

Classical Geopolitics Continues under Attack

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CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICS CONTINUES UNDER ATTACK

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Abstract - Classical geopolitics remains under attack, the causes in part reminiscent of General Karl Haushofer's fascist image in the United States press following World War Two and presently of the media and some scholars' repeated distortions of this often-maligned concept. The best solution toward correcting this malaise rests on a continued expression by proponents of the many contributions of geopolitics to international-relations theory and practice.

Accordingly, the aim of this article will be to focus upon exposing and correcting such negative interpretations as contained in two recent articles, the authors' intent being to elevate the true nature of classical geopolitics by showing and refuting the misleading depictions gleaned from these two articles:

Christopher J. Fettweis (2015) "On Heartlands and Chessboards: Classical Geopolitics, Then and Now," Orbis 59/2, 233-248

Zhengyu Wu (2018) "Classical Geopolitics, Realism, and Balance of Power Theory," The Journal of Strategic Studies 41/6, 766-823

This article divides into three parts, the first and second devoted to assessing the mistaken depictions of geopolitics taken from Fettweis and Wu and the third aimed to drawing on what the authors allege to be a more accurate description and application of the classical concept.

Key words - classical geopolitics, realism, balance-of-power, sea power/land power, heartland and continental balancing

INTRODUCTION

Theory is based upon some probability of an event happening that could affect another event. If “A” occurs, it could impact on “B” as a result of A. The key problem in this linkage between premise and happening rests upon a true estimation of “some probability,” a problem elusive and probably impossible to resolve. Unless quantifiable numbers are available for “scientific” or statistical-hypothesis testing, these numbers being absent for most of international relations, we cannot measure with any exactness the true predictability of a theory and of its likelihood to shed light with confidence on an international happening. Instead, we approximate that likelihood, our theories helping to explain events by enlisting such inexact interpreters of probability as common sense and rational hunches, historical examples and long-held policies, maps and observations, and other such determinants. We possess no other choice! Nonetheless, theories should be utilized and respected as useful descriptions and guides for students and states persons. They simply prove to be a necessity for humans to exist and for research to perform, albeit, with many premises left in need of clarification and of better application. So in our case, to contend that geopolitical theory in large part is flawed or biased and should be set aside, as some critics claim, is an easy excuse but an incomplete answer that misses the elusiveness but yet importance of theory to classical geopolitics and to the other foreign-affairs models.

For this essay, a *model* serves as a repository of assumptions, concepts, and theories that fit a particular international-relations theoretical approach. Such models are passive and follow no other function other than to assemble these three parts via defining their genre. Geopolitical theories themselves do not exist, such premises carrying, instead, their own unique labels: heartlands, sea power, checkerboards, choke points, etc. These collect within a geopolitical model because they will correspond to that spatial design. The same scheme for realism, balance-of-power, dependency, constructivism, and the other IR models, each bundling within its own compartment special assortments of assumptions, concepts, and theories. Again, these form the parts of passive containers. They join within these assortments when they agree to their model’s definition, yet with their own individual labels and applications.

As per classical geopolitics, the authors define its model thus: *a study of possible impacts upon countries’ foreign policies and actions from certain geographical spaces – relative locations and positions of states, regions and resources and such other factors as distance, borders, climate, topography, demography, and size and shape of states, among many similar traits.* The assumption rests on the relevance of the international spatial system influencing states’ behavior. Geopolitics contributes both an environmental platform or framework for devising foreign actions and strategies and a variety

of theories for assisting states persons for designing these practices. A fuller description must await this article's third section.

Contrasting definitions of the term exist. But most generally focus upon a tie between geographical placement of states and that placement influencing foreign policies and actions. This depiction, again based upon relative spaces and their influence on nations, appears to be the accepted essence of classical geopolitics. Hence, the problem the authors find from most criticisms of geopolitics is not with its "flawed" or absent definition but with the vague critiques some assess against the concept's neutrality, accuracy, and usefulness. To their credit, Mackubin Owens (2015) and Phil Kelly (2017b, 2016) are among those who have defended the classical tradition by demonstrating its worth.

A repeatedly-raised but never-defined "geopolitics" in the media and in some scholarship appears to point to a "power politics" aggressiveness among the Great Powers, one that is damaging to global stability and economic profits. If true, this poses certainly a dangerous and negative characterization! But this interpretation is much opposed in the present essay for being an inaccurate and not suitable description of classical geopolitics, one very much at odds with the portrait painted below in this article's later Part. That depiction, of comparative strengths among the primary countries, appears more suited to the model of realism with its focus on power, although this depiction of realism, too, is misleading (Kelly 2019a), for its true nature rests, instead, on a careful management of power.

In the articles reviewed in the next two parts, the authors find Fettweis of little value toward clarifying geopolitics except in its negative, and Wu's more positive account yet arrives so narrowly that it, too, distorts the accuracy and wider contribution of the model. But both will serve as a trial for exploring further what the authors consider to be the complete nature and contribution of geopolitics.

PART ONE

AN EXAMINATION OF CHRISTOPHER FETTWEIS' ARTICLE

Fettweis is dismissive to the extreme toward the totality of classical geopolitics, for to him, the concept arrives so "fatally flawed from the beginning" (p. 235) that it lacks any scholarly credibility. He continues: "Geopolitics [eventually would completely wilt] under the light of increased scrutiny that [will accompany its wider] exposure." Framed within this negativity, one is surprised the journal, *Orbis*, would publish such a diatribe against a geopolitical framework it purports to support! To its opposite, this present essay posits a value in geopolitics, placing it legitimately as equal to but separate from the other recognized foreign-policy models. Neglecting to geopolitics, for instance, an environmental context for states' behaviors, as

Fettweis will assume, negates, as well, most other international-relations models, for nations perform naturally within a spatial structure!

His critical depiction is not unusual to geopolitics. A number resemble Fettweis, and in respected journals! For instance, Charles Clovis (1999) in *Foreign Affairs* described the founder of geo-strategic geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, as “eccentric” while dismissing Mackinder’s influential heartland thesis that undergird many nations’ security policies. Clovis begins his polemic with this derogatory description: “Few modern ideologies are as whimsically all-encompassing, as romantically obscure, as intellectually sloppy, and as likely to start a third world war as the theory of “geopolitics.”” A terrible stance, certainly, but one not even closely proven! Other like examples to his could be given.

Evaluating this alleged lacking in geopolitics, to Fettweis, comes in assessing three goals (p. 237):

[Theoretical models] should be *descriptive*, or explain the way the world works; *prescriptive*, or able to provide policymakers with advice regarding how to proceed; and *predictive*, since if they truly understand the way the world works, their wisdom should extend into the future as well.

He alleges that geopolitics, for each goal, will find wanting, for it lacks clear description, it has no prescriptive use, and its theories cannot deliver accurate predictions. Once more, he but weakly tests his allegations for their accuracy.

Indeed, geopolitics does describe qualities appropriate to international relations; it does prescribe to students and states persons certain paths to solutions; and it does predict possible outcomes to the foreign-affairs machinations of historical and contemporary diplomacy! The following represent commonly held geopolitical expressions in the context of US global security, and each correspond to a description prescription, and prediction:

- Descriptive: The geopolitical examples of Halford Mackinder’s Eurasian heartland and of Nicholas Spykman’s Eurasian rimlands both exhibit the US need to balance forces inhabiting that great continent in order to award America’s own protection, both locating at the core of American security plans. US navies and armies engird Eurasia, intruding into its affairs via off- and on-shore balancing in Eurasian waters and shores. Monroe’s Doctrine warns off Asian/European challengers that might post in the Western Hemisphere, for a Fortress America would be difficult to hold secure. Geopolitics clearly helped in originating these designs.
- Prescriptive: US security again rests most strongly in establishing favorable Eurasian balances-of-power on its rimlands and hinterlands. Monroe’s Doctrine recommends a need for preventing threatening Eurasian bases in the Americas. Thus, American safety demands a

formative navy, its six battle fleets, again, must encircle the strategic parts of Eurasia to stabilize the continent for defending the homeland.

- Predictive: Off- and on-shore-balancing of the US military on Eurasian margins should provide the best defensive posture for satisfying these sea- and land-power goals. American rimlands do not exist, leaving less possibility of Eurasian intrusions where America would suffer an encirclement of threat by hostile nations. As global stabilizer, it seems, America is condemned to exert a strong presence throughout the northern portions of Earth.

Accordingly, geopolitics, with these few observations of strategic insight, should pass Fettweis' scrutiny despite his objections!

This review's Part One will outline the main criticisms Fettweis levels against geopolitics, its theory and applications, these the gist of that article. The authors will select eight problems Fettweis levels against geopolitics, with their attempts to refute the attacks and to construct a clearer description.

- To Fettweis, geopolitics does not influence the decisions of states persons, for it is "much more commonly ignored than engaged." – Its theories "merely overlap with policy by coincident rather than design, reflecting [leaders'] obvious policy preferences rather than geographical insight" (pp. 236-237).

Response:

(1) How can one truly ascertain the impact and awareness of theory on any person, in authority or not, a linkage impossible to affirm! Fettweis does not substantiate this claim of policy makers ignoring theory. Frankly, he cannot do so because, to repeat, theory has always and continues to impact upon all of us! Being utilized over the centuries and to the present, the influence of geopolitics upon humans and states represents a truism that should not be denied!

(2) It seems rather strange that Fettweis finds an overlap occurring between policy and theory while still denying the existence of the latter part! If so, wouldn't that canopy yet lend some credence to geopolitical-theory-guiding-action, since both theory and policy parallel in the same directions? In addition, theories still reside in decisions, whether or not states persons are aware of these! Premises simply exist ubiquitously and assuredly also in guiding states persons!

(3) Geopolitics rests on the assumption that geography, more specifically, a state's international environment, can at times impact upon leaders and their foreign policies. States persons conscientiously or unconscientiously act within the aegis of theories that reflect their

nation's global location. Monroe's Doctrine, a cornerstone of US security planning, inherently originated within an awareness of strategic geographical configurations, recognized but not created by the country's leadership. In sum, Fettweis' claim that geopolitics does not influence cannot be substantiated, for ample evidence reveals the opposite.

(4) It is widely asserted that, in general, the United States is a sea and land power, a hybrid, in contrast to China and Russia that are primarily land powers. These different geopolitical stances, reflective of unique locations, exert impact upon the United States to rule the ocean shores and coasts of Eurasia to bring America some security and upon China and Russia to resist this presence to preserve their own autonomies. In terms of grand strategies of the Great Powers, these configurations of theory are well-known and consistently acted upon. Theory guides policies and behaviors, once more, whether obvious or hidden, a truism that cannot be denied.

- Fettweis rejects geopolitics in toto: "Geopolitics [is] fatally flawed from [its] beginning [having] wilted under the light of increased scrutiny [once facing] wide exposure" (p. 235).

Response:

(1) Geopolitics, probably the oldest of international-relations models, has been utilized by kingdoms and empires in ancient times and by presidents and dictators in contemporary times. Long usage has indicated its utility through the ages. Its theories continue well-recognized in the vocabulary of international relations: sea and land power, heartlands and influence spheres, and distances and straits, to name a few.

(2) The basic assumption of geopolitics stems from the placement of states, regions, and resources within their own unique environments, each setting exerting impact on countries' behaviors. Specifically, the locations and positions of these places surely count in our study of countries' aims in foreign affairs, in addition to other associated factors – topography and demography, distance, climate, borders, and size/shape of countries and continents, among many other such traits. Such cannot normally be proven with exactness. Yet, rationality and common sense, history and maps, and policies and traditions all must lend to evidence of a spatial impact.

(3) The authors have assembled over sixty theories (Kelly 2016, 83-135) that correspond to the geopolitics definition, many more than other foreign affairs models. These also should lend some proof of usefulness toward our concept, as was their intent.

(4) Most international-relations theories contain similar spatial structures. Realism equates states' resources, sizes, and locations to a

management of power; dependency compares wealthier and poorer countries; systems analysis traces certain stimulants happening over distance and space. Other examples could arise as well.

(5) To repeat from the above, US grand strategy for centuries has rested upon such geopolitical traits as these: a Western Hemisphere position of isolation, void of regional challengers; internal waterways, numerous ports, with oceans surrounding that have spawned a powerful sea power; significant domestic wealth in fertile farmland with ample rainfall and temperate climate; and abundant natural minerals to bring its capitalist manufacturing and technology across the globe. In sum, the United States occupies the richest and most protected climate on Earth.

- A charge of spatial “determinism” is levelled against geopolitics. (p. 237) – That is, too much is attributed to environmental causation because “scientific methods . . . [have] virtually eliminated any determinism” from geopolitics. Fettweis does not dwell on this fault, but others do, so, too, it seems appropriate here to pursue this alleged weakness in geopolitics.

Response:

(1) Limited truth to this claim against geopolitics does exist, for geographic causation, used in excess, can distort. And that problem sometimes happens. Yet, ample justification can accrue to counter this claim since location of states within their unique spaces is central to the approach. Geography counts! To repeat from the above, space is attached to all IR models. But, many factors in addition -- personalities, traditions, and historic events -- contribute as well to a state’s foreign affairs, geographical position being one of many stimulants. This common-sense premise of a reasonable focus upon spatial placement, not questioned in geopolitics or elsewhere, should rule, instead.

(2) The present writers and others have favored the Sprouts’ “probabilistic” interpretation (1957), of not always but sometimes a spatial connection to policy and behavior might be raised (Kelly 2016). Space can generally influence but not determine the outcomes under study.

(3) Finally, as will be described below, statistical evidence lends to substantiating the relevance of nations’ positions and locations impacting upon action and policy. And beyond numbers, all theory rests upon some causal ingredient, for limiting this aspect limits theory itself.

- A “scientific methodology,” lacking in geopolitics, discredits the concept further. (237-238) Fettweis fails to define his methodology, but it is assumed his calculus equates to quantitative or statistical applications.

Response:

(1) Fettweis should not discredit a model for it lacking “scientific” or objective variables, as he does for geopolitics. Reasonableness and other measures should count as well and still merit scholarly respect, for much of social science misses these abilities.

(2) This said, geopolitics, nonetheless, possesses far more theories susceptible to statistical rendering than other IR models. For example, distance, frontiers, resources, placement, and other natural settings carry numerical renditions, and thus can figure into mathematical equations.

(3) The authors can exhibit several instances from their own quantitative publications: standard deviations and cluster analysis in shatterbelts (Kelly 1986); distance in General Assembly roll calls (Kelly and Boardman 1976); barge traffic on rivers (Kelly 2017a); borders associated with wars (Kelly 1992) and sea coasts with democracy (Kelly and Perez 2002). Other authors carry similar calculations as well.

(4) Nonetheless, it could be stated that social sciences methodology does not set well to statistics, including geopolitics. Obviously, heartlands cannot be measured quantitatively; Halford Mackinder could not accurately predict Russia expanding out from his pivot! But it still holds importance to US grand strategy. Or can “power” in realism or “functionalism” in common markets be accurately measured? Yet, we utilize such concepts with insight and rough estimates despite many without numbers.

- Geopolitics represents a “threat from peace,” or stands inherently joined with conflict and war, “a central feature of all geopolitical analysis.” (pp. 238-239) This may derive from the “power politics” description alleged to realism noted above. But, for geopolitics, no evidence of this natural strife springs from the extant evidence of history.

Response:

(1) All politics, including the international, can configure at times with conflict. For example, a

common definition of “politics”, the “authoritative allocation of values,” translates to a competition among persons and groups over scarce resources – the more scarcity, the more conflict and possible warfare. Geopolitics, together with other theories of political science, would join this broader tendency, but it should not be alone on this tendency.

(2) Here, Fettweis appears to attribute this trait of violence both to realism and to geopolitics, each to an “unchanging, conflictual international system . . . of perpetual, existential competition, which occasionally results in conflict.” Unfairly, realism is praised for such a stance; geopolitics is criticized for a same but mistaken label. Nonetheless, neither model attaches well to war – geopolitics devoted to policies and actions reflective of space; realism focused on a prudent use of power to avoid anarchy, unilateralism, and strife.

(3) The basic theme or assumption of classical geopolitics comes with *the influence of geography upon states’ behavior*. All of the many depictions of geopolitics show this spatial tendency and never a natural tie to strife. Geography itself does not automatically associate with violence; its essence is neutral but pivotal space.

(4) Geopolitics is neutral to conflict – organic borders, spheres of influence, manifest destiny, sea power, heartlands and rimlands, rivers, mountains, and choke points all represent passive concepts. Yet, in certain circumstances, conflict could arise in all of these – a spatial expansion from pivotal areas, competition over choke points, rivalry over territories, border tensions, and shatterbelts. But to state that geopolitics inherently is war prone is missing its essence.

- Halford Mackinder’s Eurasian heartland prediction (Mackinder 1919; 1904), of it dominating the World Island and later the entire Earth, has to date proven inaccurate. (pp. 242-243) This limitation weakens our concept, alleges Fettweis.

Response:

(1) The heartland thesis, coupled with coastal rimlands, has provided the bedrock of Anglo- American security policies, again, this so clear in evidence to easily refute the contrary.

(2) Russia’s failure at hegemony over Eurasia reigns true to date, but Fettweis rejects an insightful theory with a yet failed application. A hostile encirclement of suspicious neighbors has denied the Eurasian base to extend outwardly to the seas and to world empire, but a US heartland devoid of enclosure did expand to dominate the world’s oceans

and to bring it global hegemony. This rule of Mackinder's still lives, but the premise needs updating and a better placement (Kelly 2017a). Pivotal and central placement of countries can prove a vulnerability or an advantage, dependent upon the geographical context. Theories like the heartland provide possible prediction, but not always. The environment impacts upon history, negative for Russian expansion, positive for North America, should be considered in these pivotal instances.

(3) North America, the Mississippi River watershed its global pivot, will show a better heartland placement than the Eurasian (Kelly, 2018, 2017), this validating the theory. Fettweis admits to this himself, his infrequent validation of geopolitics (p. 243). But, his claim, likewise, shows a contradiction to his main thesis denigrating the accuracy of geopolitical theory.

- Technology renders geopolitics obsolete and no longer relevant. (pp. 246-247) It has “allowed humanity to overcome the constraints applied by the earth.” But, science is not space. Geography still counts as a foundation to classical geopolitics.

Response:

(1) Surely, new discoveries in transportation and communication have shortened distances and enhanced information access – this cannot be denied. But can this truism reveal an outmoded geopolitics? To Mackinder, railroads shifted a “Columbian epoch” to one of heartlands, but this new technology altered but did not erase the value of the theory. Heartlands and rimlands still found US grand strategies.

(2) Has technology markedly altered states' positions and locations? Australia still is isolated from Eurasian balances, regardless of technology. North America will continue its balancing of Eurasian countries for its security, distance still pertaining but not overcoming. But South America will continue remote and not framed in Eurasian balances. Many other examples could present.

- Geopolitics stands more useful at the local level than at the strategic level: “The importance of geography to strategy is inversely related to the level of analysis: the lower the level, the more self-evidently useful geography can be “(p. 246). To the contrary, geopolitics expresses ubiquitously, as useful to study and application on all levels of interest.

Response:

(1) In contrast to Fettweis, one could easily credit geopolitics with stressing the total global expanse, the strategic as well as the local, once more, an American grand strategy in addition to the geopolitics of individual states and locations. But to refute the strategic seems rather strange, for clearly, American forces on shore and off on the Eurasian rimlands engage in active pursuit of a favorable continental balance on a distant place to deliver protection for the Americas, despite the more expansive space. Likewise, Monroe's Doctrine and superiority of sea power represent a centuries-old creed that is both local and strategic.

(2) Fettweis also may be confusing "political geography" with "geopolitics," the former local and more immediate and visible, the latter more spatially expansive. The former deals more closely with human activity within their immediate surroundings; the latter attunes more to international relationships.

(3) In sum, geopolitics extends more ubiquitously to the near and the far.

The authors of this article might humbly submit several critiques of classical geopolitics of their own in addition to those not imagined by Fettweis, unfortunately most without good solutions. (1) To repeat, how might theories be tested with more accurate measures of probability? Few instances submit to statistics. Instead, one must roughly estimate a likely association between a plausible theory and a studied event. This reviewer can visualize no perfect solution! (2) How can we apply spatial premises to policies and events with certainly of good fit? Again, we are kept to an approximate but not precise connection. (3) To give credit to the advocates of critical geopolitics, how can we insert policy-making and normative judgments onto classical geopolitics? Alas, we cannot (Kelly 2006), for the levels of influence cannot be breached. In sum, insightful responses to these are lacking and probably never will be attainable! Had Fettweis included these, the authors would have agreed but still not have forsaken classical geopolitics!

PART TWO

AN EXAMINATION OF ZHENGYU WU'S ARTICLE

A stronger, more positive, account than the first, this second article by Wu draws a description, nonetheless, so narrow in its application as to mislead in its definition of classical geopolitics. He distorts the concept's full essence by molding his description to fit just his own depiction and his single application of sea power linked to continental balances. In so doing, he cheats by misleading the reader and geopolitics by this restrictedness!

The article divides into two parts: the first, a theoretical of geopolitics, and the second, a depiction of sea power integrated within a continental balance-of-power. It is with the first section that concerns the present authors, it's too narrow description of geopolitics, that will receive the critical attention of the paragraphs that follow. In contrast, the second section, not theoretical, is insightful and will not be judged. And it does not serve as a clear platform for his theoretical model.

Wu constructs his narrative to suit his intent, and to understand, one must follow closely the initial pages (pp. 786-794). He aims to join classical geopolitics with classical realism by enlisting balance-of-power theory to accomplish this nexus. In two sentences on page 794, he first describes this effort: "In theoretical terms, classical geopolitics could be categorized as a form of 'balance of power realism' which postulates that a stable international order depends fundamentally on the maintenance of an equilibrium of power in the system. . . Nevertheless, unlike conventional balance of power theories, the balance of power conception embodied in classical geopolitics was neither abstract nor universally applicable." Later, on page 806, he briefly returns: "In essence, classical geopolitics embodied in Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman's theories was constructed mainly around the balance of power principle. This is where classical geopolitics and mainstream realist theories converge." These few sentences, and no more, hold his limited definition of geopolitics.

Essential to understanding this link among the three models, several distinctive traits define Wu's geopolitics (pp. 790-793) that will provide some meaning to the remainder of his article. To him, geopolitics limits to a strategic realm of the larger states whose focus directs toward satisfying their own "egoistic" interests and security. Add to this an environment of "power politics" with a dynamic quality due to technological advancements, the international system narrows to a play of "Anglo-American geopolitics (or simply classical geopolitics henceforth)" within a sea power and a Eurasian balance-of-power drama. It is solely this Anglo-American image that Wu continues his geopolitical narrative.

His portrayal of geopolitics, similar to Fettweis, resembles more the realist model in his references to a focus upon the larger states and to their egoistic power politics, a confusion the authors have attempted to confront (Kelly 2017a). Here, the authors, instead, draw to realism a careful management of power, where geopolitics instead, ties to an impact of spatial placement. Never do the two traits, power and geography, closely intersect.

Three "highly recognized" geopolitical theorists, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford Mackinder, and Nicholas Spykman, together writing "as an organic entirety," alone have provided the essential linkage between geopolitics and realism, Wu's ultimate goal (p. 790):

It is in this sense that classical geopolitics embodied in Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman's theories can be arguably considered an integral part of realist IR theories. In other words, classical geopolitics is

a particular form of realism based on the influence of the natural environments defined by geography and technology.

Because these three theorists write primarily about sea- and land-power, this topic represents (p. 793) an “edifice of classical geopolitics [based upon] three interrelated propositions:”

. . . the inextricable linkage between maritime supremacy and the continental balance of power; the indispensable significance of the continental commitment for the dominant maritime power; and the dual character of the heartland power in terms of strategic orientation.

Here concludes Wu’s methodology, limited as it is, with the remainder of the article describing the three propositions of sea- and land-power. To repeat from above, the focus of this essay rests with defending geopolitics, its theory and application, and in this stance, the remainder of Wu’s article will not be assessed in the pages below.

The authors find fault with the following assertions raised by Wu:

- Wu fails to define his three models. To the authors, geopolitics centers on countries and resources inhabiting unique spaces that could impact upon their international involvements. It offers a spatial platform for study and policy with a variety of theories that might guide students and states person. Realism rests upon a careful management of power by adroit states persons. They will attempt to resolve a dangerous anarchy by constructing a collective defense, this avoiding a “security dilemma” of individual states seeking their own safety and thus causing destabilizing arms races. Balance of power includes two variables, number of “poles” or nations and relations between/among such nations, trusting or hostile. When this matrix combines with immediate foreign affairs, historic eras can be roughly established. For instance, the bipolarity of the Cold War, shifting between strife and accommodation, and the “unipolar moment,” a temporary hegemony of the United States with other Great Powers admitting to its primacy. These brief insertions might have clarified Wu’s depictions.
- Geopolitics differs from realism in definition, assumptions, and theories. One author of this article has published a recent article (Kelly 2019a) asserting this claim: (1) In their definitions, geopolitics centers upon locations of states and resources impacting upon international involvement. Realism rests upon a prudent management of power. These two definition do not mingle: geopolitics does not deal with power and realism ignores spatial positions of states and resources. (2) In their assumptions, geopolitics imagines space affecting behavior, whereas realism finds a problem in anarchy and in “security dilemmas,” a careful management of collective security bringing a peace to overcome these

dangers. (3) Their theories differ and are not inter-changeable. Nowhere do realists find heartlands, rimlands, and Eurasian balancing useful, nor do geopolitical enthusiasts enlist anarchy, security dilemmas, or measured power. A further example of differing directions arrives in how each looks toward power balances: geopolitics as positions or constellations of states, i.e., checkerboards, interest spheres, pan regions, and condominiums, whereas realism finds such balances in measurements of power, whether in imbalances or in equal balances.

- Wu defines classical geopolitics too narrowly. Not just holistic, its scope is reductionist as well, reaching to individual countries and separate variables as well as to strategic interactions of land and sea power among the Great Powers. As such, one can examine the geopolitics of all sorts of nations, for instance, Paraguay (Kelly and Whigham 1990), Venezuela (Ewell 1982), and the United States (Friedman 2011) as well as different spatial variables including distance (Kelly and Boardman 1976), shatterbelts and heartlands (Kelly 1986, 2017a), and frontiers and sea power (Starr 2018; Kelly 2019b).
- While Mackinder, Mahan, and Spykman represent well-deserved places as geopolitical theorists, a half-century has passed with other theorists' contributions as well who have originated their own premises and have updated and improved upon the three noted authors.
- Geopolitics extends much more widely to all types of foreign affairs, including but not limited to sea power and continental balances. It appears that Wu molded his account to focus upon a quite limited, simple, but attractive depiction of Anglo-American grand strategies. In this, he limited the broader scope of both geopolitics, realism, and power-balancing models.
- Wu's attempt at linking the models of geopolitics to realism via balance of power and combining these with the three theorists on sea power amidst Eurasian balances is not convincing. He merely describes these factors, enlisting mere words but neglecting any solid attempt at integrating the whole conceptual connection toward some better proof of linkage. Description alone is insufficient, a grouping of words promising but not delivering a melding. We need some sort of specific linkage among the several factors, a convincing theoretical narrative explaining how the two models, realism and geopolitics, somehow connect with

balance of power and with sea power engaged in continental balancing. These necessary bonds do not appear.

Again, the writers found Wu's problem of linking together his three concepts – geopolitics, realism, and balance-of-power – thin and limited. He cheats by asserting connections without convincing linkages and with molding his descriptions to fit his limited descriptions.

In a similar attempt by Saul Cohen, for example, one of the authors found in his many books and articles spanning half a century, Cohen constructing his geopolitical model (Kelly 2016, 39-42) by loosely combining three distinct theoretical approaches – systems and development with geopolitics. But alas, he failed, too, in attaining his goal (Kelly 2016, 42):

He did not integrate convincingly his three separate approaches: systems, developmental, and geopolitical. The reader may remain confused as to how they join together because no apparent attempt is made toward linking the members. . . . And above all, he made no effort to apply his model, probably because the model itself is so disconnected, and thus it becomes not useable.

Wu does apply his model toward connecting Anglo-American sea power to Eurasian continental balances, but he accomplishes this so narrowly that he limits the totality of geopolitics to just these limited variables.

- Technology is not the equivalent of space. Nor are history and strategy, all three traits Wu associates with defining geopolitics (page 793). Rather, all three might or might not affect space, but they do not define directly as space itself. Again, geography alone represents the sole stimulant to defining geopolitics.
- All theory is determinist to some extent, dependent upon the immediate context of a premise. Common happenings represent its essence, once more, if “A” occurs, some likelihood of “B” results because of A. Some level of consistency is natural in our environments, and thus, one will be able to visualize theory. In contrast to Wu (page 817), geopolitics stays determinist but is no more or less so than other international-relations models.

In sum, the prime difficulty with Wu's depiction of geopolitics is its narrowness of definition and application, first in its reductionist stride that neglects its full expression and second in its limited focus on sea power and continental balancing to the exclusion of other realms and premises.

For elevating geopolitics to its full potential as a separate and valid international-relations model, the goal of this article, a remedy will come in part by providing an expanded definition of the concept and by extending

several appropriate applications that will show its flexibility and appropriateness, these ambitions set in the next part.

PART THREE

DEFENDING GEOPOLITICS BY DEFINING IT

Why this need for defending classical geopolitics at all? One never sees similar attacks against realism, liberal/functionalism, constructivism, and the other IR models. Why is geopolitics so singled out for abuse? Wu and Fettweis, may both be convincing in attributing their explanations to a lingering connection to German fascism and to an absence of “scientific” methodology! It could be, likewise, something in the word itself, “geopolitics,” being perhaps a rather romantic term that exhibits some sort of dark conspiracy of illegitimate power?

These negatives may linger on, once exposed to pejorative judgment, with our concept continuing as a target, particularly to such writers as Fettweis, Clokie, and Clover, among others. Once a target, always so exposed, with the other IR models thus protected from coming under a similar scrutiny.

Additionally, it could be admitted that the concept, like other models, may require clearer definition and application, once more, a goal of the present authors. Nonetheless, geopolitics, both in its classical and critical branches, should merit legitimacy within the study and practice of foreign affairs and policy. To repeat, that positive definition of the classical is the goal of this article.

The nature of classical geopolitics found in its attributes:

- Geopolitics provides a broad conceptual framework for the study and practice of international relations. Geography counts! Placement of countries, regions, and resources in unique environments does impact on national behaviors, a truism that cannot be discounted. Geopolitics surely provides a profitable framework, and thus, for this reason, it should join legitimately with other models within the realm of international-relations theory. The authors have utilized its theories to lend insight into the Peloponnesian War of ancient Greece, these insights then compared to contemporary diplomacy among the South American republics (Kelly 2013). A similar checkerboard structure appeared for both Greece and South America but with different patterns within those configurations, the first conflictual, the second peaceful.

Here, the model contributes a spatial platform for analyzing foreign policies and actions relative to a state’s position and location. Unlike other IR models, geopolitics provides a spatial setting for comparing locations and positions of regions, states, and resources, this helpful to

study and action. The isolated placement of North America, away from Eurasia but amidst less powerful neighbors, has prompted the unique traditions of United States foreign affairs, these unlike other Great Powers. Japan, China, Russia, and Germany, of course, would reflect differing policy stances, again reflective of their geographical locations.

- The concept posits abstract assumptions that ground its initial understanding, this similar to the other international-relations models. For instance, states inhabiting certain environments and surroundings may stimulate policies and actions reflective of these spatial areas. Countries lacking hostile neighbors will react differently from countries encircled by threatening states. Nations close to seacoasts may become sea powers. The examples are multiple and simply rational and common sense in nature.
- It offers a wide assortment of spatial theories that reveal nations' foreign-affairs involvements, geopolitics offering the most by some distance over the other models. Indeed, one author (Kelly 2016) collected over sixty such premises that subscribe to a spatial design of foreign involvement. Such premises are timeless and ubiquitous in application, and these probably represent the most in number of the extant IR models.
- Geopolitics places less emphasis upon immediate policymaking, instead assisting in the formulation of longer-term traditions based upon placement within a geographical context, for example Monroe's Doctrine and sea power girding Eurasia in the North American case. Again, this stance is reflective of its more limited immediate impact on policy making.
- Nonetheless, some predictive value can be seen in geopolitics: Similar to other IR models (Kelly 2020), geopolitics does occasionally perform in cycles, i.e. Mackinder's shift from Columbian sea power to heartland land power, the rotations in the Caribbean between shatterbelts and influence spheres, and the changing patterns of stabilities within checkerboard structures. Similarly to all models, one could assume that the United States will stay on track to billet its forces upon the rimlands of Eurasia and that its opponents will seek to encourage a retrenchment of such American basing.

- Similar to other models, the concept presents three distinct contrasts or schools to its study: (1) An Anglo-American geo-strategic approach of classical geopolitics emphasizing nations' placements within geographical settings. (2) An organic perspective, this likewise of the classical bent, of equating international politics as dynamic or changing, reflective of borders and of countries comparative sizes and strengths. (3) A critical geopolitics that posits a critique of capitalist corruption by policy elites toward exploiting weaker nations and groups, its focus on exposing such corruption and constructing an emancipated result (Kelly 2006). Such a bias contrasts completely with the classical version, it being not normative, ideological, or concerned with elites' corruption.
- It represents an international-relations model separate from and not a part of realism (Kelly 2019a). The definitions, assumptions, and theories clearly depart – for realism, a prudent management of power, a replacement of “unilateralism” or countries securing themselves against an anarchic world by agreeing to a collective security managed by adroit states persons, and for geopolitics, a tie between geographical placement, a responding national policy, and a spatial platform for states to decide on actions reflective of that placement.
- Like a majority of IR models, geopolitics holds at times to a cyclic description. Nicholas Spykman alleged that “peace is an interlude between wars,” reflecting an observation that some places, more pivotal and encircled by unfriendly neighbors, may suffer more hostility than other residences with less leverage and more isolated from enemies. Another 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 configurations during the past few centuries (Kelly 1997, 164).
- States perform as the sole actors within international relations. Foreign-policy elites and states persons do not factor into geopolitics, our concept instead allowing a reliance instead upon a predictive and rational order to the international political system devoid of a human involvement. Critical geopolitics, and to a lesser extent, realism, turn to a focus upon policy makers and their actions.

- In policy making, its application is longer-termed and not immediate. Because geography remains stable, and technology does not greatly affect space, so too a country's foreign affairs show a timeless consistency. For the United States, Monroe's Doctrine, sea power, Eurasian balancing for security, and isolationism, to name a few, reflecting its location in America and its position astride natural wealth and weak neighbors. One does not see geopolitics contributing to current actions, unlike its critical geopolitics alternative that concentrates entirely on exposing immediate elites' decisions.
- Reductionist in orientation, its theories apply universally and are timeless. Unlike a focus on the powerful nations, geopolitics is ubiquitous in its application, useful to all sorts of situations under the aegis of relative positions and locations. One may glean numerous depictions of single states' and regions' geopolitics in addition those of the strategic actors. Likewise, its theories do not change; they can apply through generations and centuries. Once more, one author's study on the geopolitics of the Peloponnesian war (Kelly 2011) compared the conflict's checkerboard structure with an identical configuration in contemporary South American diplomacy. Yet, patterns within those similar structures differed, the former in conflict, the latter in peace, with the contrasts in part explained in reference to geography.
- Like other models, geopolitics emits a suggestion of determinism. Some contend -- Geography dictates! Nicholas Spykman's dictum: "Mountains stand unperturbed while dictators come and go" presents a good example of this. Yet, an improved and less rigid label would arrive as "probabilism" or "environmental possibilism" rendered by the Sprouts (1957). Such an approach to taming extreme determinism is one followed by the authors.
- Geopolitics shades to the conservative, yet, is largely devoid of ideology. Its persistent assumptions and premises and its longer-termed policies show a traditional perspective. The wrongly attributed "power politics" description, common to its depiction in the American media, furthers a negative interpretation, that of corrupt and destructive Great Power machinations of exploitation that is foreign to the largely neutral geopolitics. Also, the term, *geopolitique*, emits a similar distortion. In contrast, and one this author envies, comes in the normative and critical

nature of critical geopolitics, often a positive contribution to foreign affairs. But alas, the classical fold cannot attune to his quality.

- Likewise, the concept of “power” does not attach intimately to geopolitics, wrongly tied in large part due to its capture within the model of realism that does carry a primary trait of power. When geopolitics is freed from realism, one seldom finds the power concept directly linked to its definition or expressed to its application. Indirectly, such concepts as choke points, sea/land power, heartlands, shatterbelts, and influence spheres, of course, follow that trait, but none are essentially necessary to the model’s definition.
- Nor should the dynamics of new technologies inhabit the geopolitical definition. Inclusion of technology into that definition, as done by Wu, distracts from the traditional focus of geography and the spatial placement of nations. Rather, technology serves as a secondary attribute among several in its application, similarly to power, cycles, structures, and so forth. Essentially, the geographical attributes of position and location of regions, states, and resources alone satisfy the concept’s meaning.
- Absent geopolitics from a natural propensity toward conflict and war, as Fettweis alleges. All politics and models could be so tainted! Instead, geopolitics is available to instruct students and elites on how geography may condition a country’s international behavior. In the normal course of affairs, a security enhancement would trump a conflict stimulant.

The contribution of classical geopolitics as supplied by insightful applications of theory-to-event:

To repeat an assertion made earlier, the authors wish in this article to suggest a defense of classical geopolitics, one needed, they believe, in order to confront the repeated attacks against a valid theoretical tool. They allege the model provides a useful and legitimate place among other international-relations model, this especially the case because it appears the other models do not suffer such attacks. One author attempted this in a recent book (Kelly 2016) by enlisting three facets toward gaining this ambition: (1) clarifying the geopolitical definition; (2) assembling theories that fit the model’s definition (he located over sixty); and (3) applying theories to foreign-policy events that might offer insights. That same approach reflects the organization of this article.

From a multitude of instances, these several examples may suffice to demonstrate the utility of the several theories taken from our model, each

exhibited on difference levels of analysis and all offered within the American hemisphere:

- Paraguay, a lintel country: At times, a buffer state such as Paraguay, positioned between Brazil and Argentina, two larger and rival countries of South America's Southern Cone, can lend itself protection reflective of its middle location between the two more powerful neighbors (Kelly and Perez 1998). Here, the image fits a geopolitical description of a support beam above a door or window that strengthens a building's wall structure. Not only can Paraguay, as that lintel, stabilize relations between its two neighbors (neither would accept the other's domination of Paraguay) within an extended region by itself staying independence from either's influence sphere, it also may balance either nation against the other to continue that security, favoring one against the other and then rotating in direction if need be. This second example can be seen in past events.

That middle position of the republic also has been described as a heartland, spawned either from that of its central buffer pivot (Kelly and Whigham 1990; Velilla de Arrellaga 1982) or from its residence astride the powerful Itaipu hydroelectric dam of the Parana River that borders Brazil and Argentina.

The point made here is that, within a geographical platform for one to visualize the spatial connections of the South American lands and pivots, a series of interpretative theories also gird the portrait, positions and locations, buffers and lintels, rivers and heartlands, and resources and influence spheres, all available to present a more complete strategic picture of international relationships. It could be said that South America resembles a Galapagos Island or Jurassic Park image of isolated but traditional geopolitical theories and concepts – buffers, heartland, shatterbelts, organic frontiers, influence spheres, territorial fragmentation, and the like.

- The three Americas: The northern, middle, and southern sectors each show distinctively different geopolitical descriptions (Kelly 2016, 153-155).

The United States, dominate in the northern sphere but joined in trade with Canada and Mexico, displays a strategic and vital thrust toward balancing Eurasia to its favor, extending its military there either off- or on-shore to bring a security to America. A fortress America cannot succeed against a unified and hostile Eurasia, that continent's greater potential could encircle and defeat the Americans if not divided by US alliances, its navy, and the checkerboard rivalries dividing the European

and Asian countries. Rather, the Americans must intervene for security across the oceans to disturb a Eurasian unity, enforcing their own autonomy against Eurasian intrusions by extending Monroe's Doctrine.

Middle-American portions of many weak and divided states of the Caribbean and Central America, likewise, exhibit a strategic geopolitical nature pointing toward Eurasia. But they pose an exposed and negative security quality toward the northern sector, one of vulnerability to a possible Eurasian threat. Accordingly, the United States also has intervened when it appears necessary in order to stabilize and to isolate those countries from Eurasian intentions. The Monroe Doctrine's intention serves this strategic need. And at other times, this middle part has evolved into a shatterbelt, an area of strategic rivalry between North America against the Spanish and English and of late exemplified by the Cuban missile crisis.

South America is not strategic at all, its geopolitics focused inwardly to frontier development and security and regional integration. Never has North America militarily intruded into the region for its strategic purposes, Monroe's Doctrine meant for the American center. Nor do its geopolitical writers and policies direct toward Halford Mackinder, Albert Thayer Mahan, or Nicholas Spykman, the pantheon of Anglo-American strategic doctrine. Rather, this southern region rules as a solely independent area, isolated from the northern geopolitical mainstream but fortunately a continent at peace.

Once more, classical geopolitics provides the scholar and student a geographical platform for observing the foreign-affairs machinations of a continent, and this accompanied by a wide assortment of associated theories to complete the model: strategic Eurasian balancing attached to Monroe's Doctrine, spheres of influence and shatterbelts, integration and disunity, isolations and interventions.

- Monroe's Doctrine astride North American security: The great Eurasian continent contains a possible power to rule our globe if unified and intent upon this ambition. A Eurasian encirclement for an eventual defeat of America could transpire from that reality, a 'fortress America' being difficult to prevent this capture. Fortunately, such danger in part is inhibited by a natural checkerboard disunity among the Eurasian state residents there. Distance likewise advantages the Americans. The Doctrine was constructed two centuries ago to protect against this

liability, the design meant to ward off threatening Eurasian powers that might disturb the tranquility of the Western Hemisphere. Its influence sphere over the area, this warding off a shatterbelt, requires this focus. Because North America clearly faces no threat from its immediate neighbors, its sole danger must come from a seaward invasion of its territories. Hence, the importance of its naval superiority to encircle instead Eurasia, whether within an on- or off-shore strategy.

Once more, the Monroe Doctrine suits perfectly the geopolitical description, enlisting the traits of distance, spatial pivot, sea power, continental encirclement, influence spheres, shatterbelts, and checkerboards. That the Doctrine has kept its influence, particularly during the last century, argues for its importance.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite what appear to be its clear contributions to international-relations theory and practice, classical geopolitics continues suffering from discrediting attacks that have reduced its legitimacy and its usefulness among media commentators, scholars, and students of contemporary foreign affairs. To correct this wasting of insights, the present writers argue that these untrue and distorted descriptions should be refuted where they happen, and the concept clarified and applied when appropriate. In critiquing the two articles of Fettweis and Wu, that show those distortions, it is hoped this article may help to satisfy those ambitions.

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