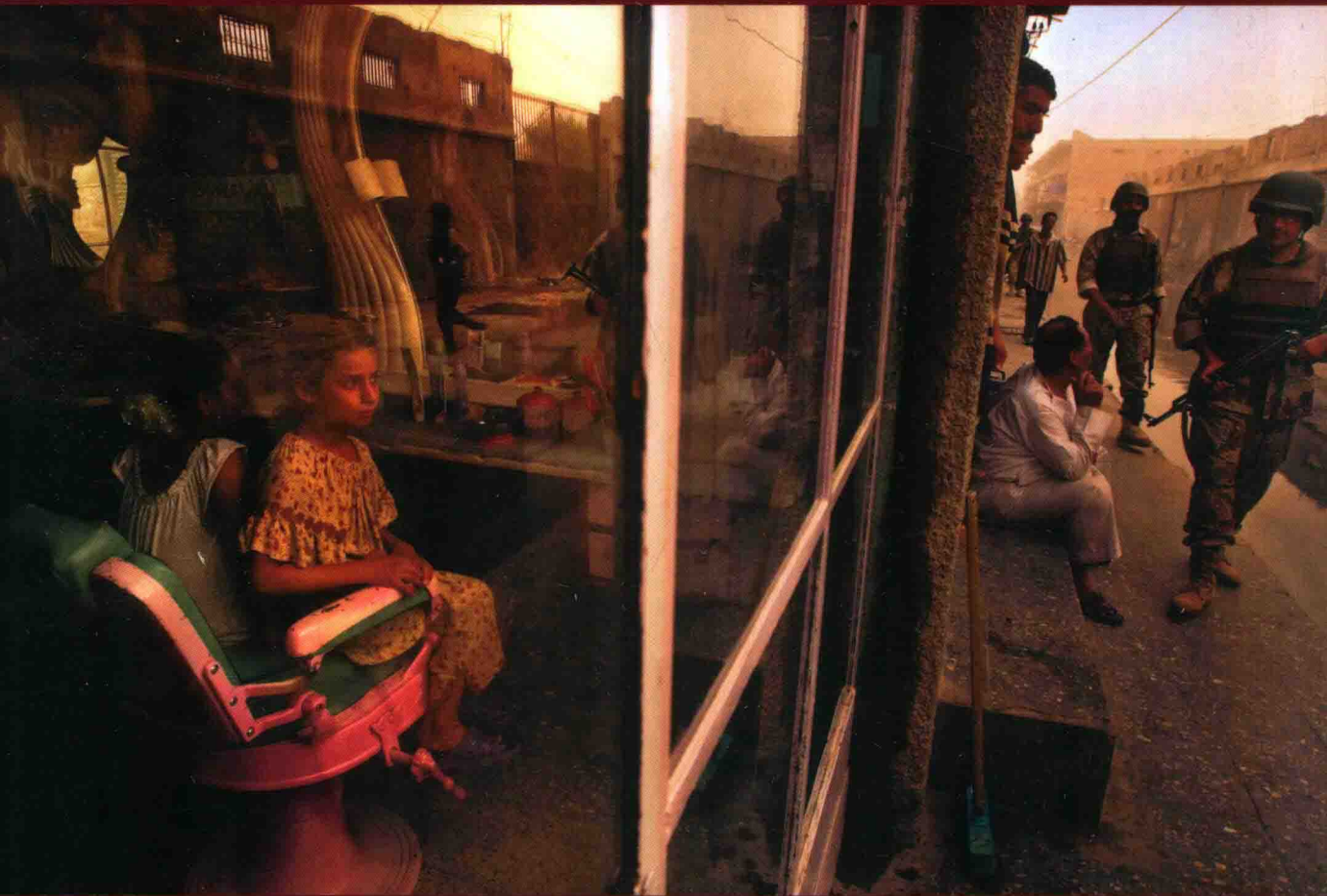


GEOPOLITICS

AN INTRODUCTORY READER



Edited by
JASON DITTMER AND JOANNE SHARP

Geopolitics

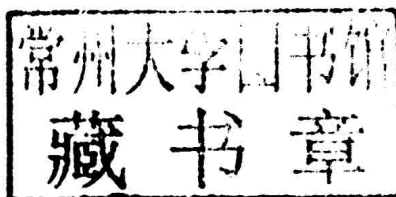
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GEOPOLITICS

It has been increasingly impossible to think about our changing world without coming across the term 'geopolitics'. In the wake of the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States, United Kingdom, and others, geopolitics has been offered as an explanation for the occupation's failure to reinvent the Iraqi state and as a blueprint for future action. But what is 'geopolitics'?

Drawing on both academic and political material, this *Reader* introduces readers to the concept of geopolitics, from the first usage of the term to its more recent reconceptualisations. The concept of geopolitics is introduced through four thematic sections – Imperial Geopolitics, Cold War Geopolitics, Geopolitics after the Cold War, and Reconceptualising Geopolitics. Each section includes key writings from a range of diverse and leading authors such as Said, Agnew, Dalby, Ó Tuathail, Gregory, Barnett and Kaplan, and is accompanied by a critical introduction by the editors to guide the reader through the material. This *Reader* establishes the foundations of geopolitics while also introducing readers to the continuing significance of the concept in the twenty-first century.

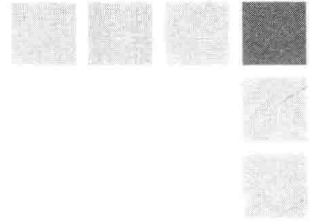
This *Reader* provides an essential resource that exposes students to original writing. The editors provide a pathway through the material with Section Introductions to assist the readers' understanding of the context of the material and impacts of the writings. The readings included draw from a range of authors, writing from a range of locations. The *Reader* concludes with the latest changes in geopolitical thought, incorporating feminist and other perspectives.

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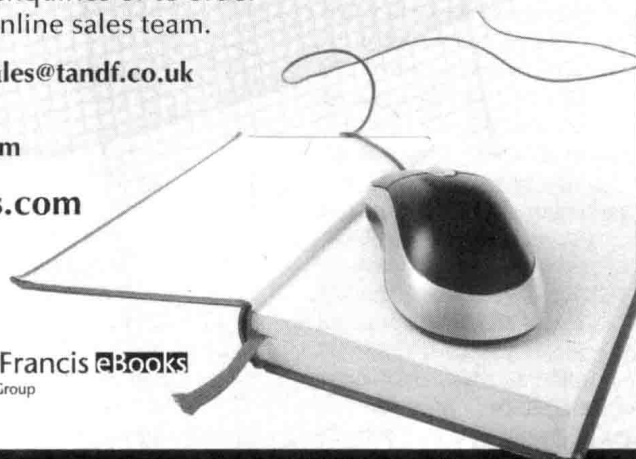
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Jason Dittmer and Joanne Sharp

Photographer Jacob Silberberg says of his 2005 photograph, the image that is displayed on the front cover of this book: “Girls sit in a beauty salon as soldiers patrol the Haifa Street section of Baghdad. This area is one of the most violent in the city; many US troops are prohibited from entering.” The right-hand side of the photo is an image that has been shown on the screens of Western TV reports and on the front pages of newspapers for decades. Heavily armed US soldiers patrol the streets of a distant city. This side of the image represents a space of danger and threat in which the soldiers need the protection of their rifles and body armor. The actual location of the shot is not immediately obvious without the geographical anchor of the photographer’s caption: the faces of the men in the street, added to the glimpse of architecture in the background, suggest it is in the Middle East, but beyond these markers it is not immediately clear whether the urban landscape is of Baghdad, Kabul, Benghazi, or another city in the troubled region. Perhaps it does not matter to the way in which a US – or a Western – viewer of the picture would view it. The colors are muted; they are the colors of the camouflage worn by the soldiers. The location is clearly distant from that of the viewer and the signs are clear: this is a dangerous space, the kind of landscape that spawns terrorists. This is the kind of place that will continue to spiral into chaos without the ordering effects of a US military presence. In this geographical imagination of the world, the danger is “over there” and the military presence is designed to ensure that it does not come “over here.”

The left side of the image is almost like another world. On a pastel-colored hairdresser’s chair sit two young girls in pretty dresses. On the table in front of them it is just possible to see the tools of the stylist’s trade: brushes, sprays, creams, and lotions. This is immediately familiar to the Western viewer as a safe, domestic space. This is the space of the everyday; a space where people go to do something as mundane as get their hair styled, catch up with local gossip, and meet with friends. If the right-hand side of the image is about significant, internationally important events – the sorts of things that lead to wars, changes in governments, shifts in international relations, indeed the very stuff of history – then the left-hand side seems ephemeral, trivial, and insignificant. It is simply daily life. The distinction is reinforced by being reflected in the gendering of the figures on either side: the soldiers, the active figures in the part of the picture that links to the making of history, are men; the figures sitting in the middle of the everyday space (passively gazing out into the world of action), are female. It is clear where the power to change things is located.

However, while there is a physical barrier between the two sides of the image, it is not a firm and impermeable division. The image is particularly powerful because the shop window reflects the militarized street back at the viewer, but the reflection is distorted, suggesting perhaps the relations between the two spaces are not balanced, not clear, or perhaps more complex than

the initial distinction that we suggested above might suggest. After all, a window both separates two spaces but also links them together, allowing each to influence the other. The viewer sees that the girls are gazing out at the action in the street; but what is it that *they* are seeing? Perhaps they see danger from the soldiers; perhaps they see a protective, stabilizing force; perhaps they see foreigners who arrive uninvited; or perhaps the girls simply see an irritation that prevents them from going and playing with their friends outside the shop. We will never know.

We have spent some time discussing this image because we feel that it very successfully represents some of the key themes that run through this collection. Geopolitics as an approach has historically focused on the kind of activities represented by the right-hand side of the image. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the founders of geopolitics created a world-view in which military conflict among the major powers was assumed to be imminent; indeed, some argued it was necessary and inherent to being human. This conflict would be played out on a global battlefield and the most powerful states would have to enact control of key territories in order to maintain their power. For these founding commentators, then, it is indeed the figures of soldiers, the military and political leaders who literally make history.

However, the idea that only certain activities, places, and people have the ability, or *agency*, to be involved with politics and therefore to make history has come under sustained critique. As we shall see later in the book, a variety of critical scholars have drawn attention to the other activities, places, and people that should be included if we are to understand the workings of international politics. These critical scholars see the idea that there are two distinct spaces in this photo – public and private – as itself a political maneuver that has important implications for our understanding of who the legitimate actors are in the world of politics. As we shall see in the final section of the book, Part Four, gender relations and other dynamics that unfold in everyday spaces, such as those represented in the left-hand side of the image, are both shaped by, and crucially shapers of, processes at the “larger” scales of the national and international. For example, one possible reading of the cover image is that women and girls are often presented as victims in need of protection by strong, heroic men. What roles does this give to men and women in the making of history?

This points to another theme of the book, in which we consider not what is *in* the image (i.e., its content), but to the image itself. In a globalized world, we are confronted by a dizzying array of images that circulate far from their origin points, via news media, social networks, and the broader Internet. Some have highlighted the fact that these images and other forms of popular culture produce stereotypes of different parts of the world that are associated with particular political identities. People in the West are bombarded by media images of violence and war in Middle Eastern cities, without ever seeing the other aspects of life there (which are considered un-newsworthy, dull, or mundane). What this means is that in the Western imagination, these places become nothing more than spaces of violence and war. For example, Western viewers are quickly able to fill in the story of what is happening on the right-hand side of the image here because of this media saturation; they have seen this image, or one like it, many times before. Moreover, just as is the case with the photo, most images circulating around in the global media are made by and for a Western audience. A Western viewpoint (or “representation”) of the world has come to dominate our collective understandings of the world to the extent that it is often not seen as a representation at all; it is just accepted as being “the way things are.” As we shall see, geopolitics is one such representation: it claims to understand international relations from an objective position – almost a God-like viewpoint that simultaneously sees everything – but is in fact a viewpoint with a distinct history and links to particular sets of political, strategic, military, and nationalist interests.

DEFINING THE FIELD

So, what then *is* geopolitics? This is no easy question. This book will show that geopolitics means different things, in different times and places, to different people. But we think that all of these versions of geopolitics can fit under this umbrella: geopolitics refers to the theory and practice of politics at the global scale, with a specific emphasis on the geographies that both shape and result from that politics. In other words, it is more than just the study of global politics (which might be studied in political science or International Relations); it is the study of how geography is implicated in that politics. Even this definition could be seen as controversial and so it is worth noting a caveat. For some, the “global scale” is by definition where geopolitics unfolds, with local events spinning out of these macro-scaled relationships. For instance, a summit of world leaders could be understood as a “global” event with “local” consequences (such as the hand-over of territory on which you live). For others, the “global scale” is produced by myriad political activities conducted in specific places all around the world (e.g., on both sides of the window in the cover image). In other words, everything happening everywhere adds up to create the illusion of a global scale where things happen, just like people buying and selling gasoline all over the country contribute to the setting of its price through the principle of supply and demand.

Given this broad definition, it is worth tracing the connections between geopolitics and some neighboring terms. The most obvious neighbor is the discipline of International Relations. Some people might argue that geopolitics is a sub-field of International Relations, or perhaps the part of political geography that studies international relations. At various moments in time, this might have been true, but in the present it is hard to make this argument. Rather, geopolitics and International Relations should be understood as two academic fields in dialogue with one another, each taking some insights from the other – sometimes pulling closer together and at other times following separate trajectories. International Relations is a discipline that is closely related to political science, originating after World War I as an attempt to uncover the principles of inter-governmental relations with the aim of minimizing conflict. Scholars working in this tradition have typically paid little attention to geography, seeing the potential for peace (or lack thereof) in the production of international institutions (like the United Nations) and international orders (such as the bi-polar world of the Cold War, or the uni-polar world that followed it). Scholars of geopolitics have recently begun paying more attention to international institutions (the work of Merje Kuus, for example) while IR scholars have recently begun to pay more attention to geographic concepts such as space and networks (e.g., Nisha Shah’s work), and so there is hope of increasing collaboration between the two fields.

Another neighbor is the practice of foreign policy by governments. In everyday usage, geopolitics is often used as shorthand for the practice of politics by states in a certain region, for example, in newspaper headlines like “How the U.S. Oil Boom Will Change the Markets and Geopolitics” (*Wall Street Journal*, 27 March 2013). This usage is very common, but has more to do with the relative length of the word “geopolitics” vis-à-vis “International Relations” (headline writers being, by definition, obsessed with brevity) than with any meaningful genealogy of the term.

So, if geopolitics is not the same thing as the academic study of International Relations, and it is not the same thing as the practice of international politics, how can we understand what it is? The task of this book is to follow the genealogy of the term “geopolitics” through its major permutations from the late nineteenth century to the present. In doing so, we occasionally wander in and out of these neighboring fields, as well as the broader discipline of geography, emphasizing in the Introductions to each Part how these fields contribute to our overall understanding of geopolitics. In

the remainder of this General Introduction, we will briefly outline the history of geopolitics in a way that will help readers make sense of the more detailed engagements that follow.

A GENEALOGY OF GEOPOLITICS

Classical geopolitics

The term “geopolitics” first appears in print in 1899, the creation of Rudolf Kjellén. Neologisms (new words) of course do not signify the creation of an idea – rather they are the naming of something “in the air” that has hitherto been too ethereal to put your finger on, but which now can be codified and turned into a concept. Indeed, Kjellén, a Swedish political scientist, was the student of Friedrich Ratzel – a German geographer of great prominence in the late nineteenth century – and we can trace the origins of his concept of geopolitics in Ratzel's geography. Ratzel was one of many scholars at the time who were working to understand the relationship between the state and its geography. He published the first book on the topic of political geography, in which he drew from Darwin's notion of “survival of the fittest” and applied this to the state. In his “organic theory of the state,” Ratzel imagined each state as a species, which needs an ecological niche that can support itself. A “thriving” state will have *Lebensraum*, or “living space,” sufficient to its needs. Indeed, it needs to grow, at the expense of other states if necessary, in order to support a dynamic and successful population. Kjellén viewed the state and its society as linked, each feeding the other and both drawing strength from the land. Consequently, the German variant of geopolitics saw borders as always provisional – not as the outline of the state and its legal sovereignty. Indeed, some trace the rise of Nazi Germany's aggression to this German *Geopolitik* (more on this later in this volume).

The Anglo-American branch of geopolitics in these early days was derived from a rather different mode of thinking. Rather than starting with the state, some scholars such as Mahan and Mackinder focused on the long patterns of history, trying to link particular climates and landscapes with patterns of political success. Seeking lessons from the past to inform current foreign policy and strategic thought, scholars like Mahan and Mackinder also linked these historical patterns to emerging technologies of warfare – for Mahan, it was the steamship that threatened to upend military strategy while, for Mackinder, it was the railroad. In both cases, geography is understood as the space in which international relations unfolds, but is not a neutral space: rather, landscapes (and seascapes) exert power over human politics. Both Mahan and Mackinder would agree that, for instance, Napoleon's early nineteenth-century invasion of Russia was in defiance of geography. His long supply lines, stretching from France to the steppes of Russia, meant that Russia's army would almost inevitably overwhelm the French army. The key to success in the realm of international relations, according to these thinkers, is to work *with* geography rather than *against* it. For the United States and for Great Britain (the homes of Mahan and Mackinder, respectively) that meant becoming naval powers and ensuring that no land power was able to cross the water (the Atlantic Ocean or English Channel, respectively) to get to their territory.

While these two strands of geopolitics seem quite different, they were aware of each other. Of particular importance to this dialogue between the Anglo-American and German schools of geopolitics is Ellen Churchill Semple, who studied under Ratzel and then adapted his ideas to the American context. Collectively, the writings of this group compose a body of thought today referred to as classical geopolitics. Referring to it this way, however, does not imply that such thinking is found only in the past. Indeed, variations on this form of thinking survived World War II in the work of scholars such as Saul Cohen and Colin Gray (whom we will find in Part Four of the book).

Complicating this genealogy of “geopolitics” is the fact that the term itself goes out of use after World War II, only resurfacing after several decades. Popular accounts of Nazi *Geopolitik*, found in national magazines such as *Time*, had stigmatized the term, such that even the strongest proponents of the Anglo-American strand of geopolitics backed away from the term, preferring to couch their work as part of the broader project of “political geography.” Burnt by their association with the Nazis, political geographers tended to back away from explicit discussions of foreign policy, instead finding scientific respectability in abstract, often mathematical, models of power, borders, and territory. While this may seem like a huge leap from the sweeping historical grandeur of Mackinder or the Darwinian ecology of Ratzel, these approaches all share a belief in the state as the primary actor in politics. Such an approach became increasingly untenable in the 1970s as the effects of various social movements, such as those associated with civil rights, feminism, and the anti-nuclear lobby, took root. These movements illustrated to observers the rich diversity of politics that unfold not only within the formal processes of the state (e.g. elections and diplomacy) but also beyond the confines of the state system: international movements opposed to the Vietnam War, pan-African solidarity, and Islamism, for instance. These marked a new geopolitics, with little in common with old formulations.

Critical geopolitics

A new, critical form of geopolitics emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s driven by the “cultural turn” in the disciplines of geography and International Relations. Whereas classical geopolitics saw geography as the “reality” that needed to be analyzed in order to guide foreign policy, critical geopolitics saw language as the building blocks from which reality emerged. Geopolitics, then, can be understood as a discourse through which the world is made intelligible and therefore made amenable to foreign policy intervention. In other words, our understandings of the world are produced through a series of representations that we communicate to one another over and over again to produce a web of common-sense geographical knowledge: the Arctic is cold and forbidding, the tropics are hot and steamy, and the Alps are beautiful. These are common representations that enable us all to do a range of things: for instance, to decide where to go on vacation, how to dress when we get there, and what shots to get in advance. Now take this notion and apply it to classical geopolitics: the world is divided into land and sea powers, and as a sea power that means we are threatened by land power. Therefore we must develop strong naval forces and “contain” our rivals. Without these geographical representations, we would have no idea who “we” are, who our enemies are, and what features of geography are meaningful in this contest. When “critical” is used in this context, it does not mean “to criticize” but rather refers to an approach which refuses to take categories at face value. Instead it thinks through the implications of using one particular representation, understanding or story rather than others: what does the acceptance of one over the others allow to happen, and, importantly, who benefits from this?

Scholars of critical geopolitics began by returning to the classical geopolitical tradition and showing the geographical assumptions those scholars had embedded in their theories. However, soon this task was effectively done and scholars of critical geopolitics set out to do the same for more contemporary forms of geopolitics. This is a crucial task, as world politics has constantly been in a state of transition, buffeted by the processes of globalization. As geo-politicians have derived “lessons” from globalization that they thought ought to be the basis of an often-violent foreign policy, scholars of critical geopolitics have stood up to challenge their assumptions and show how these

geopolitical visions perpetuate global inequality. To aid in this task, Gearóid Ó Tuathail and other critical scholars divided geopolitical discourse into three branches: formal, practical, and popular geopolitics:

- 1 *Formal geopolitics*: Formal geopolitical discourse is that which is relayed by academics and researchers in think tanks. We use the term “relayed” because it is tempting to think of geopolitical discourse as originating in this sphere and then filtering “down” to practical and popular geopolitics – an idea that is captured in the term “intellectuals of statecraft” (see Reading 20). However, this is not the case, as these theorists have their views shaped by the other sites of discursive production just as much as they shape them (though they may be loathe to admit it). Most of what has been discussed thus far can be considered formal geopolitics – Ratzel, Mackinder, Cohen, and Gray are all engaged in formal geopolitical discourse – but the circle of abstract geopolitical thinkers goes far beyond academics and even beyond those who use the term “geopolitics.” If we take seriously the idea that critical geopolitics is about the spatializing discourses of politics, then we can fold all kinds of “lay” theorists into this category as well.

Consider, for instance, Tim LaHaye, an evangelical pastor who has written a range of books describing what he thinks the Bible says about the end of the world, a period which LaHaye does not think is far away. Crucially, this involves the production of geographical representations – the translation of place names in the Bible into contemporary places. This enables current events in these parts of the world to be mapped onto prophetic futures purportedly found in the Bible. While LaHaye is unconcerned with land powers and sea powers, or with the impact of technology on military strategy, he actively divides the world up into good and evil, or God’s people and the Antichrist’s camp. Therefore, he can be understood as producing a theory of the world’s geography and its relationship to power on a global, if not cosmic, scale. While LaHaye’s ideas are best known for circulating through popular culture (he co-authored the best-selling *Left Behind* novels), such theories of geopolitics can impact more “traditional” foreign policy in a range of ways. For instance, LaHaye and others like him actively lobby for continued American support for Israel, a country they interpret to be God’s “chosen people.” But when we turn our attention to foreign policy, we start to consider discourse that is more appropriately understood as practical geopolitics.

- 2 *Practical geopolitics*: Practical geopolitics refers to the geopolitical discourse relayed by politicians, military commanders, and others speaking from the perspective of the state. Sometimes there is a direct link between the spheres of formal and practical geopolitics in that “intellectuals of statecraft” are often drafted in to help craft government foreign policy. This means that sometimes academic theories shape government policy. However, in other cases, it is the pull of government funding and prestige that drags theorists into the orbit of policy-makers. In any event, practical geopolitical discourse sometimes takes the form of politicians’ speeches or military documents, but it is worth lingering on the term “practical” for a moment longer. Practical refers to the aspect of this discourse that is about *doing* – applying geopolitical knowledge. Of course, doing something is also a form of language; people see what you are doing and seek to try to impute meaning to the act. What is he doing? Why is she doing that? Therefore, we can see geopolitical discourse as including a whole range of acts, or practices. This notion of discourse as composed of practices is not exclusive to practical geopolitics, but it is a bit more obvious here.

For instance, the United States has, since World War II, maintained a nearly global military presence. As many have noted, the US military has service personnel posted to roughly 150 of the world’s 200 countries. Some see this as the military infrastructure of imperialism, while others see