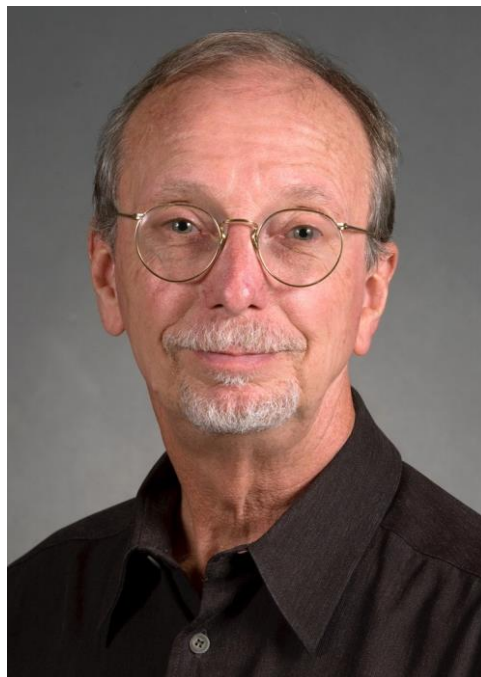


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Rescuing Classical Geopolitics Separating Geopolitics from Realism

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Abstract

The author submits his two intentions for writing this essay: first, to *clarify* the two international-relations models, realism and classical geopolitics, and second, *to show why the models should separate*.

Below, the Introduction will provide reasons for a separation. In Part One, the author will define each model, its primary characteristics. In Part Two, he will outline differences and similarities. And in Parts Three and Four, to further differentiate and show value, the author will demonstrate the utility of dividing the two, how this will broaden an understanding by examining how realism and geopolitics have influenced the thoughts and actions of three scholars and two presidents and have impacted on the parameters of several foreign-affairs sketches.

It will be shown that the two approaches differ in their assumptions and theories. After each of the models is drawn and then utilized, a new clarity and preciseness will be evident from their separation.

Key words: realism and classical geopolitics, the three Americas, strategic balances between Eurasia and North America

Introduction

Reasons for separating geopolitics from realism include:

- The two models, realism and geopolitics, do differ in their assumptions, theories, and approaches.
- A value will come from clarifying their individual premises, to do so, a scholar's responsibility.
- Frequently, the two models are joined, geopolitics subordinate to realism. The author believes this confuses their individual descriptions and contributions.
- Releasing one from the other should reveal their unique strengths. We will then see their broader capacities!
- The application of theory-to-event, the reason for generalization, should enhance understanding after use of the improved and separated models.

But, before moving on to Part One, several brief perspectives of the author will need further comment as to the directions he will follow. This manuscript is more *essay* than article, more the writer's opinion than deeper research and literature review. The reader will see few footnotes showing others' views that might be similar or at variance to the materials presented. Likewise, the scholars, statespersons, and topics selected for Parts Three and Four reflect choices by the author; these represent his best efforts to provide appropriate examples to support his narrative.

Additionally, for brevity and focus, only the classical versions of realism and geopolitics will be examined, leaving aside the neo-realist and structural varieties of realism and the critical varieties of geopolitics.

A "model" serves as repository for similar theories, its definition a gatekeeper to that collection. "Theories" come as simple sentences of probability, "A" happening to cause a likely reaction in "B." A checkerboard thesis, of countries opposed to neighbors but aligned with neighbors of their neighbors, would fit the spatial or positional design of a geopolitical model. A maritime challenge in the South China Sea between the US and China represents a rivalry corresponding to a realist model, where relative powers would be measured and applied.

Part One: Defining realism and classical geopolitics

As a central theme for this essay, the author contends the model of classical geopolitics deserves separation from its frequent inclusion within the folds of realism. The two models, both useful to international-relations theory, contrast in their assumptions and premises, lessening their worth when joined, and thus lending to confusion when applied to their separate interpretations. Once more, for clarity and utility, the two, realism and geopolitics, should separate.

The following instances, not difficult to locate, show how geopolitics has been submerged within realism. These examples should highlight this feature: “Geopolitics has been seen as subordinated to the broader area of ‘realist thinking’” (Rivarola Puntigliano in Kelly 2016, 29). “Classical geopolitics can arguably be considered an integral part of the family of realist theories” (Wu 2017, 1). Geopolitics is “fundamentally concerned with the exercise of power over territory” (Dodds 2010, 1). “Classical geopolitics closely is related to the traditions of political realism in international relations” (Klinke 2015, 1). In his *The White House Years* (1979), Henry Kissinger displays multiple instances of “geopolitics” but with these conforming to the realism description.

To continue, Stefano Guzzini (2012, 29) argues: “there is undoubtedly a common stock that justifies the inclusion of geopolitics within the larger realist tradition.” Finally, Christopher Fettweis (2015, 238) writes: “Nearly all geopolitical analysis is founded in the tradition of classical realism, and shares some of the basic assumptions of that school of thought, including that of an unchanging, conflictual international system.” His claim finds further substantiation by MacKubin Owens, long a proponent of geopolitics, in this statement: “Owens agrees with Fettweis’ assertion that geopolitics is very much a part of the realist tradition” (Garrity 2015, 4; see also Kelly 2016, 2).

Realism follows four points in sequence, nicely connected in posing a problem and then in providing a solution. (1) Anarchy or lawlessness defines the international system, where individual states must defend themselves without the international institutions that could protect. Stability might arise were a substantial peace to appear. (2) Yet, states of equal power by themselves would face a “security dilemma,” where their separate attempts at building more protection could alarm neighbors who in turn may want to augment their safety as well, setting off a costly arms race that will not deliver any state a security. Countries’ “self-help” or unilateralism is normally not a solution. (3) Instead, it would be better for nations to work toward a common protection, arranged in a collective security where all would join to a gathered safety. (4) To construct and maintain this consensus among nations for a common bonding, statespersons will promote prudent, moderate, and trustable policies and actions so as not to upset the consensus. Likewise, these leaders will isolate or erase radical/revolutionary groups and reckless countries that, too, could destabilize the peace.

Hence, international anarchy, an inherent threat to nations, can be cushioned for a time by a common trust and moderation that would bring countries a peace, and thus, a security.

The author has revised three aspects to the classical definition, areas that may make the model as shown more amenable to understanding and to application. First, the focus on raw “power” is shifted to a “management of power” and not to a calculation of national strength. Now the reader can integrate the collective security

and the statesperson solutions more appropriately with the administration of force. Second, the security dilemma, an obstacle to national safety, must satisfactorily be bypassed; the impasse of self-help requires a resolution. Third, the remedy arrives in a consensus of trust among states to band together for a plural safety, leaders arising to foster this outcome.

In differing with the author's outline for realism, certain realist scholars find no good solution to the security dilemma. Instead, they admit to an unbridled arms race: (1) Some ignore the problem entirely while (2) others recommend that Great Powers should compete vigorously for supremacy despite the dilemma, the victor exerting power to force a hegemonic peace. Any common trust for a collective security that might circumvent this security impasse, or for a statesperson guiding the system to moderation, is ignored.

John Mearsheimer, a leading advocate for this second alternative (2001, 35, 82) argues:

Great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive.

But this stance on the security dilemma may reveal several faults: (1) The ensuing rivalries and strife would add to the anarchy already feared by realists. This path erases a prudent management of power, instead, prompting a recklessness among states lending further to instability. (2) One could sense a seemingly perpetual reign of warfare among rivals' struggles for hegemony, a violent cyclic rise-and-fall of the leader-state. (3) A "night watchman," or a dominant state envisioned by Mearsheimer, could lead to exploitation and corruption by that state and not to a stabilizing of the system. Any sort of peace created by that hegemon probably would be short-lived at best. In sum, this path leaves one lacking any positive solution, other than raw power.

Nonetheless, the outline of realism in this essay does provide a reasonable remedy – that of a collective security and of a statesperson to manage it. Accordingly, this author will stay with the depiction of realism as featured, a stable system of some sharing of power among a trusting assembly of countries as a promising cure to problems inherent to the security dilemma.

The collective-security feature the author attaches to realism is not well-understood by some. Admittedly, the United Nations Security Council has failed in resisting international conflict via its mutual deterrent, Article 51 of the Charter, instead, allowing for regional alliances providing such a protection when the Council cannot perform. But similar coalitions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also exhibit a shared defense, although for a more limited and not global reach. It likewise is true that this approach extends to other venues as well, for example, to concerted sanctions that might ward off armed invasions as in the partial Russian occupation of Ukraine today or against nuclear proliferation as in the contemporary curbs on Iran and North Korea. All of these instances demonstrate some confidence in coalition and within the realist format bent upon a grouping of moderate countries preventing excesses of insurgent forces by way of joint shackles.

In the three parts that follow, this description of realism, and later that of geopolitics, too, will broaden after observing contrasts between the two models and after

showing how each, when alone, will facilitate a clearer interpretation below for the several examples of scholars and presidents and of foreign-affairs cases.

Geopolitics rests on locations of states, regions, and resources as these influence countries' foreign actions and policies as aids to statecraft. Its main assumption: placement in an environment matters. Therefore, in geopolitics, a platform is established for students and state-leaders to study benefits and liabilities in their regional and global positions and to work toward opportunities and solutions based upon these surroundings. Ample sea coasts might encourage a seafaring orientation; residence within continents could spawn an encirclement by opponents or opportunities for expansion.

Much in geopolitics is devoted to theories based upon geographic space - - heartlands, rimlands, shatterbelts, checkerboards, distance, migrations, sea and land, resources, among the many. Here, the author has found over sixty such generalizations (Kelly 2016, 173-185), all influenced by placement in territorial or maritime spaces. He looks upon geopolitics as a neutral, timeless, ubiquitous, and constructive array of tools, all useful to understanding foreign affairs.

Unfortunately, geopolitics suffers blame either as a disruptive and manipulative "power politics" amongst the great nations or as some sort of pesky economic or political disturbance, for instance, oil price declines, trade imbalances, climate change, revolutions, coups, failed developments or government collapses, and so forth, all depressing stock-market prices and countries' budgets. Neither of these negative depictions satisfies the term's traditional definition about states' locations and positions influencing their international involvements.

In substantiating geopolitics, a person could admit to some evidence that a state's environment does shape behavior. Harvey Starr (2013) brings us ample statistical linkages between borders and conflict/cooperation. Christopher Fettweis (2016) continues this theme with an expansive display of similar correlations: contiguity and proximity, frontiers, diffusion, and war, to name the primary. The author with a colleague (Kelly and Boardman 1976) found in a stepwise-regression routine a conclusion that distances significantly affected General Assembly voting on UN peacekeeping among the Latin American states, the closer to the United States, the more opposition to such roll calls. An even larger assortment of less objective but still appropriate postulates could be added to this testament on the impact of space upon action.

The two models in Part One now outlined, the author will turn to expanding such descriptions, first by contrasting realism against geopolitics in Part Two, and then by characterizing their separate features with views of selected scholars and presidents (Part Three) and with depictions of two international topics (Part Four). To repeat the purpose of this essay: the goal is, first, to clarify the essentials of both models, and then, to justify why each should be kept separate by way of a closer application.

Part Two: Contrasting classical geopolitics with realism

To engage at greater length toward distinguishing between the two models, a shift is taken next to contrast their individual approaches, and later, to draw together and to broaden their separate attributes.

Assumptions: These come as simple beliefs that underlie a model, expressions not provable but simply accepted as credible. For realism, nations suffer anarchy or a dangerous lawlessness in which states must seek security on their own initiatives. Power alone offers some protection if managed effectively but an assembled defense among similar states may ultimately prove the more successful. For geopolitics, a country's spatial placement may influence behavior, and a leader will study its relative position and location for insight by enlisting pertinent theories to guide an explanation. Once a partisan of realism or of geopolitics accepts the presented assumptions, the other factors will fall into place, as we will observe below.

Theory: To repeat, a theory is a simple sentence of probability, "X" happening to influence "Y." Geopolitics exhibits a wide variety of these theories, all tied to spatial positions and locations of states, regions, and resources – heartlands, checkerboards, shatterbelts, distances, sea or land powers, borders, maritime straits, and such, the author having located over sixty (60) of these. Indeed, the essence of geopolitics points to the application of theories within international relationships, in part, to assist an interpreting of events, and in part, to form broader platforms for designing policy.

In contrast, realism contributes fewer theories, its priority tied more to security policies and to the immediate management of power. It, too, will submit premises that define its parameters. Such examples as the following include: an environment of anarchy and danger, a failure of self-help for a certain defense, a solution coming in collective security, and finally, a wise and skilled statesperson. Seldom do the geopolitical and realist generalizations intersect.

It might prove rewarding here to pause for a moment to locate where a few theories with common labels may appear to intersect with each other. In the topic of power balances, so central to our discussion, geopolitics looks to spatial configurations reflective of states' relative positions such as in checkerboards, shatterbelts, and pan-regions, opposing countries juxtaposed against friendly nations. Power itself does not factor into this calculus. Realism envisions structures attuned to calculations and leverages of strength, two sides equal or one side preponderant, a balancing or band-wagon phenomenon that would derive from statespersons' decisions and their measurements and applications of comparable power. These orders would arrive in the number of nations or "poles" and in the relations among these nations, whether friendly or hostile.

Important Earth spaces contrast, too. For geopolitics, a core-periphery design occasionally appears, for instance, in heartlands expanding toward rimlands, or sea powers poised against land powers, or rich or industrial nations astride the poorer or marginal. Realism tends to show a Great Power proclivity, the larger countries in alliance or competition. Additionally, a global North bias is distinctive, the further a land to the South, its lesser importance. Geopolitics applies its theories to all sorts of countries and regions, small, peripheral, and unimportant or others raised to the more strategic and wealthy.

“Offshore-balancing” may turn in either direction as well. For geopolitics, the US Navy possesses the ability to position its fleets along Eurasian coasts, there to favor allies in regional constellations with its forward deployment. For realism, paramount is a Great Power’s attempt to check the rise or potential of hostile challengers, whether or not within a maritime format. Here, the author suggests for the current essay a wider interpretation that includes for both models a coastal and inland perspective, the United States among the Great Powers holding this sole advantage over the global commons both in maritime position (geopolitics) and in naval might (realism).

Power: Power embodies a prime focus of realism, its management in addition to its calculation for national security. States or blocks of nations stand in equal or in unequal allotments of strength, the premise being that similar amounts may discourage an aggressor but dis-similar aggregates could encourage war by the superior. Or a unified gathering of countries’ power might protect all members from a feared attack, the combined strengths of many against a single rogue state or aggressive coalition. For geopolitics, authority derives more from a spatial or pivotal leverage, strategic choke-points, central or peripheral locations, sea or river fronts, or resource possessions. Heartlands and rimlands should hold importance in addition to distance, isolation, migrations, and frontiers. The measuring and applying of power do not appear in geopolitics.

False images: Realism and geopolitics alike suffer from pejorative descriptions that distort and diminish their efficacies. *Geopolitique*, intended to show a conspiratorial aggressiveness bent on greed and exploitation, often unfairly attaches to both. Likewise, “power politics” is thrust against the two models, linking them erroneously to assumptions that Great States regularly compete against others violently and illegally.

This author regards both realism and geopolitics positively, their characters constructive and not disruptive. Indeed, realism offers a good solution to international instability and to resolving conflict, once more, a collective security holding a common front against aggressors. Geopolitics guides states to policies and actions that would reflect their geographic environments toward giving an increased security and prosperity, whether a focus on sea or land power, or a better spatial placement for protection, an enclosure within a checkerboard, for example, or an avoidance of a shatterbelt. In sum, both models are designed to issue productive outcomes to countries’ foreign affairs.

It could be admitted that one model may reside in the shadow of the other, as the above examples demonstrate. But, their assumptions and approaches yet differ sufficiently to separate their identities in the majority of cases.

Extent of regional or global involvement: It seems that realism adheres more frequently to the Great Power balances and strategies upon Eurasia and North America and less elsewhere, whereas geopolitics applies equally to smaller countries and the more remote as well as to the larger states and the more strategic. In the latter case, this author with a colleague described the geopolitics of Paraguay (Kelly and Whigham 1990), a study that enlisted the traditional concepts and expressions of geopolitics for this isolated yet pivotal nation. This variance in extent between the two models may be reflected in the greater number of theories held in geopolitics and in the greater relevance to national strength shown in realism.

Statespersons: Realism points more immediately to elites’ policy calculations based upon power management, this essential to its argument. A leader must reckon for dangers that

may threaten, especially against the excesses of revolutionary and crusading/reckless states. The moderate states should assemble in coalitions when required for national safety, and this demands expert diplomacy for building such unions and for stabilizing local/regional challenges. In contrast, geopolitics, and sometimes realism, neglects the individual and her/his immediate decision-making. Rather, the state is an assumed rational international actor. Geopolitics depicts states' decisions as long-term and displays a geographic backdrop to the advantages and limitations contained in a country's historic placement.

Security and war: Distance, isolation, rugged topography, and central or marginal placement renders some protection or danger to states in geopolitics, these and like traits geographic in stance. Sea-power orientation and isolated continental heartlands, for example, may bring safety. Power in abundance or managed well by leaders of states and coalitions would contribute to security in realism.

Cycles: Rotations may appear in realism, interludes of consensus and peace interrupted by periods of division and strife, the problem of international anarchy unsolvable. Here, Nicholas Spykman asserts that "peace is a brief interlude between wars," conflict an unavoidable impediment (1944, 45; 1942, 15-25, 446). Balance-of-power and rise-and-fall scenarios offer another example of such rotations, leader-states replaced inevitably by challengers, a "unipolar moment" to an American rise to and later fall from hegemony to a rise of a successful China. We see fewer cycles in geopolitics, but one instance occurs in land powers replacing sea powers in Halford Mackinder's heartland thesis (1904), the "Columbian" era succumbing to that of the Eurasian pivot. Also, Middle American shatterbelts have shifted from and returned to spheres-of-influence during the past few centuries.

Geography: Space forms the crux of geopolitics – comparative land and sea locations, positions of states, regions, and resources, and a multiple of other territorial features – distance and isolation, climate, topography and migrations, maritime and land orientations, areas of pivot and leverage whether core or periphery, and so forth. For realism, these same attributes should translate to security derived from the variables of power.

Foreign and Security Policies: Realism is more present to policy making, a facility for recommending to leader's timely strategies for advancing national interests, these including enhancing resource accumulations and communication facilities, billeting of forces in pivotal locations, constructing alliance balances and recognizing hostile forces, to name several. Geopolitics poses similar suggestions but for the longer term, whether a nation should focus on sea or land power, secure frontiers and develop marginal lands, or conserve energy and other resources. Yet, in this category, the policy features overlap between the two stances, but the time factor does show some variation, shorter for realism, longer for geopolitics.

Ideology and morality: Both realism and geopolitics offer neutral perspectives within foreign affairs. Both tend toward conservatism but neither provides expansive ethical vistas. If realism reveals any morality, it is that a state's safety rates the highest value, anything less would be secondary. Better to attain important national interests than to contribute to expensive and non-essential humanitarian and other ventures. Critical geopolitics reflects normative and deconstructive natures, but these expressions do not appear in traditional geopolitics.

In sum, classical geopolitics provides a study of how the relative locations/positions of states, regions, and resources may influence nations' foreign behaviors, policies, and actions. The approach envisions neutral, timeless, and ubiquitous tools for examining international relations, with emphasis upon theories inserted for insight into international events and foreign policies. Such premises also provide a general backdrop for policy and action – core position vs periphery, ocean fronts vs hinterland isolation, with a multitude of additional theories characterizing this approach. For instance, a country's security or insecurity in part rests upon its location within regions and its position relative to other nations. Some countries tend toward the seas; others lean more landward. Certain regions exude checkerboard configurations or suffer shatterbelt conflict escalations. One might contend that geopolitics is more passive, academic, and reflective of theory application. It exposes a geographic setting for leaders' constructing their security and diplomatic designs.

Realism focuses on statespersons' awareness and management of a nation's power, this measured by several variables – political effectiveness, military preparedness, natural resources, pivotal locations, advanced technology and industry, among the primary facets. This model assists foreign-affairs analysts toward formulating and carrying out security and economic interests of countries that inhabit a dangerous international environment. Individual countries may attend to their own security, the idea of self-help, but seldom are they able wholly to defend themselves unilaterally against opponent states of equal power. Whenever they attempt to increase their defenses, others may improve their protections as well, creating a security dilemma leading to dysfunctional arms races.

Ultimately, a turn to a collective security among countries might prove more profitable, all agreeing to a joined trust, moderation, prudence, and diplomacy. In most instances, such a consensus will bring peace by creating some safety in a lawless world, and states-leaders should perform to maintain such a confidence and transparency by enlisting a careful management of foreign relations with attention to ready adjustments in power. Reckless crusading and revolutionary factions must be isolated and eliminated because they do not hold to the necessary trust for a common protection. The term, "long peace," reflects the strategic stability of the multipolar balance among the moderate European Great States following Napoleon's fall, that depiction of cautious balance returning during the Cold War years of bipolarity. In contrast to geopolitics, realism is more problem- and policy-oriented and attentive to immediate decision making.

All told, shedding "power" from geopolitics and "placement" from realism tends to clarify both and to distract from neither, raising a needed lucidity to applying theory and to formulating policy. Such revisions will improve the utility of the models' contributions to foreign affairs.

Part Three: Geopolitical and realist depictions of three scholars and two statespersons

A further path toward showing the benefits of contrasting geopolitics to realism may come from different depictions of three international-relations authors, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Nicholas Spykman, and then from two realist applications of US presidents Richard Nixon and Barack Obama. These selections are the author's, ones he believes may best exemplify what the narrative requires.

Kissinger's book, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problem of Peace, 1812-22* (1957), shows cogently the basic traits of realism, Kissinger's a short study of the aggressions of Napoleon Bonaparte, a revolutionary and unstoppable assailant never amenable to European peace. The dictator exhibited a perpetual military threat to his neighbors, the individual nations standing helpless and alone against his invasions. Only Napoleon's own destruction via a collective alliance among the rival states could bring about his demise and usher stability onto Europe. Kissinger's heroes, Austria's Foreign Minister, Klemens von Metternich, and England's Foreign Secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, performed with the necessary discipline, patience, prudence, and leadership to isolate the French revolutionary, eventually to crush him and his power, and thus, to deliver a continental peace and security to the victors. This historic depiction shows the realist traits described above – a dangerous anarchy spreading from revolutionary France, a security rendered by a common security among its opponents, sage statespersons to establish this consensus, and destruction of the radical before consensus would be possible among the moderates, then allowing them to forge a more lasting peace and security. Tying realist perspectives to Kissinger's account deepens our understanding of these historic events.

A similar scenario would repeat in the 1960s and onwards to the same realist bent, Nixon and Kissinger eventually softening Cold War dangers by concluding the socialist states as being less threatening and revolutionary. This once observed, negotiating a stable framework of moderation could evolve into a trust among the Great Powers for calm and alliance. Accommodations among the gathered states would materialize through diplomacy and arms control, delivering a new order protective of all according to a collectivist pattern. Despite Kissinger's occasional references to "geopolitics," his main pitch conforms to a realist power management, when effective, giving stability and protection. Spatial placements of nations and other geopolitical accoutrements do not appear in his writings.

These traits affix to Kissinger's realism: A threatening anarchy required a careful management of power for states' safety. This protection of strength with prudence derived from a common trust among moderate states, led by wise statespersons who would manage their combined authority through a solid consensus, with radical and reckless states either destroyed, coopted, or brought to reason. Collective security offered a protection not possible in a unilateralism.

Brzezinski's geopolitics portrayed two general perspectives: (1) the importance to America of a stable and friendly Eurasia, and (2) the need for America to engage that continent with timely cross-oceans interventions for retaining that region's favorable balance. He applied to this Mackinder-like strategic configuration a number of traditional premises -- balance-of-power, land and sea power, choke-points, offshore balancing,

encirclement, gateway states, and American isolationism. But a Eurasian emphasis dominated his spatial approach.

He introduced these themes with this statement: “Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the center of world power” (1997, xiii). Yet, this great land mass, the “world’s central security concern” (2004, 36), has become more diverse and thus, it has become more difficult for Americans to control its growing disruptions, these now requiring “maneuver, diplomacy, coalition building, co-optation, and the very deliberate deployment of one’s political assets [as] key ingredients of the successful exercise of geostrategic power on the Eurasia chessboard” (1997, 35-36).

As “ultimate guarantor of global stability” (2004, vii; 2007, 192), the United States must “accommodate” or resist likely challenges among the continent’s Great Powers in the coming years or suffer “global anarchy” (1997, 195-197), the US becoming a “garrison state imbued with a siege mentality” (2004, viii). In terminology reminiscent of Halford Mackinder, George Kennan, and Nicholas Spykman, Brzezinski asserts:

American foreign policy must remain concerned with the geopolitical dimension and must apply its influence in Eurasia in a manner that creates a stable continental equilibrium, with the United States as the political arbiter. . . it is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America (1997, xiv).

Substantial obstacles will confront America in its need to formulate friendly Eurasian balances, challenges both internal and external to the nation. Brzezinski cites the following as examples: disinterest and ignorance of American leaders and publics; missed opportunities at the close of the Cold War; a “global Balkans” of “north-south animosity [induced by] rising aspirations of increasingly restless global populations” that will bring “explosions of undirected anger” toward the industrial states; and a more complex, instable, and dangerous Eurasia prompting a strategic shift from West to East, with marginal “endangered states” of Ukraine, Pakistan, South Korea, and others that might create a “chain reaction that could bring down the global system itself” (2012, 123-125; 229-232; 2007, 135-142, 186-191).

Brzezinski recommended a “cooperative global system” and a “collective involvement” of world powers, led by an enlightened and active United States that would provide a necessary “Eurasian pluralism” of stability and peace. He felt some urgency in this endeavor, fearing a present waning of US influence relatively and absolutely and a potential for rivals engaged in a “post-American scramble.” if such a failure happens, creating a future world of 2025 that will “not [be] Chinese but chaotic” (2008, 6, 34; 2012, 2, 75-79).

These are the characteristics of Brzezinski’s geopolitics: In strategic terms, his stress pointed to North America forging a favorable and stable Eurasia. This would require an involvement of America as global moderator, a failure of this plunging the world into disorder. A confining checkerboard pattern among the continent’s nations will discourage aggressions among neighbors, but a shatterbelt escalation of violence may be unavoidable among the marginal and buffer states. His collective-security recommendation and his frequent references to strength shaded to realism, but for the most part, Brzezinski utilized theories from the geopolitical playbook to draw out his theses.

Nicholas Spykman is noted for his “rimlands” extension to Halford Mackinder’s Eurasian heartland, these territories encircling coastal regions of leverage and discord between the central continental pivot and the outer maritime countries. He rated both areas, heartland and rimlands, of equal strategic importance, a revision often missed by scholars (Gerace 1991). For American defense, he advocated, similarly to Brzezinski, this need:

Our objective is to prevent the domination [of Eurasia, both heartland and rimlands] by hegemonic powers whose principles and ideals are opposed to the whole course of Western Civilization. . . . It is obvious, therefore, that the internal power relations between the states of the Eurasian Continent will determine to a very great extent the course of our policies” (1944, 45, 34). [Accordingly,] “it will be cheaper in the long run to remain a working member of the European power zone than to withdraw for short intermissions to our insular domain only to be forced to apply later the whole of our national strength to redress a balance that might have needed but a slight weight at the beginning” (1942, 3-7).

He visualized this conclusion: “The strategic picture demands that we conduct our military operations in the form of a great offensive across the oceans. If our allies in the Old World are defeated, we cannot hold South America; if we defeat [the Eurasian enemy] abroad, our good neighbors will need no protection” (1942, 457).

Spykman’s narratives are replete with references that fit the geopolitical packet. For instance:

“Geography does not determine [policy] but it does condition; . . . Ministers come and go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed. . . . The nature of the territorial base has influenced [statespersons] in the past and will continue to do so in the future” (1938, 29-30). He alleged that the “North Atlantic is today the most desirable body of water on which a state can be located. . . . [The most important] political activity of the world is, and will continue to be, centered between 25 degrees and 60 degrees north latitude [where] history is made” (1944, 41-44). In organic terminology, some countries “have a tendency to expand.” Frontiers are lines “where conflicting pressures [of states] become equalized in an inevitable struggle for power” (1939, 399, 410). Buffer states, checkerboards, climate, the distribution of landmasses, and land and sea power are awarded attention (1938, 29-30, 226-227, 349; 1939, 392-399, 410; 1942, 20-25, 180-181; 1944, 38-44).

But in other writings, a realist blending emerged. He argued that power balances among nations provided the best method for containing expansionist states, for if countries wished to survive, “they must [alone or together] be willing to go to war to preserve a balance against the growing hegemonic power of the period” (1942, 20-25). “Nations which renounce the power struggle and deliberately choose impotence will cease to influence international relations, either for evil or good and risk eventual absorption by more powerful neighbors” (1942, 446).

In realism, Spykman’s emphasis rested upon power balances and the requirement of strength for national protection, with no confidence in individual self-help or in international institutions. In geopolitics, his focus was predicated upon the classical theories: heartlands, rimlands, buffers and checkerboards, organic borders and country’s lifecycles, climate, and land and sea power. For Spykman, some combination of both models held sway.

Presidents Richard Nixon and Barack Obama (in addition to President H.W. Bush) followed realist directions more often than did other recent chief executives (see Goldberg 2016; Pillar 2016). For instance, both Nixon and Obama envisioned serious international dangers approximate to anarchy, Nixon over expansive Communism, Obama over nuclear proliferation and Middle East instabilities. Obama's earlier optimism as Chief Executive shifted later to pessimism in this regard.

As statespersons, both favored negotiation and not force, Nixon with China and Russia, Obama with Iran, Cuba, and Myanmar. Neither threatened or bullied rivals, favoring diplomacy and adjustments through discussion. Both sought achievement of vital national interests before taking on humanitarian ventures, Nixon's focus on ending US involvement in Vietnam and on seeking relaxed tensions with China but on ignoring less-developed areas, Obama's concern on starting an Asian priority and a Middle East conflict abatement, but on staying away from humanist military interventions against chemical weapons in Syria (despite his "red line" assertion!).

They together sought to retrench military force as ways to end unproductive foreign ventures and to increase trust among allies and opponents: Nixon from Vietnam, Obama from Iraq and Afghanistan. Both ruled with moderation and compromise. Obama imposed sanctions instead of war to halt Russian intrusions into Ukraine and to delay Iran's nuclear weapons intentions. Nixon and Kissinger attempted cooption by trade and technology transfers toward socialist states. Both moved to eliminate radicals/revolutionaries, Nixon isolating Cuba and encouraging moderation in China and Russia, Obama ridding Osama bin Laden and refusing to bargain with Middle East terrorists. Additionally, Obama rebuffed accommodation with Russia's Putin, resisting Putin's assaults with sanctions and indifference.

In toto, differentiating the separate paths of realism and geopolitics offers a greater precision of understanding that may advance a deeper insight. That Kissinger, Nixon, and Obama drifted to realism, Brzezinski shaded to geopolitics, and Spykman favored both, all present advantage.

Part Four: Realism and geopolitics applied to certain international-relations topics

Application of theory to event, the methodology of this last part, presents the most difficult, but also the most essential, task for this essay and for empirical research. Where might realism fit more naturally in interpreting foreign-affairs events, and where might geopolitics? To attempt to assist the reader for this task, the author will point out either an underlined realism or an underlined geopolitics where these might best illuminate an understanding.

Two test runs are presented below that illustrate the author's joining premises of either model to an interpretation of events, policies, and spatial patterns, reflective of his study of Latin American and of North American/Eurasian geopolitics, with realist traits interspersed as well.

The three Americas: In geopolitical terms, the Western Hemisphere separates into several contrasting Americas (Kelly 1997, 161-166):

First, a wealthy Northern sector, dominated by the United States, shows a region strategically involved overseas in Eurasian balances for its own security, this advantaged by its (1) naval supremacy astride the shores of Eurasia, enhanced further by (2) a checkerboard pattern among the Great Powers of the Continent's interior that can be manipulated by a distant American strength, and by facing (3) no dangers from American neighbors or from a Eurasian encirclement to its preponderance. All of these and other traits allow an east/west focus upon sea power over the global commons and upon a US Eurasian involvement.

Second, a weak, fragmented, and depressed Middle America of the Caribbean and Central America reveals still a strategic location but holding a liability to the United States due to the area's fragility and disunity. This dependency creates a US vulnerability toward a region attractive to Eurasian opponents entering the Caribbean. To prevent this vacuum, Monroe's Doctrine represents a tradition of preventing Eurasian enclaves threatening to the Yankee. The danger would arrive in a shatterbelt structure, an alliance between an American republic tied to a Eurasian sponsor, the Cuban missile crisis a good example of this hazard.

To continue along this geopolitical vein, a third variant, South America, contrasts with its northern neighbors, being a non-strategic and isolated region, disconnected from either the middle or the northern portions of America. One could depict its domain as a primitive and unique continental Galapagos Island, one containing ancient and untainted flora and fauna (or classical theories) that differ from other lands. The traditional buffer states, crush zones, checkerboards, tempting vacant lands, frontier insecurities, distances across rugged topography, and regional integration, all exhibit this tradition. Its geopolitics locates within its own continent, revealing little interest in Eurasian balancing or in assisting in defense against an endangering Great Power coalition against America. The southern wealth rates above that of Middle America but it clearly is not sufficient to pose a challenge to North America.

In contrast, in depicting realism, Kissinger displays a diminished interest toward South America and other outlying marginal regions. His interview with the Chilean ambassador portrays this disdain (Hersh 1983, 263):

Mr. Minister [Kissinger speaking], you make a strange speech. You come here talking of Latin America, but this is not important. The axis of history begins in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes on to Tokyo. What occurs in the southern world is not important. It is not worth the time.

I said, remembers Valdez, Mr. Kissinger, you know nothing of Latin America. No, Kissinger replied, and I don't care.

His "pentagonal thesis," stating a preference for the northern Great Powers, is not an unusual bias among many realists. The "camino del oro" expression (Kelly 1997, 127) marks yet a further instance of a favoring of the North over the South.

Spykman's realism, likewise, reflects a northern preference and disregard toward South America (Kelly and Perez 2002). He envisioned a "Chile-Brazil axis against an Argentine-Peru axis" that reflected a divisive checkerboard potential. Neither axis showed a Eurasian interest nor an involvement for South America connecting to northern power balances. He advocated US control of the Atlantic Narrows between northern Brazil and Africa and of northern Chile to secure the Southern Cone from a Eurasian invasion hostile to the United States.

The United States as balancer over Eurasia: A long-held premise within the domain of American security advocated a balance favoring the United States among the major Eurasian states. That balancing would be performed just on the Eurasian continent, the Americans demanding they be kept away from such conflict on their continent. Reflective of this advantage, the United States stood as the lone "indispensable global stabilizer," its steady and trusted involvement safeguarding peace and moderation over continents and oceans. A "fortress America," of limiting its involvement to just a hemispheric autonomy, never has received much notice within both realist and geopolitical spheres.

In geopolitics, *North America embodies preponderantly a maritime orientation*, its placement almost dictating this environmental designation: (1) its vast and passable internal and coastal barge traffic ways; (2) its coastal and river deep-water ports on Atlantic, Pacific, Great Lakes, and Mexican Gulf coasts; (3) its frontiers facing no threats; (4) its navy balancing on the fringes of Eurasia, billeted in rimland areas of vital interest; and (5) its military able to manipulate a divisive Eurasian checkerboard. Taken together, these and other maritime facilities allowed North America to extend its authority onto the Eurasian World Island, there to exert a favorable impact upon the contemporary balances and to block any threat to America.

In terms of realism, *two strategic northern continents represent the most vital areas on Earth*, Eurasia and North America. "Strategic" defines as continental areas or platforms for Great Power involvement, the great nations in competition over these expansive spaces within global affairs. Both continents dominate the Northern temperate climes and thus the globe, the peripheral areas of Africa, South/Southeast Asia, the lower Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, not significant to their system. Five Great Powers, China, Japan, Russia, Germany, and the United States dominate their areas and extend authority within influence spheres beyond their frontiers.

Yet, in a geopolitical stance, the *sole theater of strategic competition* resides just in Eurasia and not in North America, the United States since 1823 declaring in Monroe's declaration its hemisphere off-limits to overseas engagement. Here, *America is different*: it

is not Eurasian, awarding it more trust and flexibility in constructing alliances from afar. Its navy dominates the global commons far out from America; it fears no landward or seaward invasion; it possesses the most recognizable global heartland within the Mississippi watershed; and its hegemony at present lacks serious Great Power challengers. These factors should hold for the foreseeable future.

In balance-of-power and in realist terms, *this US advantage of hegemony is no longer cyclic*, a point at odds with certain realist scholars (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016; Brooks and Wohlforth 2015; Layne 2012). Instead, because America differs from Eurasian states, the former rise-and-fall theses no longer pertain (Levy and Thompson 2010). American power and leadership could well last into the next decade or beyond because of its privileged place of authority in the Western Hemisphere. Accordingly, *North America will continue to perform as hegemonic balancer* among the Eurasians, a feat enabled by its maritime mobility. Within this advantage, by connecting from offshore it can focus its strength onto mainland areas of importance. Aligning with Eurasian and other nations in a collective security facilitates because of the appearance of America's indifference to absorbing new lands, this gaining a trust over the continent's residents who might be suspect of such aggrandizements by neighbors.

Again stated for geopolitical emphasis, *a checkerboard of divisiveness limits the likelihood of a joined Eurasian encirclement of America*, if American engagement continues. It might be difficult to imagine a Russian-led coalition set to invade the Americas over the vast ocean barriers. Or a Chinese thrust that would accomplish a similar purpose. In sum, America resides in a place of protection, able to enforce its Monroe Doctrine of limiting Eurasian threats within the Americas, but yet with the leverage and resolve to maintain its worldwide ascendancy.

In realism, China poses *the only serious challenge to American preponderance*, its growing strength arising from successful national development. Its possible elevation as a new reigning hegemon could depend on the ability to resolve national difficulties and to reduce regional encirclement. Some realists claim a "Thucydides trap" of inevitable war between a rising China and a challenged North America. That China may stay a land and not a sea power, in contrast, might sway others to accept the possibility of accommodation with the United States. The marine-faring position of America could present a seemingly dominant variable at present against any serious rivalry between the two nations.

Finally in a geopolitical turn, *the United States appears firmly-decided upon a global maritime and rimland supremacy*, and this predominance appears assured because the most threatening Eurasian states are land-oriented. This supremacy guarantees protection from a direct naval attack from an encircling Eurasia. Instead, one can see an American maritime encirclement of that continent, the main external threats to America arriving from asymmetric aggressions from nuclear-armed Iranians, North Koreans, or other radical and climatic elements.

In sum, a global pivot resides in North America, its leverage (geopolitical) and strength (realist) conferring a strategic maneuverability over Great Power balances upon Eurasia that favor United States security. The utility of realist power and geopolitical position that America possesses facilitates this primacy.

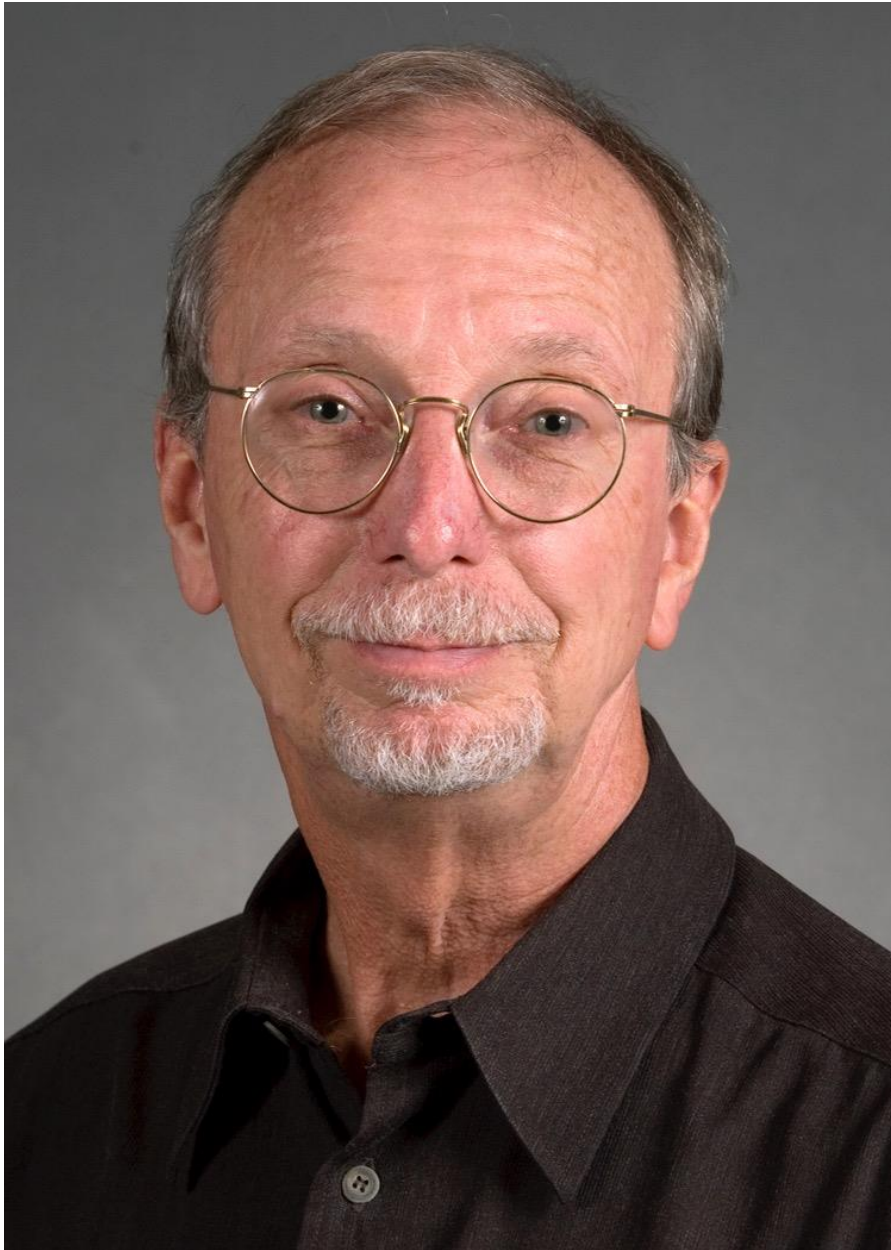
Conclusion

Geopolitics needs rescue from the strictures of realism. Once accomplished, both models will benefit with a new coherence and precision. Being this essay's motivation, its four parts – clarifying and then comparing models/theories, sketching further examples of three scholars and two presidents, and testing applications from American foreign affairs – it is hoped, have provided the reader with some added potential for enlisting the two models, realism and geopolitics, now refined, separated, and applied, in advancing their study of international relations.

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