Sustainable Development*', Faye develops an actor-centred approach (Faye, 2022). Human agency of not only state actors but also non-state actors such as multinationals becomes important in order to understand these processes. Realist and neo-realist paradigms rather suggest states as the main actors without whom joint management cannot be imagined, but there exist also more liberal paradigms that can help us to tap into energy transition with a broader, perhaps more accurate portrayal (including the role of individuals, private companies, multinationals) (Faye, 2022, pp. 63-65). The author is right in this analysis, yet there are also territorially embedded and geographical issues at play here. In that sense 'energy geopolitics' and 'environmental geopolitics' touch upon different dimensions of the geopolitical challenges related to energy transition. In his book '*Anthropocene Geopolitics. Globalisation, Security, Sustainability*', Simon Dalby outlines a number of important issues (Dalby, 2020). Among other things, he discusses the use of chemicals and the long-term

viability of the current agricultural sector. Dalby also questions the limits and finiteness of what is possible on this planet Earth, indirectly interacting with earlier debates on the 'end of growth'. Geopolitics can also reflect on the extent to which and with which humanity moves or organizes its production chains. Sustainability comes to the fore as a central concept in human survival. The implicit message is that this is only possible by coming back into balance with 'environmental variables'. A combination of technological innovations and a new geo-environmental awareness should provide solace in this, although, according to Dalby, it is not certain that a 'good Anthropocene' can emerge from this.

6. 'De-territorialisation', 're-territorialisation' and the study of the diplomatic activities of non-state actors such as regions and cities

At the beginning of the 1990s, influential IR scholars focused their attention on globalization and its impact. Some believed the world would gradually become one village, with no borders. They argued that myriad processes of *de-territorialisation* were occurring, in which society and politics were less bound to territorial spaces. Different authors in IR but also in Political Geography focused on other aspects of de-territorialization. Ó Tuathail (1998), a seminal author in 'Critical Geopolitics', made some very important remarks in this regard:

"Deterritorialization is best interpreted, as Virilio remarks, as a question; it evokes the challenges posed to the status of territory and, by extension, our territorially embedded understandings of geography, governance and geopolitics, states, places and the social sciences, by planetary communication networks and globalizing tendencies. But it is deceptive when it becomes an answer polemically naming this challenge as a clear disappearance of territoriality. The problematic of deterritorialization is therefore also the problematic of reterritorialization; it is not the presence or absence of state territoriality but its changing status, power and meaning in relation to postmodern technological constellations, speed machines and global webs of capitalism" (82).

Another seminal contribution can be found in the work of Ruggie (1993). He spoke of a process of "unbundling" of territoriality:

"in the modern international polity an institutional negation of exclusive territoriality serves as the means of situating and dealing with those dimensions of collective existence that territorial rulers recognize to be irreducibly transterritorial in character. Nonterritorial functional space is the place wherein international society is anchored." (165).

During the 1990s, it seemed this process would continue. However, as the twenty-first century dawned, it became clear that territoriality had not vanished as a potential explanatory variable of international relations and diplomacy. In fact, quite the opposite has occurred.

Scholte (2000) argued: “*The end of territorialism as a consequence of globalization does not mean the end of territoriality.*” (59).

Today, multiple processes of re-territorialisation can be identified. This concept can be understood as a series of “*developments which occur when certain territorial entities diminish in importance, in favour of other territorial configurations*” (Scholte 2000: 60). Thus, geopolitics has not vanished: different types of re-territorialisation are altering the fabric of international relations and, inevitably, such processes are also influencing the practices and conduct of modern diplomacy.

An interesting example concerns the relationship between re-territorialisation and non-state actors. Both above and beneath the state level, territorial entities become relevant, and generate their own external relations, foreign policy and diplomatic practices. As stated earlier, Europe constitutes an interesting testing ground in this regard. On the one hand, the Lisbon Treaty in 2010 has led to the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS). European diplomacy is still in its infancy, but with the new Commission under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen, it has expressed an ambition to think more in a geopolitical and geostrategic fashion. Many institutional hurdles, such as the need for unanimity and the compartmentalization of dossiers over different policy-matters, are obstacles to achieving that goal. Nevertheless, the EU’s *Global Strategy* developed under the former High Representative for Foreign Affairs Mogherini, constitutes an important milestone in this ongoing ambition. One of its added values is that it tries to identify the root causes of problems such as migration, terrorism and instability in Europe’s near and far abroad. At the same time, national diplomatic services are adapting to this new geopolitical reality. They often sent their brightest diplomats to the *European External Action Service*. Gradually, a new division of work between the EU level and the member states will materialize on the wide variety of foreign policy dossiers. This experiment will impact European and possibly global diplomatic practices.

On the other hand, Europe has been and still is a nursery for sub-state diplomacy, a phenomenon that also exists in other parts of the world. Different regional sub-state entities in Europe such as Flanders, Wallonia, Catalonia, Scotland, Bavaria and others engage in international relations on their own merits, and conduct a foreign policy parallel, complementary or sometimes in conflict with their diplomatic state counterparts. The days when diplomacy was exclusively associated with national states are gone. Since the late 1990s, the spectrum of diplomatic instruments and the strategies that accompany sub-state entities have become more diverse and complex (Crikemans 2010a; Crikemans 2010b). To a certain extent, today’s diplomatic practices resemble a pre-Westphalian world in which realms of different territorial sizes generate their own diplomatic identity and practices. Diplomacy has become a multi-level endeavor, in which different policy levels (macroregional, national, cross-border, substate: regions and cities) each generate specific

types of diplomatic activities reflecting specific needs felt at their respective territorial levels. The question here then is when and under what conditions are diplomats of the macro-regional, national and sub-state level able and willing to cooperate with one another? This line of thinking mirrors the complexity of societal questions relating to the EU experiment and would add another layer of knowledge to diplomatic studies. In addition, all around the world, cities and even harbors are becoming important geopolitical actors in domains such as energy, climate mitigation, security and supply chains.

Re-territorialisation challenges the study of diplomacy, particularly in terms of its research questions and objectives. The potential for exploring the geopolitics-diplomacy-nexus is valuable but multifarious.

7. Geopolitics and IR: a plea to learn more actively from each other's insights, theories and methods

Bringing the scholarships of Geopolitics and International Relations more actively together may result, over time, in the development of a joint research agenda (Criekemans, 2022). It may be guided by and facilitated through the fascinating process of learning from different schools of thought and of academic fields. The most obvious elements of such a research agenda are affected by the times in which we are living. Clearly, global power centres are shifting and territorial entities around the world (states, macro-regional entities, cities and regions) are trying to deal with these realities. The drivers of these shifts are multiple; demography, technology, economy, energy, military, etc. Each of these variables offer us a 'way into' better understanding the fundamental geopolitical shifts which we are experiencing, and how world actors are responding to them. *Combining material capability approaches with cognitive or critical research approaches could offer us a more multi-faceted understanding of a changing geopolitical reality.*

Geopolitical analyses can be developed at a global, macro-regional or local level. The French geopolitical tradition has shown how a geopolitical analysis may also be relevant inside states themselves, in addition to their foreign policy ('géopolitique interne' vs. 'géopolitique externe') (Lacoste, 1976; Lacoste, 1982). Geopolitical developments at the local level may also change regional equations. Conversely, global geopolitics may limit what is possible at the regional or local level. Specialists in Geography and International Relations can also help each other in making sense of some of these dynamics.

Geopolitical analyses can be historical in nature, contemporary or even include scenario analysis. Historical analyses can help us to better understand key geopolitical concepts of the past. In this book we for instance discussed the origins and interpretations of the concept of 'containment'. Such an analysis can still be relevant to today's world. Another domain to be further developed lies in extrapolating key geopolitical variables into the future for the

purpose of developing better policy or even investment choices. Both military planners and financial specialists have, over the last years, become quite interested in combining the insights of forecasting with geopolitical analysis (Papic, 2021). This area clearly also constitutes a domain which can be of future relevance to both academia and practitioners. For foreign policy elites, it is crucial to gain a better insight into the dependence of societies upon the ‘changing’ environmental variables; to include them into their political ‘calculations’ in order to better understand the viewpoints they have to defend in their foreign policy ‘the day after tomorrow’.

During the past decades, Geopolitics and International Relations have at best been ‘living apart together’. In our opinion, Geopolitics and International Relations can again become at least ‘friends with benefits’. Both have much to offer to each other, but hurdles at the conceptual, theoretical or methodological level may lie in between. Both have similar interests; to make sense of a world which is in transition in many domains; economic, energy, technological, environmental and in terms of power politics. Both are also different; Geopolitics asks attention for territorially embedded variables and provides a more holistic view of world problems and their interconnectedness. International Relations is a broader, multi-disciplinary endeavour which also encapsulates approaches coming from diplomatic history, economic theory, international law, etc. Moreover, IR has branched out in many different areas around crucial concepts such as power (Realism), interdependence (Liberalism), inequality (Marxism), and identity and international norms (Constructivism). Similar theoretical developments have taken place inside the field of Geopolitics. But because of all these theoretical branches and different schools of thought, it has become less apparent for outsiders where respective theories of Geopolitics and IR can be mutually strengthening each other’s ontological views and epistemological insights.

The renewed attention for territorially embedded factors in several schools of thought nevertheless connects numerous scientific approaches. By better understanding these contributions, academics, students and practitioners can learn from each other. Hence it is possible to develop more comprehensive analyses on the geopolitical challenges which affect many dimensions of politics today and tomorrow (security, economy, energy, environment, technology, diplomacy & foreign policy).

Better understanding these changes through an innovative combination of theoretical and methodological insights beyond neoclassical geopolitical geopolitics, can help us to better understand that geopolitical reality. In this chapter, we pointed to Cognitive Geopolitics, Analytical Geopolitics and the literature on Geoeconomics as some of the more promising routes to further explore and apply in future studies. In conclusion, Geopolitics and IR can further learn from each other’s insights, theories and methods in the years to come.

An ongoing challenge within the literature of Geopolitics remains that the Western perspective often seems to dominate (Parker, 2015; Rona, 1982), whereas the actual richness of the literature is much greater. Mainstream literature could thus be enriched to also discover more local, non-Western approaches from Central and South America, Africa, Russia and the post-Soviet area, Asia, etc. Only gradually are these trickling into the mainstream geopolitical literature. Confronting Western and non-Western approaches with regard to basic geopolitical concepts and their political application at home may prove very insightful, both from a fundamental and a more practical point of view. It may give us a better insight into basic sources of contention and potential areas of agreement. It may help us to identify misunderstandings or fundamental differences in opinion. It may also help us in the “decolonization” of key geopolitical concepts and approaches. Through such a scientific endeavor, a critical attitude can be developed which may inform a rethinking of North-South relations (Slater, 2004) and the ongoing debate about a new multipolar order in the making.

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