

1 Theoretical Framework

The complexity of the present work requires a theory mix. Drawing on and critically rediscussing classical geopolitical theories this mix combines elements of geopolitics with international relations, international political economy and historical theories. Owing to the character of the chosen approach and the scarcity of theory-founded analysis regarding non-energy transport issues in the Eurasian space, this book will discuss each of the presented theories, modify and redefine them, in order to develop the categories that structure the analysis.

During the 20th Century, an ill-conceived, pseudoscientific, almost messianic faith in geographic settings as the exclusive determining factor of human and state action led to the tragic entanglement of geopolitics in the Nazi ideology. Hence, in the German academic world, a geopolitical approach to international politics is rightfully considered with suspect. Hence, it seems to us of capital importance to clarify on this point at the beginning of our theoretical part.

The great French historian Fernand Braudel, in ‘Geohistory and Determinism’, the concluding section on Part I of his monumental work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philipp II* (not included in the revisited second edition),⁷⁵ discusses his decision to make use of the term geohistory instead of geopolitics, in an attempt to escape the criticism of “geographic determinism.” He argues that – while geopolitics is the application of a schematic, *a priori*-oriented, spatial history to explain the present – geo-history is “an intelligent human geography” that has to be kept separated from an analysis “of the present in the present” and “has to be forced to apply its methods to past realities” in order to “converge both social sciences, history and geography, whose separation is of no advantage.”⁷⁶ In fact, the (political) orientation of its

75 In 1949, the French historian Fernand Braudel published a path-breaking book, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philipp II*. See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (California: University of California Press, 1995, 2 Vol.). For the first French Edition see Fernand Braudel, *Le Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philipp II* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1949, 2 Vol.).

76 Author's translation from the original: “Poser les problèmes humains tels que les voit, étalés dans l'espace et si possible cartographiés, une géographie humaine intelligente : oui sans doute, mais les poser non point seulement pour le présent et dans le présent, les poser dans le passé, compte tenu du temps ; détacher la géographie de cette poursuite des réalités actuelles à quoi

historical and geographic analysis is exactly what distinguishes geopolitics from political geography or a geography-based historical analysis, as conceptualized by Braudel. Hence, even though geopolitics cannot be considered a merely political theory – always being rooted in its time, space and amongst concrete strategic imperatives – a modern geopolitics should have the ambition of integrating historical, geographic *and* political sciences in a non-schematic way: not only the separation of history and geography, but even the separation of these from a present-oriented political analysis is indeed of no advantage.

However, as with Braudel's geo-history concept, the question of the scientific consistency and the political orientation of any geopolitics is essentially related to the sore point of geographic determinism.

Braudel, while rejecting mechanic geographic determinism, did not deny the role of geography as a co-defining force of collective human action. Braudel claimed, that "Geography does not explain everything, nor does the whole of human history. The stage on which humans act, while important because it endures, whereas they are damned to pass, does not determine everything. Outside its realm, human action does not rest, but keeps influencing itself and his reality."⁷⁷ Yet Braudel did not end up denying any form of geographic influence on human actions. He warns neither to overestimate nor to underestimate the role of geographic determinism because, in his words, on the one side is "the obstacle of nature and geography; on the other, the human effort to counterbalance and to model itself on it."⁷⁸ Hence, geographical determinism seems to be acceptable only if we understand it as the obstacles that nature poses for human action: geography influences human action as much as the latter slowly transforms the former.

Confronted with the criticism of "geographic determinism," in one of his most recent books Robert Kaplan argues, like Braudel: "I'm aware that I'm on dangerous ground in raising geography on a pedestal [...], but I'm not talking here of an implacable force against which human kind is powerless. Rather, I wish to argue for a modest acceptance of fate, secured ultimately in the facts of geography, in order to curb excessive zeal in foreign policy."⁷⁹

The present work, like scholars as different as Kaplan and Braudel have done before, will not consider the "eternal" power of static geography as determining human and state action, but will consider geographic factors as an im-

elle s'applique uniquement, ou presque, la contraindre à repenser, avec ses méthodes et son esprit, les réalités passées et, par là même, ce que l'on pourrait appeler les devenirs de l'histoire." Braudel, *Le Méditerranée*, 295.

77 Author's translation from Braudel, *Le Méditerranée*, 301.

78 Braudel, *Le Méditerranée*, 303.

79 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 36-37.

portant element to integrate into a new approach to International Relations. Specifically, the spatial dimension (in terms of location, geographic distribution of economic and production centres, the relevance of distance to and from the open oceans, and to and from the centers of economic power), more than the geological dimension, will be integrated in this work. While we will discuss briefly some of the concept of the German “*Geopolitik*,” we are aware of the scientific worthlessness of an ideologically-led, deterministic approach. Any attempt to justify aggressive or discriminatory political action or orientation, based on geographical or geocultural elements, is hence strictly condemned and ignored.

1.1 Geopolitics: Definition and a New Framework for Analysis

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent changes in the economic and power structure of the world system, geopolitics has been rediscovered as an autonomous field of analysis, mostly oriented toward explaining the new power dynamics emerging in the former Soviet Space and between new and old powers, inside and outside the Eurasian mass. Different approaches to geopolitics (from classical to critical geopolitics) have mostly followed the divide between positivist and post-positivist approaches in the International Relations debate.

Particular in Germany, where, in general, the realist school of International Relations has been marginal in academic debate, a geopolitical approach to International Relations has been almost banned from the academic and political thought.⁸⁰ However, long before the end of the Cold War and of the “rediscovery” of geopolitics, in the Anglo-American world, particularly in the US, geopolitics has emerged among political-academic elites as a tool for political forecasting and for influencing policy decision-making. At the academic level, the realist and neo-realist school of International Relations, while not particularly interested in integrating historical and geographical elements in its analysis, shares with classical geopolitics the core assumption that states are consistent major players in a structurally anarchic international system, in which they compete to maximize their safety (mostly by military means).

80 For an overview of the geopolitical debate in German-speaking countries and the evolution in the geopolitical thinking in Germany before and after, see Paul, Rauber, *Politische Geographie*, (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2012); Wolfgang Baumann, “Geopolitik ein zeitgemäßer Beitrag zum gesamtstaatlichen Führungsverfahren?” (Geopolitics: a timely contribution for a comprehensive approach to state leadership ?, Bundesministerium der Landesverteidigung Österreichs 2005, accessed June 03, 2013, http://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/09_vul_01_gbf.pdf).

In the current international system, however, this approach seems no longer timely. While states are still the main regulatory actors of the international system, their unilateral expansive (military) power is increasingly constrained and balanced by reciprocal interdependence, by the interaction with expanding private economic and financial actors, and by the emergence of new forms of transnational conflicts. Spatial-geographic elements and historical heritage seemed for long time increasingly irrelevant for explaining the new challenges of world politics. Hence, geopolitics experienced a paradox: while geopolitical discourse has experienced a renaissance, the increased economic and financial process of global interconnection, known as globalization, has challenged the realist premises of classical geopolitics, based on the state as the only central actor of international politics. During the past 20 years, this has caused either a radical opposition to the use of classical geopolitical categories, or the revision of these categories in favor of a de-territorialized, non-spatial and “social constructed” version of it, as we will shortly discuss.

Notwithstanding some shared core assumptions and common challenges, the biggest difference between realism and classical geopolitics has always been the use of geographic and historical elements to explain and define state interests and actions. While realism – like any positivist approach to political and social sciences – aims at establishing general and abstract models of analysis, which generally exclude the influence of history and geography, classical geopolitics defines state interests mostly according to historical experience and geographic settings in order to forecast policy reactions to concrete, contingent challenges. Since geopolitics aims at applying history and geography to explain concrete political processes, and to offer policy strategies, without the ambition of establishing a general theory, it has always been debated whether it deserved to be labeled as theory: how can we deliver a clear-cut definition of geopolitics that could be used as a general analytical framework instead of a tool for political forecasting? It is fairly difficult to find a generally accepted definition of what exactly geopolitics is, and how to differentiate geopolitics from – on the one hand – political geography, and an all-encompassing and less-explaining patch-work approach, on the other.

Hence, any attempt to use a geopolitical approach as the theoretical basis of a political science analysis of International Relations is confronted with two challenges. The first, shared with the realist school, is to adapt “geopolitics” to the changed, more complex reality of the interconnected, multidimensional world of the 21st Century. The second is to restate, as opposed to both positivist (realist) and post-positivist analysis, the role of history and geography as analytical categories. This requires a more in-depth discussion of how to define geopolitics so

that it can stand up to these challenges by combining a more “complex” interpretation of reality, including historical paths and geographic settings, with the necessary analytical straightforwardness and clarity of the social sciences.

Jakub Grygiel's Geopolitics

In the post–Cold war academic debate on geopolitics, we can find a broad range of attempts to define this discipline so as to close the gap between historical paths, geographic settings and the analysis of political processes. Saul B. Cohen, for example, former Professor for Human Geography at the New York Queens College, derives its definition from a purely realist, power-centred perspective: “Geopolitics is the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other hand, political processes. [...] Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequences of this interaction.”⁸¹

Yves Lacoste, one of the most appreciated French scholars, defines geopolitics as the relations between power and territory and between small and great territorial entities:

The term geopolitics, which is nowadays used in multiple ways, actually refers to all that concerns the rivalry of powers or influence over the territories and over the people who live there: rivalries between political powers of all kinds - and not only between states but also between political movements, or more or less illegal armed groups - rivalry for the control or domination of large and small territories.⁸²

Both definitions are strongly influenced by classical realist thinking, whereby Lacoste, as correctly pointed out by Cohen, tries to focus more on territory and less on state, in order to “detach” geopolitics from nation state-centered tendencies and to concentrate more on global issues such climate change, environmental conflicts, non-state organizations.⁸³

81 Saul B. Cohen, *Geography of the World System* (Maryland, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 12.

82 “Le terme de géopolitique, dont on fait de nos jours de multiples usages, désigne en fait tout ce qui concerne les rivalités de pouvoirs ou d'influence sur des territoires et les populations qui y vivent: rivalités entre des pouvoirs politiques de toutes sortes - et pas seulement entre des États, mais aussi entre des mouvements politiques ou des groupes armés plus ou moins clandestins - rivalités pour le contrôle ou la domination de territoires de grande ou petite taille.” Yves Lacoste, *Géopolitique. La longue histoire d'aujourd'hui*, (Paris: Larousse, 2006), 8. Author's translation.

83 Cohen, *Geography*, 27.

Other representatives of the so-called critical school of geopolitics go even further and try to separate geopolitics from any territorial-spatial element, defining geopolitics rather nebulously in terms of discourses and socially created interests.⁸⁴

Since the spatial-territorial dimension has been neglected in the post–Cold War academic discourse about International Relations for too long, this work will discuss geopolitics starting from a more classical approach, taking into account the relation of political action to both geography (the spatial element) and history (the temporal factor). Territory and geographical settings – in their interaction with power – cannot *per se* be considered analytical elements of geopolitics, since both seems to be quite static (territory) or elusive in definition (power).⁸⁵

Hence, this analysis will introduce a dynamic element, which is human action *within* geography. Drawing on this, when we consider the action of political organizations, this can be defined as the political action that leads to the exertion of power, starting from the assessment of their geographic environment (while not determined by it). This is indeed what differentiates geo-politics from human geography, or political geography, and which makes geo-politics a less deterministic analytical tool than generally argued. As the German geopolitical scholar Otto Maull argues in his late work *Politische Geographie*:

Each simple political-geographic fact, for example the location of a country or even just of a place, was called geopolitical and was thus surrounded by a captious aura, that never deserved. Neither the location nor the space, nor the economic structure or something else of a State are “geopolitically”. Only when the simple realities, on the basis of political and geographical knowledge, are used with a specific value in a political sense, they gain geopolitical importance.⁸⁶

According to Maull, while political geography describes merely the way the spatial environment and geographic settings may affect political processes, and how the state – as socio-political and economic institution – deals with its geographic environment, geopolitics defines the political direction of a state and its strategy

84 Critical geopolitics is, for example, a widely diffused approach among scholars of the Association of American Geographers.

85 Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have labelled as “elusive” any attempt to define “power” in their famous work, *Power and Interdependence*. See Robert O Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, Second Edition, 1989), 11.

86 “Jede einfache politisch-geographische Tatsache, zum Beispiel die Lage eines Staates oder selbst nur eines Ortes, wurde als geopolitisch bezeichnet und damit mit einem verhänglichen Nimbus umgeben wurde, der ihr gar nicht zukam. Denn weder die Lage noch der Raum, noch die Wirtschaftsstruktur oder etwas anderes eines Staates sind geopolitisch. Erst wenn die einfachen Gegebenheiten auf Grund politisch-geographischer Erkenntnis mit einem bestimmten Wert in eine politische Rechnung eingesetzt werden, gewinnen sie geopolitische Bedeutung.” Otto Maul, *Politische Geographie*, (Berlin: Safari-Verlag, 1956), 29-30. Author’s translation.

toward the external world (its environment) starting from the analysis of given geographic conditions.

Among the many definitions of geopolitics, the one more suitable to the topic and the research questions of this work, which adds human dynamism to the above-mentioned static elements, seems to be that of the Johns Hopkins scholar Jakub Grygiel.⁸⁷ He considers geopolitics as “the human factor within geography. It is the geographic distribution of centres of powers and line of communications, assigning value to locations according to their strategic importance.”⁸⁸

By trying to define geopolitics as the human factor within geography, Grygiel is able to escape the determinism of which geopolitics has often been accused. According to a determinist approach to geopolitics, states, like humans, *must* cope with the geographical reality that surrounds them. They cannot escape the constraining forces of their geographic settings and are dammed to develop a foreign policy *determined* by their relief map.

On the contrary, according to Grygiel, geopolitics is the intermediate analytical link between geography and geostrategy. While geography is the physical immutability of mountains, planes, rivers and seas (and thus an element not prone to change), geostrategy is the foreign policy direction a state takes according to the geographical reality of its territory and its capacity to react to geopolitical changes caused by human action.⁸⁹ Since foreign policy is a complex decision-making process in which many actors are involved, geostrategy will not always be implemented according to real or perceived structural geopolitical change. According to Grygiel, by not doing so, a state may suffer decline, but this decision will still belong to the realm of human action (political decision) and not be purely geographically determined.

Geopolitical change and geostrategic responses are hence both results of human and political action and both interlinked. Long-term human action and political decision change the spatial structure of the national and international system in terms of trade flows, production and technological change, centers of power, as well as in terms of new transport routes. Short-term human action and political decisions both react to previous changes and pave the way for or reinforce further

87 Jakub J. Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

88 Grygiel, *Great Powers*, 22.

89 The Dutch-American geostrategist and geopolitical scholar Nicholas Spykman stated: “The territory of a state is the base from which it operates in time of war and the strategic position which it occupies during temporary armistice called peace” and referred to geography as “the most fundamental factor in the foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent”. Nicholas J. Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt- Brace, 1942), 41.

geopolitical changes. Geopolitical change and geostrategy differ only in the temporal dimension in which they occur: besides geographical change, which is almost static and can be measured only in terms of geological eras, geopolitical change is dynamic but slow. It can hence be measured in terms of centuries, and thus in terms of long-period historical changes. Geostrategy is rapid and can be measured on a day to day, month-to-month or year-to year basis.⁹⁰ According to Grygiel, the analysis of the relation between geopolitical change and geostrategic response in a certain timeframe is the analysis of the rise and fall of hegemonic powers in the international system.

Table 1. Geography, Geopolitics and Geostrategy

	Change		
	Level	Type and Cause	Effect
Geography		Tectonic: de facto constant	
Geopolitics	Systemic	Slow: rise and decline-new transportation and production technologies	Changes in strategic value of locations, trade routes
Geostrategy	State	Varied: dependent on situation and on state borders	Success: reflective of geopolitics; Failure: not reflective of geopolitics

Source: own elaboration based on Jakub J. Grygel, *Great powers and Geopolitical Change* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2006, 23).

According to Table 1 and Grygiel's definition of geopolitics, in this work *Geopolitical change and geostrategic response* will be the key concepts of the present analysis. We will consider geopolitical changes at the systemic- level as *the shift in trade flows and in the geographic distribution of the centers of power*, while geostrategy will be defined as *the state reaction to these changes in terms of transport strategies at domestic and international level, and their relation to the foreign policy strategies of the country*.

For the purpose of this thesis, applying and extending Grygiel's assumption about the relation between geopolitical change and the geostrategic reaction of state actors, geopolitics can be redefined as *the analysis of changes in the geographic distribution of centers of economic power, in trade flows, and in lines of transport and communication in a long-cycle historical timeframe, and the interaction of these changes with the geostrategies of state actors*.

90 Grygiel, *Great Powers*, 23.

However, in this definition of geopolitics, three new elements have been introduced, which are missing in Grygiel's definition:

1) Centers of power are defined as centers of economic power. Accordingly, we will define power in a narrow manner, only in terms of economic power, measured in annual GDP growth, and in terms of industrial output, measured by its share of GDP and its role in external trade.

2) Geopolitical change is considered as change in the distribution of centers of economic power and in the direction of trade flows. These two factors will be our key indicators for measuring geopolitical change. As already mentioned in the Introduction, shifting trade flows will be analyzed considering export and import in goods from and to the principal sub-regions of Eurasia: Europe, developing Asia and China, the Middle East (Turkey and Iran, and the GGC countries), Russia, and the Central Asia-Caucasus space (eight countries: see Part 1.3). The indicators for evaluating the geostrategic response will be projects and plans of individual countries (China, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Kazakhstan) in their non-energy transport sectors and the relation of these plans and projects to the respective foreign policy objectives.

3) Since geopolitical changes happen slowly over centuries, a historical dimension has to be introduced to this definition. Hence, in our theoretical framework, Grygiel's indicators of geopolitical change are applied in a "long cycle" historical approach to the International Relations.

To better explain each of these three elements, two further theoretical approaches are needed to complement and expand Grygiel's framework. To explain the relation between economic power, its geographic-spatial dimension and the physical interdependencies arising among different centers of power, we will integrate our analysis on geopolitcal change with a geoeconomic approach which focuses on the geographical distribution of production centers inside each country. Furthermore, in order to set the analysis of geopolitical change in an historical dimension, this book will discuss the "world system" and the "systemic change" theory.

Luttwack's Geoeconomics

By introducing two elements like changes in trade flows and in transport lines as crucial for defining geopolitical change, Grygiel sets not only a concrete human element that modifies the static of geography in physical reality, but offers the possibility of defining power in a dynamic way as this becomes, essentially the ability of adapting to these changes by controlling lines of communications and trade, and hence the space. According to Grygiel, those countries able to control

lines of communications and transport-largely by military means- can be considered centers of power which successfully adapt to geopolitical change. However, in order to analyze geopolitical change in today's Eurasia under the new conditions of both increased economic interdependence, and multipolarization of power centers, we state that the possibility for a state to gain exclusive control over trade and communications lines is constrained by the increasing trade and economic interconnection between states and regions. Hence, only the ability to establish itself as a center of *economic* power at the core of web of new supply and value chains, more than the simple capacity to militarily control trade and transport lines will be determinant in defining stance and fate of a state in an highly interconnected world. Against this backdrop, the new economic dimension of geopolitics is better understood via the geoeconomic approach, originally presented by Edward Luttwak.

Since the early 1980s, the spread of economic globalization and new interdependence theories have posed a big challenge to state-centered realist theories, aimed at explaining conflicts and war more than cooperation between states. Realist analyses have for a long time simply ignored the rising interdependence of the global world system and the increasing role of non-state actors. So, for example, Kenneth Waltz⁹¹ still considered the inter-state, systemic level of analysis to be better suited for explaining international policy.

According to Waltz, changes in the balance-of-power system among states are only possible through changes in the relative military and economic strength of national actors.

They develop their strategies based solely on the change in the power structure of the international system. War and the international confrontation are simply explained as disruptions of the military balance of power among states, which aim at maximizing their relative security and prosperity. Against this backdrop, while the globalization is a challenge for states, they still remain the only major actors in an anarchic international system.⁹²

Other authors, like Robert Gilpin,⁹³ have tried to explain the phenomenon of war and inter-state confrontation in a substantially different manner. They try to include many other factors in the realist framework (especially the nature of political and economic systems of individual states). This approach is realist, state-centered, but offers a more differentiated and flexible statement of the relation between world politics and global economics.

91 Kenneth Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

92 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

93 Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Gilpin, for example, while reaffirming the primacy of high politics on an interdependent world economy, and considering institutions as an instrument of states, attaches a greater autonomy to private actors, multinational corporations and transnational integration processes, and attempts to deliver an analysis of the international political economy from a realist point of view.

In the geopolitical debate, which is realist at its core, Edward Luttwak⁹⁴ has followed a similar path, trying to explain the relation between classical inter-state rivalries and private capitalist competition among private actors. While he accepts globalization in its framework and the preeminence of the economy, he questions its naturally cooperative essence.

In his book *Turbocapitalism*, Luttwak argues that a new form of geopolitics has emerged: geo-economics. He states that economic means have substituted military means in inter-state rivalries. Accordingly, states remain central actors on the world stage as “territorial entities, marked off against each other by precisely defined borders, jealously claimed and closely guarded.”⁹⁵ States seek to maximize their own interests and their relationships to each other tend to be fraught with conflict. However, these conflicts rarely break out with violence, and military means prevail only in the “backwaters of world politics,”⁹⁶ i.e. in regions of still unresolved territorial conflicts. When it comes to relations between the major actors in world politics (the US, EU, Japan and China), not military but economic means are applied for the enforcement of different and competing interests.

In this “new version of ancient rivalry of states,”⁹⁷ as Luttwak refers to it, capital investments, subsidized products and market penetration represent modern weapons by which states replace the traditional military ones. The states have not disappeared, but appear rather as political and military support to private companies, backing them through subsidies in the form of investment, R & D, tax incentives and tariffs, as well as through national programs to promote advanced technologies. Their goal should be the conquest of “strategic” sectors identified in high-tech industries, managerial and financial skills, communications, aviation and space industry. Luttwak concludes: “in the traditional world politics goals are to secure and extend the physical control of territory [...]. The goal of geo-economics is [...] the conquest or protection of desirable roles in the world economy.”⁹⁸

94 Edward, Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

95 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 128.

96 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 128.

97 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 128.

98 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 133.

The interdependence between states and private companies, between state-centered interests and transnational market and private interests, not only defines the new behavior of international actors, but also a new kind of geopolitics. Compared to traditional military-centered classical geopolitics, the innovation of geo-economics is, as Luttwak points out, that “geo-economics, by contrast, is a game that is played by countries that have already ruled out warfare among themselves.”⁹⁹

This is, according to Luttwak, the new expression of rivalry and competition between developed countries that rely not on military means, but which compete through political and economic measures, and seek to exert pressure on each other to gain geopolitical dominance. Geo-economics is thus a sort of “soft” geopolitics behind the classical concepts of hard, state-centered geopolitics. At the same time, geo-economics questions the assumption that sees in the spread of globalization and inter-dependence the end of power conflicts and rivalries: market access has substituted territorial conflicts and physical, conquest.

Luttwak’s approach to geo-economics, however, does not consider the transformation geo-economics has been undergoing since his book was published at the end of the 1990s. At that time, the globalization process was at its peak and geo-economics was presented as a modern version of geopolitics not only owing to its focus on economic more than military means, but because geo-economics, as formulated by Luttwak, denied the role of space, territory, and hence of distances, in favour of the virtual space of the market.

Indeed, the lack of the spatial-territorial element in a geo-economic analysis has a theoretical and empirical explanation. As claimed early in this section, Luttwak’s approach is rooted in the tradition of realism and, together with the liberal school, both are rooted in a “social scientific approach,” as Grygiel sharply points out:

The vast majority of current international relations literature is characterized by the absence of geography. Although the perverted versions of geopolitics, notably Nazi geopolitics, are partly to blame for the current dislike of geography, the main cause for the academic irrelevance of geography seems to be the tendency to explain political realities only through political variables. That is, the study of international relations, in particular the study of geography and international relations, has swung from a purely natural-scientific to a purely social-scientific approach.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, Luttwak bases his analysis exclusively upon a social scientific approach, which considers theater (international system) separated from environment (space) and human and state action separated from geography, location and the

99 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 141.

100 Grygiel, *Great Powers*, 13.

spatial distribution of resources, production centers, and lines of communications. In this way, geography becomes “an illusion”¹⁰¹ and distances an irrelevant variable.

Empirically, this approach was justified by the widespread perception of the end of manufacturing economy in favor of a financial and service-based economy. Luttwak, indeed, focuses on private financial actors and on multinational companies as the new, de-nationalized and de-territorialized players in the international system. Even though he is a state-centered realist, he assumes a certain erosion of state power. While states still set up the framework for action, their action is “defensive” or “discrete,” aimed at backing and flanking private actors.¹⁰²

Luttwak does not consider the spatial dimension of both state and non-state action. For instance, the geo-economy Luttwak refers to is simply a new, sophisticated and updated version of old mercantilist praxis applied to a new global system where states interact with new non-state actors. Starting from a narrow definition of geopolitics in purely military-territorial terms, he reframes a new form of geopolitics that, along with military elements, also excludes spatial elements from the analysis.

For instance, just like the development of military technology and the nuclear bomb apparently led to a “shrinking space” and to the seeming irrelevance of the connection between distance and power, during the “third wave of globalization,” global market integration, as a virtual space, seemed to replace real economic space. This has been increasingly considered irrelevant, since, for instance, transport has increasingly been considered a derived or implicit variable whose strategic relevance no longer affects the way goods are traded. The world was supposed to have become “flat” where geographic locations (and historic divisions) no longer were relevant.¹⁰³

According to this interpretation, the state becomes either irrelevant or, like for Luttwak, a “geo-economic actor,” acting exclusively in the non-spatial realm of economic and financial market penetration and set in the framework where private actors follow their own parallel business interests.

This book shares with this early geoeconomics the economic dimension of intra-state rivalry as well as the new role of transnational and subnational actors (for instance private economic actors, cities, regions). It refuses however an analysis which considers inter-state and state-to-business economic relations as “non-spatial” and “de-territorialised.” and agree with Gilpin’s analysis on the rising

101 Grygiel, *Great Powers*, 13.

102 Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism*, 134-35.

103 Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005).

role of competing forms of economic regionalism as new stage of globalization in a mixed international system of overlapping state and non-state actors.

Indeed, after the accelerated process of globalization has made production, supply and value chains apparently increasingly independent from location, geography, states and politics, the multipolarization of the international system and the 2008 financial and economic crisis have led to a new, fragmented world of interconnected but economically and geopolitically competing macro-regions, mostly centred around pivot states. This has led to an increase, and not a decrease, in the importance of the relations between real economic processes, mostly the production of goods and the access to resources, and geographic locations. It seems that in the past decade the globalization process has turned from virtual, a-spatial market penetration virtually connecting the entire world beyond the space and the territorial state to a new form of space destruction and restructuration by economic means, where states and non-state actors more deeply interact.

While trade interconnectedness and evolution in global and regional production networks are indeed driven by the interests and needs of private companies on the global market, these are dependent on states and public actors at both national and local, urban level, for obtaining access to markets, security, favorable tax regimes and, particularly, infrastructure. Otherwise, considering the increasing integration of transnational production networks (Global and Regional Value Chains) at regional and cross-regional level, the spatial location of economic activity and distances between production centers and final markets are not only an important element to consider for a micro-economic analysis of trade and production, as Paul Krugman has sharply argued¹⁰⁴, but they assume relevance in reshaping centre-periphery relations and hierarchies among states and hence gain geopolitical relevance, particularly in those less-connected spaces which could evolve from “fault-lines” to intra-regional bridges.

Indeed, this emerging new system is both prone to more conflict and more economically integrated, since market interdependencies do not only take place in the virtual spaces of finance and do not per se lead to inter-state cooperation. More than economic interdependency it is indeed the (re)emerging relevance of its physical, spatial dimension, i.e. long-distance physical connectivity for raw materials, intra-industrial trade, as well as for final goods, which might force cooperation upon states and balance (but not eliminate) geopolitical rivalries.

104 Paul Krugman, *Geography and Trade*, (Leuven-Belgium: Leuven University Press and Cambridge-Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991); Paul Krugman, Masahisa Fujita and Anthony J. Venables, *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions, and International Trade* (Cambridge-Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001).

Shifting direction in trade flows, changes in the physical distribution of economic activities inside and between the major centers of economic power and (re)emerging transport routes among them represents the three complex geo-economic transformations which define the form geo-politics and geopolitical analysis assume in the present day.

World System and The Systemic Change Theory.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, this geo-economic transformation limits the chance for a state to exert hegemonic power unilaterally. In Eurasia, both this geoeconomic transformation and the constraints and challenges it generates have become increasingly visible in the past two decades. Since the early 2000, the simultaneous rise of different centers of economic power and growth has been matched by an increasing “synchronization” of continental political-economic cycles in both post-soviet Eurasia and Asia, and thus by an increase in mutual trade dependencies and physical interconnections. This fact, while presumably limiting the chance for a single actor to become the exclusive dominating hegemon, poses a challenge for any analysis trying to explain the transformation in continental and, in hence, global order. The question is whether the combined effects of the spread of economic wealth, increased trade exchange, and eventually transport re-connection across the continent can be considered the exclusive by-product of three decades of Western-led globalization, or part of a recurring, long-term cycle autonomously originating within Eurasian history.

Grygiel’s concept of different temporal durations for geographic, geopolitical and geostrategic change can be combined with the long-term history approach of the French historian Fernand Braudel. Long-term history or “long-durée histoire” as Braudel defined it¹⁰⁵ has thus to be considered one of the most important analytical elements of geopolitics. Braudel is particularly interesting, since, as Robert Kaplan pointed out in one of his latest works, he “is a summation of all the strategic thinkers.”¹⁰⁶ Particularly, his concept of “long-durée”, based on the assumption that history is characterized by “varying wave lengths of time”, offers the chance to connect historical and geographical analysis. While the first and more epiphenomenal, short-term “wave” consists of the “daily vicissitudes of politics and diplomacy”,¹⁰⁷ as Kaplan describes what Braudel labels

105 Fernand Braudel, “Histoire et sciences sociales: La longue durée,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 13/4 (October/December 1958): 725–753.

106 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 323.

107 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 323. See for this and the following quotes the Preface to the First Edition of the English translation in Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20–21.

as the time of individuals or “histoire événementielle” (consistent with Grygiel’s definition of the “geostrategy” level), the second mid-term wave is the “time of history”, that of “structural history”, as Braudel refers to it. In Braudel’s own words, this is “a social history of groups”, a history of “economic systems, states, society, civilization”, hence the history of human interaction with the environment. The “third wave” or “the time of geography” is what Braudel labels as “timeless history”,¹⁰⁸ that of “man’s contact to the inanimate”,¹⁰⁹ i.e. to geographic settings. This is a slow-developing, slow-changing history, which Braudel aims to integrate into his analysis.

This corresponds to Grygiel’s first “geographic” level, where change is defined not in historic but in geological eras (tectonic). While barely perceivable, this is an everlasting element that mankind is confronted with. The second “wave” can be considered similar to the “geopolitical” or “systemic” level of Grygiel. However, there is an important difference between the two authors: Braudel’s interest is particularly directed toward structural change (time of history) and not its effects on the rise and fall of hegemonic centers of power, while Grygiel’s theory considers structural geopolitical change only as instrument for explaining the rise and fall of a single hegemon (states), not the effect of their reciprocal interrelations on the systemic level. In our opinion, the short-term wave of the “histoire événementielle” and the mid-term wave, the “time of history” (corresponding respectively to Grygiel’s “geopolitical change” and “geostrategic response”) must be combined, since the effects of geopolitical changes and the geostrategic responses of states both affect and change the system. Hence, this work will integrate Grygiel’s approach with the so-called “systemic school” or “long-term” approach to the International Relations, referring particularly to a modified version of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World System Theory.¹¹⁰

The “systemic” school has indeed applied the long-wave structuralist analysis of Braudel to the question of the rise and fall of hegemonic powers during history, and their effect on stability in the international system.¹¹¹ Kindleberger, the father of the Hegemonic Stability Theory, assumed the necessity of one

108 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20-21.

109 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20-21.

110 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011; First edition: 1974).

111 For a detailed account of the long-cycle approach in the analysis of “change” in International Relations, see the well researched volume: Kent R. Dark, *Waves of Time: Long-Term Change and International Relations* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001).

hegemon to guarantee the stability of the international system.¹¹² Following Kindleberger, authors like Modelski¹¹³ have framed Kindleberger's argument in historical cycles. According to Modelski's long-cycle-theory, since the 15th Century, hegemons have risen and declined every 100 years. Wars determine the shift from a hegemonic period to another: after the old hegemon has reached the peak of his power, he will collapse and eventually unleash a war and a period of instability before the new hegemon is established.

Following Modelski's long-cycle theory and Braudel's methodology of an integrated analysis of both political, social and economic forces, Wallerstein, himself a Marxist, has specifically analyzed the rise of the capitalistic world system under the Western-European Hegemony. Wallerstein, in opposition to Modelski, stated that the economic power of capitalism, more than military power, is at the basis of the emergence of Europe as a hegemon. Since, as he argues, the emergence of the world system is related to the process of capital accumulation as key element of the capitalistic "world system", European capitalism is the origin and Europe the geographical center of this system. Wallerstein identifies three main characteristics of the World System: the core-periphery-semi periphery relation, defined according to the level of capital accumulation and concentration and centralization of state power; the long-wave historical cycles that correspond to the cycles of expansion and contraction of the economic capitalist system (Braudel); and the hegemony-rivalry alternation.¹¹⁴

While Wallerstein's focus on the role of economic factors as determining the emergence of a world system is shared by this work, Wallerstein, and the structuralist school, ignore the possibility of the existence of a "world system" before the Age of Discoveries – the spread of European mercantilist capitalism and the European industrial revolution of the 18th-19th Centuries. So, referring to the Wallerstein's approach, but transcending and broadening it, some global historians like Abu-Lughod,¹¹⁵ Frank and Gills¹¹⁶ have critically reviewed Wallerstein's Eurocentric approach to the HST and argued that: (a) The World System did not derive from the European hegemony and the rise of the modern capitalistic system. Moreover, the World System already existed well before them.

112 Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression: 1929-1939* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1986).

113 George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987).

114 Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I*.

115 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

116 Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (ed), *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, "World System Cycles, Crises, and Hegemonial Shifts, 1700 BC to 1700 AD," *Review of the Fernand Braudel Center* 15/4 (Fall, 1992): 621-687.

(b) Alternating cycles of hegemonic rule and rivalry among hegemonies do not lead to a mechanistic substitution of one hegemon with another.¹¹⁷ Moreover the World System is characterized by “a set of inter-linking cores”¹¹⁸ that are interconnected and whose relations are both cooperative and in conflict. (c) The co-existence of different power centers (a polycentric or multipolar system) requires some form of structural interrelation among the power centers, making the world system independent of the existence of one hegemonic power.

Against this backdrop, this work specifically refers here to Janine Abu-Lughod’s Theory of Systemic Change. Abu-Lughod’s approach is deeply related to Grygiel’s approach to geopolitical change. Abu Lughod’s Theory assumes that “systemic changes” should be considered as “shifts in the direction and configuration of central trends”¹¹⁹ (in our case trade flows and centers of economic power).

Against this backdrop, Abu Lughod defines a theory of systemic change based on three main assumptions:

(a) “In a System, it is the *connections* between the parts that must be studied. When these strengthen and reticulate, the system may be said on the “rise”, when they fray, the system declines, although it may later undergo reorganization and revitalization...” (b) “successive systems reorganize in a somewhat cumulative fashion, the lines and connections laid down in prior epochs tending to persist even though their significance and roles in the new system may be altered...” (c) “no system is fully integrated and therefore none can be completely controlled, even by its most powerful participants.”¹²⁰ Indeed, as Gills and Frank write:

If co-existing, inter-linked hegemonies in their ups and downs appear to be occurring simultaneously (i.e. synchronized), this might be evidence that there exists some connection among them and their respective patterns that may be more than the sum of the part. The identification of correlation in events... may be empirical evidence also of their mutual connections and perhaps for the existence of a world system-wide process and rhythm. This rhythm affects all of the parts of the world system simultaneously, though differently and thus accounts for the synchronization we observe.¹²¹

Frank and Gills present here an interesting analysis of the dynamics of power and trade interconnectedness on the Eurasian continent. They note the co-existence

117 “When there was a period of congruence among the upward cycles of related regions, these cycles moved synergistically. Upturns were the result, at least in part, of linkages each region managed to forge with other parts of the world system, and feedbacks from that system, in turn, intensified local development.” Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*. 358-359.

118 Frank and Gills, “World System Cycles,” 624.

119 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 368.

120 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 368-369.

121 Frank and Gills “World System Cycles,” 626.

of hegemonic, global and / or regional players (multi-polarity) alongside a process of trade integration between them. Accordingly, the hegemonic transition and the rise and decline of a hegemonic power are not an immediate process but instead a transition inside a system of simultaneously existing hegemonies:

At several points in world history we find a period of simultaneously consolidating hegemonies. That is, several hegemonies are expanding simultaneously over the scope of the world system as a whole. During such period, there is usually a high level of infrastructural investment. This facilitates higher intensity economic exchange both within and among these hegemonic entities. This economic exchange occurs through world system logistical inter-linkages. Thus such periods of simultaneously expanding hegemonies seem to be generally characterized by economic expansion.¹²²

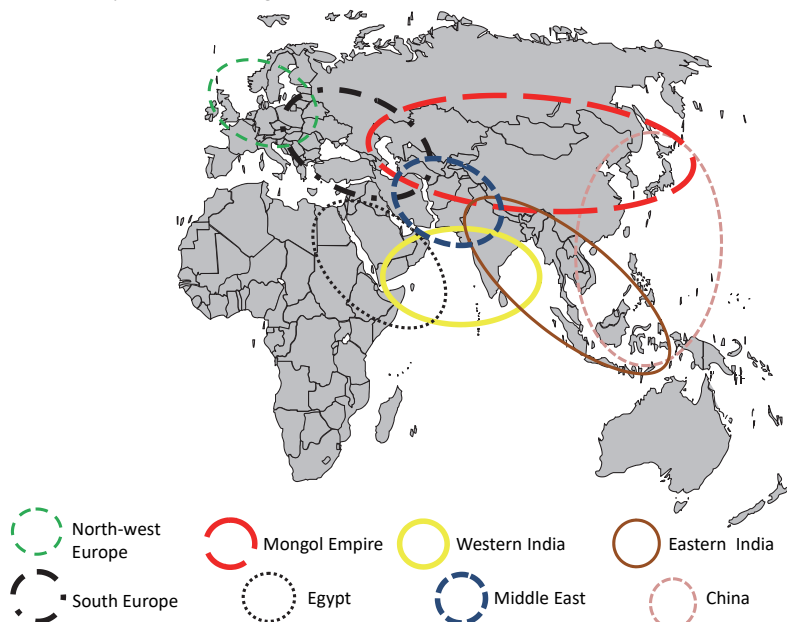
Abu Lughod developed her theory for the analysis of a short period of Eurasian history, between the 13th and 14th Centuries, when a truly “pre-capitalistic” world system existed, composed of eight interdependent centers or “cores” (North-west Europe, South Europe, the Mongol Empire, Egypt, the Middle East, Eastern and Western India, China), inter-linked by sea and land via trade and transport, and whose existence depended on synchronized economic wealth. (see Figure 1).

On the contrary, Frank and Gills go even further and assume the existence of a pre-European world system of an interlinked and non-hegemonic cores even before the 13-14th century.

Against this backdrop, combining Abu Lughod’s approach and Frank and Gills time frame, an analysis of the geopolitical changes occurring in Eurasia and the geostrategic responses of selected states must consider the paths of synchronization of inter-linked centers of economic power as the long-term main characteristic of Eurasian history before the rise of Europe.

122 Frank and Gills “World System Cycles,” 627.

Figure 1: Thirteenth century World System: the eight interlinked cores, as developed by Janet Abu-Lughod



Source: own elaboration based on Janet Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, 34.

This cyclical approach based on the simultaneous rise and decline of interlinked and synchronized cores is indeed more conducive to explain present-day Eurasia's evolving power structure than the somehow mechanical alternation of single, different hegemonies which has characterized the European history after the 15th Century and the Age of Discoveries and which is traditionally used as an explanatory model for the rise and fall of great powers. Accordingly, in the following chapters this book will explain how the present continental shift in the centers of economic power, in trade flows and in lines of transport and communication will paradoxically prevent the very single power apparently profiting the most from this process, China, from exerting exclusive hegemonic control over the continent. Doubtless, in this system, the center of gravity is shifting from the north-western edge back to the south and east, thus determining an internal restructuration of the system itself. Meanwhile, as this book shall argue, emerging physical connections in trade and transport are leading to the simultaneous re-emergence, consolidation and synchronization of multiple and different centers of economic power besides China and to a renewed centrality of different 'core'

regions located at the juncture of continental and maritime Eurasia. In the paradoxical situation of an increasingly coherent political-economic continental space with a high degree of geopolitical fragmentation, mutual physical dependencies, reciprocal constraints and territorial extension will once again prevent the emergence of a single hegemon.

1.2 Geopolitics and Transport in Eurasia

Eurasia – with the land-locked Central Asia-Caucasus space at its core – can be considered the main stage where this complex process of destructuring and restructuring of the geo-economic space, cooperation and competition has been taking place since the turn of the millennium. The shift in the geographic distribution of centers of power from Europe to Asia is matched by a parallel shift in trade flows, for instance from North – South (developed – developing countries) to more South-South relations and in the relative weight of trade routes, from exclusively maritime to the emergence of a mixed maritime-continental connectivity. This internal restructuration will require all centers of powers to adjust their geostrategic responses accordingly.

Against this background, the issue of a continent-wide transport interconnection seems to become crucial not only in defining the geostrategic response of the involved states, but in redefining the strategic location of single Eurasian subregions, particularly the Central Asian- Caucasus space, hence in re-defining the political and economic geography of the continental space.

In the past decades, an important and relevant exception to “de-spatialization” and “de-territorialization” of geopolitical analysis has been the trade and transport of gas, crude oil and raw materials. The transport of oil and gas has been at the core of the rebirth of geopolitical analysis, mostly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the Caspian Region to world markets. A vast, almost endless, and comprehensive literature has dealt, for instance, with the renaissance of classical geopolitical thinking. This has been applied to analyze the attempts to diversify the supply of crude oil and gas from the Caspian basin away from Moscow and Russia and toward other markets and regions (for instance Europe and China). A new “geopolitics of energy” was born, and the term geopolitics – but not geo-economics – ¹²³ has become synonymous with (state) foreign energy policy, and energy security also a matter of military security.

123 An important attempt to analyze energy issues from a geoeconomic point of view is Behrooz Abdolvand, “Die geoökonomischen Interessen der USA und deren Auswirkungen auf die Neuverteilung der kaspischen Energieressourcen“ (The geo-economic interests of the United States

The fundamental problem with this “new” geopolitics” has been a narrow focus on classical geopolitical thinking (mostly Mackinder’s heartland theory) to conceptualize the centrality of the Central Asian-Caucasus space and to explain the dash for Caspian energy resources among the great powers. This approach has often underlined the geopolitical dimension of the energy issue, forgetting the economic rationality of the energy markets.¹²⁴ Moreover, by considering the role of energy transport infrastructure as fulfilling “the strategic function of road and rail for land-locked countries”,¹²⁵ pipelines have generally been considered as having more strategic relevance than rail and roads. As Glassner and Idan have argued:

the relations between energy exports and transit states linked by energy pipelines are mutually dependent. Thus these pipelines have even more significant impact on the strategic situation of land-locked States than roads and railroads [...]. Energy export transit routes create more international interest and invite security involvement and guarantees of global powers that possess an interest in preserving the stability of export transit routes [...]. Moreover challenges to the stability of the energy transport routes are viewed as threats by a number of global powers and international companies. This contrasts with the function of roads and railroads that link land locked countries and their neighbors, whose influence is generally local.¹²⁶

This assumption seems consistent with the relevance that energy trade has for supplier and consumer countries. For energy producers, energy security is mostly defined as the security of demand, and assured by a diversified access to different final consumer markets. For final consumers, energy security has not only to be considered as “adequate, affordable and reliable supplies of energy”, as a narrow definition by the International Energy Agency states, but it involves the security of the entire supply chain, from extraction to transport and sale to the end consumer. As Daniel Yergin argues, political instability, bottle-necks or scarce reliability within transit countries requires skillful risk-management that can be provided only by states.¹²⁷

and their impact on the redistribution of the Caspian energy resources) (PhD Diss, Freie Universität, Berlin, 2008).

- 124 Simon Pirani (Edited), *Russia and CIS Gas Markets and their Impact on Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Energy Institute, 2009); Roland Götz, “Pipeline Popanz: Irrtümer der europäischen Energie-Debatte“ (Pipeline Bugbear: Errors of the European Energy Debate), *Osteuropa-Energie Dossier* (2009): 5-20.
- 125 Martin Ira Glassner and Avinoam Idan, “Pipelines as a Means of Transport for the Land-Locked Caspian Basin,” in: *Central Asia and South Asia –Energy Cooperation and Transport Linkages* ed. Kulbhushan, Warikoo (New Dehli: Pentagon Press, 2011), 195-201. Here: 200.
- 126 Glassner and Idan, “Pipelines as Means of Transport,” 195-201.
- 127 Daniel Yergin, “Ensuring Energy Security”, *Foreign Affairs*, 86/2 (March/April 2006): 69-82. Here: 70.

Notwithstanding the vital, essential role of energy resources for the economic wealth of both consumers¹²⁸ and producers, in the case of producing countries, the physical transport infrastructure for liquid energy resources like oil and gas neither *per se* fosters diversified, sustainable economic development inside these countries, nor changes and structures the economic geography of the space and the relation between different political spaces in sustainable way. There is, indeed, a qualitative difference between oil and gas pipelines and rail and roads. This has not been considered by Glassner and Idan. For some of the newly independent and resource-rich states of Eurasia, investment in energy transport infrastructure and in the energy sector in general has been a precondition for economic expansion, but not for sustainable economic development and long-lasting regional integration.

In the long run, energy sector dependency may instead reinforce the resource course of resource-rich countries and limit the economic development of energy-producing countries to the primary sector. However, in developing and industrializing countries - as experts at DB International point out - whilst investments in the expansion of the rail network were once not a priority, after the governments of these countries expanded their energy and power grids and secured energy supply, they gained strategic relevance in transforming them from developing into developed nations.¹²⁹

Rail and road network and logistics services development is hence deeply connected with and dependent on the industrial diversification of the productive basis of a country. When in different, territorially contiguous countries rail (and road) networks and logistics are modernized and interconnected, this accounts for a deep transformation in the geoeconomic structure of space and heralds the beginning of an epoch of historical geopolitical changes.

In the present day, a geopolitical analysis of shifts in trade flows and centers of economic power must be based on the key issue of transport connectivity and logistics services. Long-distance trade flows, reconnection of nodes/terminals and networks for the transport, delivery and transit of non-energy, manufactured and manufacturing goods directly affect a new, broader and deeper form of spatial interconnection, where states and private actors and state-to-state relations play a determining, and mutually reinforcing, role. Continental Eurasia, poorly connected and landlocked, is home to rapidly integrating centers of economic power at its edges, and is the key space where this long-term geopolitical change

128 "Energy is all about security. Our societies are entirely addicted to energy services [...] hence a satisfactory supply with energy is a precondition for economic growth and also for legitimacy within a political entity." Florian Baumann, "Energy Security as Multidimensional concept," CAP Policy Analysis 1(March 2008): 4.

129 Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations of the German Industry Association, "Interview with Niko Warbanoff," Ost-West: -Contact 5(2012): 9-12.

is taking place. The center of gravity of the continent is shifting and the relation between land-locked and coastal, external countries is being transformed deeply.

To offer a reconceptualization of this space, and particularly of its central part, classical geopolitical concepts, which have dealt with the relation between transport, trade and power in the Eurasian space and in Central Asia, must be discussed and reviewed against the backdrop of the key variables we have introduced in our definition of geopolitics.

Indeed, classical geopolitics, as conceptualized between the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th Century, is traditionally divided into a maritime and in a continental school. Authors like Alfred T. Mahan,¹³⁰ Halford Mackinder¹³¹ and Nicholas Spykman¹³² are generally considered expressions of the strategic point of view of maritime power (Great Britain and the US), while Rudolph Kjellien,¹³³ Friedrich Ratzel,¹³⁴ and Karl Haushofer¹³⁵ (to cite just the most popular), even though considered the “fathers” of classical geopolitics, are seen as the representatives of continental powers’ interests (for instance: Germany). Indeed, less their biographic origin, and more their objects of research, differentiate maritime and continental geopoliticians: Sir Halford Mackinder – a “maritime” geopolitician – assigned a privileged position to continental powers, while Karl Haushofer – a “continental” – advocated a mixed form of continental and maritime power alliance between a continental Eurasian Power (Russia/USSR), a continental European power (Germany) and an Asian maritime Power (Japan).

What makes classical geopolitical thinkers interesting for our analysis and worth discussing is the central role transport, mobility, communication and trade have played for both the maritime and continental schools.

130 Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Little, Brown&Company, 1890) Publication can be accessed online at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13529/13529-h/13529-h.htm>, accessed August, 28 2014.

131 Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Washington, D.C: National Defense University Press, Second Edition, 1942).

132 Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World politics*.

133 Rudolph Kjellien, *Der Staat als Lebensform (The State as Living Organism)* (Berlin-Grunevald: K. Vowinkel, 1924).

134 Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie (Political Geography)* (München und Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1923).

135 Karl Haushofer, *Jenseits der Großmächte: Ergänzungsband zur Neubearbeitung der Großmächte Rudolf Kjelléns (Beyond the Great Powers: a revision of Rudolf Kjellén’s Great Powers)* (Leipzig-Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1932); Karl Haushofer, *Raumüberwindende Mächte (Space-defying Powers)* (Leipzig und Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1934).

Halford Mackinder's Heartland: Overland Transport Connections in a "Closed Eurasian System"

In this regard, Halford Mackinder is the first geopolitical thinker who clearly focused on the role of mobility and new transport modes as the defining factor in the land/sea opposition throughout history. According to Mackinder, the cause of the rise and fall of powers and empires on the Eurasian landmass is not just geography, but technological discoveries in mobility and transport. These changed geographic realities. In his most famous lecture, delivered before the Royal Geographic Society, he claims:

The conception of Euro-Asia to which we thus attain is that of a continuous land, ice-girt in the north, water-grit elsewhere [...] whose centre and north, measuring some 9 million square miles or more than twice the area of Europe, have non available water-ways to the ocean, but, on the other hand, except in the subarctic forest, are very generally favourable to the mobility of horsemen and camelmen. To east, south and west of this heartland are marginal regions, ranged in a vast-crescent, accessible to shipmen.¹³⁶

Mackinder's Heartland Theory is based upon the vision of a Eurasian World Island whose most central region stretches from the central European and the Siberian planes southward to the central Asian steppes and the doors of India. This central region is encircled by ice to the north and the high chains of the Carpatian mountains, the Iranian-Turkish Plateau and the Hymalaya to the south. It is defined as the "pivot area" of global politics.

Mackinder relates the description of geographical reality (the central Eurasian steppes and the coastal zone of the Eurasian inner crescent) to the analysis of the transformative power of different transport modes (horsemen and camelmen vs shipmen). He defines both as the forces behind the rise and fall of Eurasian empires. He hence considers technical development in the mobility of men and goods as the factor defining the relations between vast coastal and continental Eurasian empires throughout history.

His analysis of the location of the Middle East in Eurasia is paramount for this approach:

In some degree it partakes of the characteristics both of the marginal belt and of the central area of Eurasia. It is mainly devoid of forest, is patched with desert and is therefore suitable for the operations of the nomad. Dominantly, however, it is marginal, for sea-gulfs and oceanic rivers lay it open to sea-power, and permit of the exercise of such power from it. As a consequence, periodically, throughout history, we have here had empires belonging essentially to the marginal series, based on the

136 Halford J Mackinder, "The geographical pivot of history," *The Geographical Journal* 23/4 (April 1904): 421-437. Here: 431.

agricultural populations of the great oases of Babylonia and Egypt and in free water-communication with the civilized worlds of the Mediterranean and the Indies.¹³⁷

In the age before the sea trade lines around Africa were “discovered” by Europeans, this “mixed” geographical setting was the very reason for the success of these “marginal” civilizations – land powers with strong sea projection and veto-power on the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, who controlled both the African deserts and the open seas, thus cutting off maritime Europe from the Asian markets. In the same way, it was a mobility and transport revolution that allowed Europeans to circumvent Cape Horn and thus neutralize the strategic advantage of central-Eurasian “mixed” and “continental” nomadic empires.¹³⁸

Figure 2: The natural seats of powers: Mackinder’s Heartland



Source: Halford J Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history”, in: *The Geographical Journal*, 23/4 (April 1904), 435.

This geopolitical revolution occurred in the 15th-16th Century. Following a revolution in navigation technology,¹³⁹ it led to the so-called Age of Discoveries or – as Mackinder labels it – to the “Columbian epoch”, an epoch of unmatched

137 Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history,” 432.

138 “The Cape road to the Indies was to connect the western and the eastern coastal navigations of Euro-Asia, even though by a circuitous route, and thus in some measure to neutralize the strategic advantage of the central position of the steppe-nomads by pressing upon them in rear.” Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history,” 432.

139 For examples, the “caravels” used by Vasco da Gama in his trips to India were three or four-masted ships developed in the 15th Century by the Portuguese and then by Spaniards. They were an evolution of previous, smaller and lighter models that were adapted to the necessity of exploration. On this, see the informative work of Roger Smith. Roger C. Smith, *Vanguard of Empire-ships of exploration at the age of Columbus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

European supremacy over the open oceans and over maritime trade lines. According to Mackinder, this epoch lasted until the very beginning of the 20th Century.

At the turn of the century, Eurasia was going to enter a Post-Colombian Epoch, characterized – in Mackinder's words – by the necessity for a declining Europe to deal with a rising Eurasian "closed political system", i.e. an epoch where the central position of the former steppe-nomads' Empires would be occupied by Russian landpower, whose expansion toward the southern shores of Eurasia - by controlling the "pivot area" (the central Eurasian core) – would directly challenge British India and eventually jeopardize the British supremacy.

In his definition of the Eurasian "Heartland", Mackinder stresses the role mobility and transport would play in determining the re-birth of a Russia-led, "closed" Eurasian system:

It is not the pivot region of world politics that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships but in antiquity lay open to the horse-riding nomads, and is to-day about to be covered with a network of railways? There have been and are here conditions of mobility of military and economic power of a far-reaching and yet limited character. Russia replaces the Mongol Empire.¹⁴⁰

The explicit reference to the role of railways as the driving force behind the rise of a continental landpower becomes even more clear when Mackinder compares the new age of steam power applied to rail transport with the Colombian age of the unmatched supremacy of ships and ocean-going commerce:

A generation ago steam and the Suez canal appeared to have increased the mobility of sea-power relatively to land-power. Railways acted chiefly as feeders to ocean-going commerce. But trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land power, and nowhere can they have such effect as in the closed heart-land of Eurasia [...]. Railways work the grater wonders in the steppe because they directly replace horse and camel mobility.¹⁴¹

This analysis may look outdated, and Mackinder a man of his time. After all, he was a deterministic geographer with imperialistic tendencies, a loyal citizen of the declining British Empire.

Indeed, at the end of the 19th Century, when the European balance of power collapsed under the weight of a unified German state, the weakness of the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires seemed to offer the best chance for Tsarist Russia to expand westward again through the Balkans (after having been defeated in the Crimean War), whilst simultaneously putting pressure on the British Dominion in India, the guarantor of Great Britain's status as a world empire.

140 Mackinder, "The geographical pivot of history", 434.

141 Mackinder, "The geographical pivot of history", 434.

A German-led Europe and a westward and southward-expanding Russia empire had the potential to join forces and thus accelerate the decline of Great Britain in favor of a unified Eurasia, which could emerge as the unmatched landpower, owing to the development of internal lines of communications (for instance, railways).

Karl Haushofer's "Great Areas": Overland Transport Connections and the "Kontinentalblock"

Almost 20 years after Mackinder's lecture, the German General Professor Karl Haushofer, broadly considered the father of the perverted version of German "*Geopolitik*", developed his vision by revisiting Mackinder's main thesis.

Strongly influenced by social Darwinism – and by the biological sense of geography of the ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel¹⁴² and one of his students, Rudolf Kjellen – Karl Haushofer further developed the assumptions of Mackinder by adapting them to the interest of an expansionist German landpower. Aware of the importance of Mackinder's Heartland theory, and fascinated by Japan's rise to the pivotal power in the Asia-Pacific Region during the 1930s and thus by the possibility of a German-Japanese Entente, he added Soviet Russia as the third decisive pillar of the alliance to counterbalance the British dominance of the oceans. Haushofer's "*Kontinentalblock*" was, in fact, Mackinder's nightmare: a united Eurasian continent under German and Russian control and reinforced by Japan's sea power. A deep-water fleet would establish Germany as a land and sea power dominating maritime northern Europe and the plains of the European homeland. The Russian army would dominate the central Eurasian space and put pressure on British India. On the Pacific Rim, Japan would counterbalance the maritime power of Britain and the US in the South China Sea and extend its territorial reach to Manchuria and China (the so-called Asiatic co-prosperity zone). This triple partitioning of Eurasia was underpinned by Haushofer's geo-cultural and geohistorical idea of the Great Areas or Macro-Regions: a German-led Pan-Europa, a US-led Pan-America and a Japanese-led Pan-Asia.¹⁴³ An alliance between Pan-Europa and Pan-Asia, connected by the Russian transcontinental bridge, would jeopardize the US-led Pan-American area, isolate Great Britain and break the entrenchment in Eurasia of maritime powers.

142 Friedrich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie (Anthropogeography)* (Stuttgart: Verlag von J. Engelhorn, 1912-1921).

143 Karl Haushofer, *Geopolitik der Pan-Ideen (Geopolitics of Pan-Ideas)* (München: Zentralverlag, 1931).

Haushofer inverted and partially modified Mackinder's logic, but shared with him the focus on the Heartland. At the core of his analysis was – again – an innovation in transport technology, the Trans-Siberian Railway, which fascinated him and led him to consider Russia as the crucial missing link in the Eurasian strategic chain, and railways as the means to fulfill the internal unification of the continent in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon dominance of the oceans:

[...] wie gefährlich es für die zunehmende Englisierung der Welt werden müßte, wenn durch eine großzügige transkontinentale Eisenbahnpolitik mit den Endpunkten Port Arthur und Tsingtau eine große deutsch-russisch-ostasiatische Einheit geschaffen werden könnte, die einzige, der gegenüber jede britische und amerikanische Blockadeaktion sogar vereinigt, machtlos wäre [...].¹⁴⁴

The problem with Haushofer is that, at the core of his consideration, there lies the perceived necessity for Germany to undertake military expansion and aggression, which would eventually break the balance of power Mackinder had advocated. As Robert Kaplan points out, quoting the Austrian Strausz-Hupe: "Whereas in Mackinder's hands the Heartland is an arresting way to explain geopolitics, in Haushofer's hands it becomes both a crazed and dreamy ideology [...]." On the Nazis, Strausz-Hupe writes that Haushofer "transmitted something that the vaporous celebrations of Adolf Hitler had failed to provide – a coherent doctrine of Empire."¹⁴⁵

According to Haushofer's vision, railways were an instrument of power projection, military logistics and the transport of raw materials for the German war industry, rather than a mode of transport for commercial purposes and thus for international exchange and integration. The aggressive role he assigned to road and rail expansion was directed at breaking the frontiers of middle and smaller powers (mostly in Eastern Europe) and expanding into other countries' territories, thus guaranteeing Germany "Lebensraum" toward the East. This vision not only provided the theoretical and ideological tools for the annihilation of Eastern Europe, but – by doing so – discredited geopolitics as an ideology-driven instrument of expansive warfare.

Assessing Mackinder and Haushofer's Contribution: A Critical Evaluation

To today's observers, Haushofer's assumptions are rightly discredited and almost forgotten, while even the ideas of Mackinder may appear to be stuck in their

144 Karl Haushofer, "Der Kontinentalblock, Mitteleuropa-Eurasien-Japan" in: Karl Haushofer, Werke (München: Zentral Verlag, 1940.): 606-635. Here: 608.

145 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 85.

epoch, and his analysis useless, since his prediction of a Russian-led unification of the continent, or of a German-Russian rapprochement challenging the supremacy of the sea powers on the open oceans and leading to a world empire, never turned into reality.

Otherwise, despite so many differences, today's Eurasian power and economic constellation is somehow reminiscent of the conceptual organization of the Eurasian space pursued by Mackinder and perverted by Haushofer. Both assume a "closed" Eurasian system, based on the rising interconnectedness of Eurasian powers vis-à-vis maritime powers, and both assign a key role to overland transport infrastructure (railways). However, some important differences and structural limits of pre-World War II classical geopolitics are indeed to be stressed.

If we refer to our definition of geopolitics – and to the key indicators of trade flows/transport routes and distribution of centers of economic power – against the backdrop of present-day Eurasian trade and transport realities, the classical geopolitical concepts of Mackinder and Haushofer have two main limits, one concerning the role of maritime and continental trade transport routes, and another concerning the change in the distribution of centers of power.

Considering the different roles of maritime and continental trade transport lines for world and Eurasian trade, Mackinder and Haushofer ignored commercial realities and analyzed Eurasia against the backdrop of the experience of the European space. Here, the development of internal rail communications and inland waterways, starting in the first half of the 19th Century, indeed challenged the maritime veto power of Great Britain. From the second half of the 19th Century, connecting southern and northern Germany via rail diminished the control of Britain over the trade lines connecting Hamburg with Munich and central Germany, and turned inland rail lines into a transport mode able to offer "door-to-door" transportation of goods and manpower.¹⁴⁶ When Mackinder and later Haushofer consider Eurasian connectivity, both regard transcontinental rail networks from this perspective. Mackinder argues that the "old" commercial function of railways, to act as "feeders to ocean-going commerce", will be soon enter a new stage, where a Eurasian railway network would eventually challenge ocean transport and the supremacy of sea lines.

As we will see in Part Four, present-day Eurasian and global trade is different: rising containerization, larger vessels, complex logistics, competing deep-water ports and falling freight costs are among the main reasons why Eurasia has not yet entered a post-Colombian epoch (at least not as Mackinder intended it),

146 Friedrich List, *Die Welt bewegt sich. Über die Auswirkungen der Dampfkraft und der neuen Transportmittel* (The world is moving: About the impact of the new means of transport and of the Steam Power), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985. First Edition, 1837).

and why sea lines of communication, and trade via the Cape of Good Hope and the Suez Canal, are more than ever the backbone of Eurasian trade. The renaissance of continental, inland connectivity needs to be understood as a complement, and not as an alternative to, seaborne trade and sea lines.

This complementarity in terms of transport and trade assigns a new role to the centers of economic power, which have the possibility of profiting from both continental and maritime connectivity. This leads us to the second limit of classical geopolitics: the role of the Eurasian Heartland as a separate and strategically preeminent region of Eurasia.

Indeed, the combined effect of globalization, continental trade exchange and the multipolarization of the centers of economic power, including the countries of the Central Asia-Caucasus space, has caused the former Russian Eurasian hegemon to lose its exclusive dominant position. China's growth, and Turkey, Iran and the Middle East's desire to integrate in a globalized trade system, have complicated Mackinder's argument about a Russian Eurasian power able to exert exclusive control over the Eurasian landmass, as well as regarding the key geostrategic role of Central Asia as a separate entity.

The rise of China in Asia poses a further problem for the analysis offered by Mackinder and Haushofer: both had not foreseen, and thus not considered in their analysis, the protagonist of the Asian-Pacific region and the trendsetter of today Eurasian politics: China. Both developed their theories in a period between the end of the 19th and the first 30 years of the 20th Century, when China was suffering decline, territorial division and occupation, and thus was not considered a player in its own right.

In fact, China's geography is best suited for establishing the country at the center of the Eurasian power system. For China – more than Japan – occupies a “mixed” territory, where a system of inland waterways links the developed industrialized coastal zones with open access to the sea to the center, and where a large but still underdeveloped hinterland stretches northwestward deep into the heart of the continent, to the central-Asiatic planes.

Reversing Mackinder's assumption, a sea power that develops – by means of inland transportation networks – its own hinterland gains strategic depth and becomes a fully-fledged “amphibian” power. Concluding his lecture, Mackinder envisaged this – for him – horrific scenario, but did not consider it as being of relevance any time soon:

“Were the Chinese [...] to overthrow the Russian empire and conquer its territory, they might constitute the yellow peril [...] just because they would add an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent, an advantage yet denied to the Russian tenant of the pivot region.”¹⁴⁷

147 Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history,” 437.

Haushofer, who – like Mackinder – ignored China in favor of Japan as the main actor in the Asia-Pacific, nonetheless added in his analysis an Asia-Pacific vector to the exclusively Eurasian/European centric vision of Mackinder. He thus opened the Eurasian space toward the Asia-Pacific area. Hence, the concept of great areas, considered just as an analytical tool, and by no means as a foreign policy “blueprint for action”, seems more reminiscent of the increasingly multi-polarization of the Eurasian system, concentrated around geoeconomic macro-areas and different centers of economic power, particularly in the Asia-Pacific space, than Mackinder’s.

However, Haushofer considered the unification of the Eurasian landmass to follow a process of conquest and the division of the continent among two main continental powers – Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia – as well a sea power, Japan, while the functional alliance between these three actors and their infra-structural interconnection had to follow the definition of the sphere of influence of each.¹⁴⁸ This had to happen by means of military occupation, acquisition and the partitioning of weaker territories to serve autarchic economic systems, rather than by means of commercial integration among trade-open nations.

His great-area concept is rooted less in a geoeconomic and geopolitical analysis of power relations, or in geographic realities and historical heritage, and more in the concept of aggressive warfare geopolitics (German: *Wehrgeopolitik*), embedded in an almost mystic, pre-capitalist vision of an expanding German “vital space” toward the east, as well as in his aversion to American and British sea power.

This perverted vision of a German colonial space to the east, and his obsession with the Anglo-Saxon colonial powers, leads Haushofer to overlook the complexity of Eurasian history and to forget its most important lesson: the history of the continent has only for a short time been a history of political and military unity, when the Mongols unified the landmass under their control, even though they proved unable to reach and acquire control over the open oceans (13th–14th Century). Before and after the break up of the Mongol empire, the unity of the continent was in fact not of political-military but of commercial nature.

Before the Mongols ruled over the continent, it was trade and transport, mainly land based, but with an important role played by coastal sea trade routes along the shores of the Indian Oceans and of Eastern Africa, that unified the continent. The maritime and overland silk roads were interconnected and existed almost independently of the centers of powers, as we will discuss in detail.¹⁴⁹

148 Haushofer, “Der Kontinentalblock,” 613-614.

149 On this, see Part Two.

The lesson to be learned here is that Eurasian history has always been split between commercial interdependence and integration, on the one hand, and geopolitical multipolarity and disintegration on the other.¹⁵⁰ There is no sign of this in Haushofer's simplified approach to the "*Kontinentalblock*", which considers the southern Eurasian countries from China, India, Iran and Turkey toward the Arabian Peninsula less as an active subject of this history, and merely as an instrument for colonial great power ambitions.

The rise of China as a mixed land and sea power, as well as of other middle Eurasian powers, shows today that the vision of a united Eurasian World Island under one (Mackinder) or two (Haushofer) continental powers, opposed to the maritime realm of the sea powers (the outer crescent) is ill-suited for understanding the complexity of this process. Eurasian unification, driven by the powers of the coastal inner crescent, relativizes the role of the Heartland and reduces it to a variable dependent on the Rimland powers.

To sum up, this book states that, contrary to Mackinder and Haushofer's assumptions, overland rail transport routes have only marginally become an alternative to maritime routes. Their crucial role in present day Eurasia consists much more in becoming a significant element in a rising intermodal transportation network that crisscrosses the continent, reconnects Heartland and Rimland countries, and thus blurs the distinction between the two concepts in favor of the Rimland's preeminence.

Nicolas Spykman's Rimland: Integrated Land-Sea Transport Connections and the Center-Periphery Relation in Eurasia

Nicolas J. Spykman, a generation younger than Mackinder and almost a contemporary of Karl Haushofer, shares with them both the central concern about Eurasia, however his analysis of continental geopolitics is more complex. Living and writing during the Second World War, he looks at the geopolitical setting of the continent from the point of view of the contingency of America's security interests. Involved in a war with the land power Germany and the sea power Japan, the US was only secured by a precarious and instrumental alliance with the Soviet Union. Looking at the world in 1942, when Spykman published his book *America's strategy in World Politics*, the main concern for him was the security of the United States. Since the Soviet Union was resisting German penetration by successfully retaining control over Mackinder's Heartland, this region was not a direct war front and therefore not a concern for the US. The main cause of concern for Spykman was the zone where the American and English armies were

150 On this, see Part Two.

still directly facing German and Japanese troops: along the shores of Eurasia rim, stretching from northern Africa to Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

At end of 1942, at the turning point of the war, Spykman delivered a series of lectures in which he discussed the strategic scenario of a post-war world order. Accordingly, not the Germans or the Japanese, but the Soviet Union and perhaps India, China and a potentially united Europe would shape world politics in the post-war years. This world looks astonishingly like the actual Eurasian power constellations.

Spykman, political scientist and IR scholar, a full-blooded realist in the tradition of Morghentau, and not a geographer like Mackinder, nevertheless derived his analysis, published after his premature death in the seminal work *The Geography of the Peace*,¹⁵¹ from an in-depth observation of the relief map and of geographic reality. His work seems more complex and coherent than what Mackinder presented. The book resulted from a series of articles published in the *American Political Science Review* in 1938 and in 1939 on the relations between geography and foreign policy.

In these articles Spykman “charts [his] course somewhere between the possibilism of Fevre” (and other scholars of the *Annals* which we discussed earlier in this chapter when we referred to Fernand Braudel’s *long durée*) and “the determinism of Friedrich Ratzel.”¹⁵² He points out:

It should be emphasized that geography has been described as conditioning rather than as determining factor. It was not meant to imply that geographic characteristics play a deterministic, causal role in foreign policy [...]. The geography of a country is rather the material for, than the cause of, its policy [...] but the geography of a state cannot be ignored by the men who formulate its policy. The territorial base has influenced them in that formulation in the epast and will continue to do so in the future.¹⁵³

Spykman considers two “stable” geographic factors influencing state action – size and location – one “transformative” natural factor – topography – and one proactive factor that is influenced by and reacts to the other three factors – routes of communications and transport networks.

According to Spykman, size, topography and location are all linked with each other: whilst size defines the potential strength of a country, it is topography that still influences the capacity of a state to transform its size into effective or actual strength:

151 Nicolas J. Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” *The American Political Science Review* 32/1 (February 1938): 28–50.

152 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 30.

153 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 30–31.

in its abstract form as total surface area it does not give rise to specific objectives and gives no content to foreign policy, [...] but size is still operative in the sense that the larger the area, the greater the chances that it contains varying climatic ranges and varying topography, and therefore varied resources and economic possibilities. [...] But size is undeniably been conditioned by topographical facts [...].¹⁵⁴

Indeed, the larger the size, the more relevant must be the effective control of a central state on its peripheral regions in order to transform size into an element of strength, rather than weakness. And topography (the height and the configuration of mountain ranges, the depth and width of valleys, the direction of rivers and the modifying effect of climate) determines the obstacle a government faces to successful integration and to exerting control over its own territory by means of developing a system of transport and communication routes.¹⁵⁵ According to Spykman, while mountains – by hampering communications – divide more than unify, rivers and inland water flows can play both a divisive and a unifying role.¹⁵⁶

While “natural” means of communication like rivers or mountain passes may both ease or hamper the unification of a territory, only effective lines of communications and transport networks can have an exclusively “connecting” function. Starting from this assumption, Spykman points out the strategic role played by railways in unifying territories and binding them to the central government:

It was the railroad, however, that made possible effective integration over wider areas. Before its development, few states located in conflict areas were able to maintain control over territories lying more than three hundred miles from the center of the government [...]. The railroads of France, Germany and Russia radiate from Paris, Berlin, Moscow. In the same way, the large continental powers confirmed their unity by the development of their railroad systems. Transcontinental lines stretch across US, Canada and Australia and the Transsiberian and the Turk-Sib lines have brought Asiatic Russia within reach of the central government.¹⁵⁷

Once a state has successfully coped with its own topography and has developed an adequate transport and communications network, and thus may transform the

154 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 31-32.

155 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 36.

156 Comparing the case of Switzerland with other fluvial empires of the past, Spykman points out: “What is significant about the river system as a dysunifying influence is not its direction, however, but the fact that all the rivers flow from the periphery outward, creating one network of communication within the country and tending to connect the peripheral sections more closely with foreign countries than with the central part of the homeland [...]. Rivers can be, and often have been, however, the chief unifying influence, especially in early political organizations.” Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 36.

157 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 36.

size of its territory from potential to actual strength, the factor of location becomes crucial in defining the stance of a state in international affairs, and thus its foreign policy. Hence, more than simply size, the very fact of geographic location is the most influential upon a state's foreign policy when coping with its geography.

Spykman considers two sorts of location: a world location and a regional location. While the former refers to the land masses and oceans of the world, the regional location refers to the territory of surrounding states. As he writes in *The Geography of the Peace*:

Geographic location of a state in the world is of basic importance in defining its problems of security. It conditions and influences all other factors for the reason that world location determines climatic zone and thereby the economic structure, and regional location defines potential enemies and allies and perhaps even the limits of a state's role [...]. Supplemented by description of the topographical nature [...] a clear picture of geographical location will provide the framework for an understanding of security problems.¹⁵⁸

Interestingly, by analyzing the factor of location, the “transformative” power of transport and communication infrastructure reveals itself to be crucial for the relevance that location may assume for a state. As in the case of size, location can be considered as potential strength or potential weakness, according to the grade of integration of the state in an external system of communication: “The significance of such facts changes with every shift in the means of communications, in routes of communications, in the technique of war and in the center of world power.”¹⁵⁹

The role of world location (the distance from and the connectedness to the open oceans and the position on a land mass) and of regional location (the surrounding states) are at the core of the analysis of *The Geography of Peace*. In it, he coherently lays the ground for his Rimland Theory and redraws the “political map” of Eurasia in a post-war world. He refers to the Rimland as: “the surrounding string of marginal and Mediterranean seas which separates the continent from the oceans [...], a circumferential maritime highway which links the whole area together in terms of sea power.”¹⁶⁰

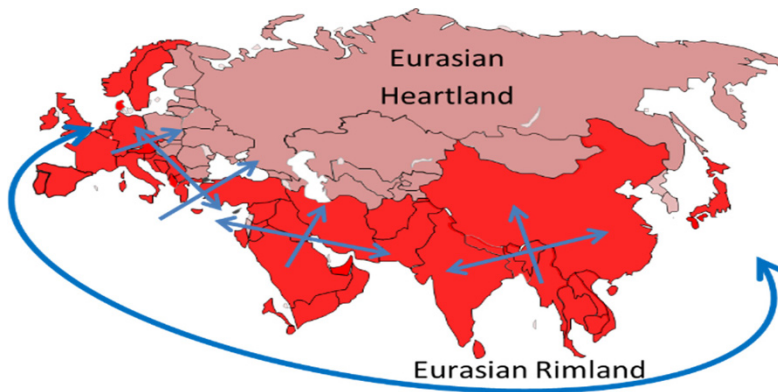
According to Spykman, while Mackinder's definition of the Heartland zone was consistent with the topography of the territory, i.e. central Eurasian lowland plains, encircled by mountains to the south, west and east, and by ice water to the north, the definition of the external shores of the continent needed to be updated and clarified.

158 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 36.

159 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 40.

160 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 38.

Figure 3: Nicolas Spykman's Rimland vs Halford Mackinder's Heartland



Source: Own elaboration

Spykman states that Mackinder's definition of the "inner crescent" was somehow geographically undifferentiated. The "inner crescent" or Rimland consists of three regions: the European coastland, the Arabian–Middle Eastern desert, and the Asiatic monsoon land. Whilst the former two are geographically clearly defined, the latter can be considered a single unity only from the point of view of a sea power. For a sea power, India, Southeast Asia and China are equally accessible. However, looking at the map from a land perspective, these three sub-systems are not only all separated from the Heartland by the Himalaya and Hindu Kush ranges, but the same mountain ranges reach further south, vertically separating India, Burma and China. This makes any contact between the Indian sub-continent and China possible only "across the lower part of the India-China peninsula by land and around Singapore in terms of sea-power."¹⁶¹

Spykman points out that the unity between the three main areas of the Eurasian Rimland is maritime and commercial ("the circumferential maritime highway") more than topographic and political. In fact, human action (the establishment of trade routes and communication lines), more than mechanic geographical settings, defines the strategic unity of a defined political and geographic settlement.

If human action can influence its spatial environment, Spykman's most relevant contribution to the redefinition of geopolitical concepts lies not only in his formulation of the Rimland concept, but in re-assessing the role of the Central

161 Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy," 40.

Asian Caucasus space as directly dependent on its relation to the Rimland, starting from “the human factor within geography” (Grygiel): transport connectivity. This turns size and location from a potential to an actual strength.

Mackinder considered Heartland and Rimland as two geographically separated zones and assigned a pivotal geostrategic role to Central Asia, deriving this from the central *geographic* location. By building up internal lines of communication that would off-set sea power this action would not be *transformative*, but simply *adaptive* to the geographic reality of the central Eurasian space. In opposition to this, Spykman assesses Central Asia’s strategic marginality as owing to the lack of ‘*transformative*’ action: the construction of inland lines of communications connecting to -and not sealing off the region from- the coastal shores of the Rimland. Indeed, to Spykman, geographic location is not directly a source of geostrategic centrality. His explanation is straightforward:

It cannot be ignored that this area (Central Asia) is ringed [...] by some of the greatest obstacles to transportation in the world. A large part of the rimland areas that touch the heartland have even poorer transportation facilities. Afghanistan, Tibet, Sinkiang and Mongolia are regions with no railroads, no motor roads [...] the law of the inverse ratio of power to distance remains valid within the same political unit as well as between political units. Within the immediate future, Central Asia will undoubtedly remain a region with fairly low power potential.¹⁶²

While he recognized the resource potential of the region, Spykman was skeptical about its capacity to mobilize its resources for genuine industrialization. Being a “closed” zone controlled by one single power (the Soviet Union), with scarce access to the southern open oceans, separated by mountain ranges from the Eurasian maritime belt and connected with internal lines of communication only to the northwestern Eurasian hemisphere via Moscow, the region had no chance to transform autonomously its location, size and resources into actual power, except in the case that the Soviet Union shifted its economic center of gravity to the east and south of the Urals, and made this region the center of industrial power, connecting it with the southern Eurasian Rim.

Indeed, in a time where the Soviet heartland power was not only controlling the core of Eurasia, but seemed potentially able to project power to the oceans, Spykman points out the structural geopolitical weakness of the Soviet Union, whose political and economic center was peripheral to the core of the continent. The Soviet Union was thus unable to project power outside the Eurasian land-mass effectively, to the south and to the east, unless it could further link the core of the Heartland with the Rimland via transport infrastructure.

162 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 39-40.

Hence, owing to missing transportation links with the Eurasian shores, particularly in those bridging countries between Rimland and Heartland, the central geographical location of Central Asia did not per se turn in a geopolitical factor.

On the contrary, to Spykman, the “amphibian states surrounding the heartland” play a preeminent strategic role, even though their geographic position might expose them to an encirclement from land and sea. Robert Kaplan’s explanation is that “in addition to dominating Eurasia, the maritime-oriented Rimland was central to contact with the outside World,”¹⁶³

Considering the question of transportation lines from the point of view of military logistics, however, Spykman transcends the simple notion of military domination. He argues that the geostrategic (not the geographic) centrality of a region or of a center of power is not static, but changes:

The transportation lines between Russian Turkestan and Northwest India are certainly interior if compared with the sea route from Southampton to Karachi [but] interior lines function in terms of two points of reference rather than one. The relations between the center [*in our case Central Asia*] and the circumference [*the Rimland states*] may easily be changed if a point on the circumference [*for instance, China*] becomes in turn the center of another circle of communication.¹⁶⁴

In fact, in this latter case, “the whole concept of external and interior [*transport*] lines is changed. What is true for India and China if they have to be defended by British sea power is no longer true if their military strength can be made a by-product of their own industrial development.”¹⁶⁵

In this case, from Spykman’s perspective, were these two Rimland powers to develop their own autonomous military and economic potential, the center-circumference relation would rapidly change, the relevance of Mackinder’s Heartland dramatically diminish and the geostrategic centrality shift to the Rimland.

Therefore, this means that the geographic location of a state or a region is strategically relevant only from the observation point of the player for whom this region is pivotal.

Assessing Spykman’s Contribution to the Present Work

The relevance of Nicolas J. Spykman for this work is twofold. On the one hand, he contributes to clarifying how the development of transport and communications systems is key in assessing the role of human action in transforming geographic realities (topography and location of a state) from potential into actual

163 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 96.

164 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 40.

165 Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” 40.

strength. He approaches geography more as a political scientist than as geographer, but by doing so, Spykman has always considered the strong influence of geographic realities in co-determining policy decisions.¹⁶⁶

On the other hand, the theoretical concept of the “Rimland”, his analysis of the changing center-periphery relation with respect to the Central Asian space, will be the basis of the New Eurasian Inner Rimland concept we will introduce in the next chapter. This will be based on the analytical tools developed in Part 1.1 and on Spykman’s revisited Rimland, aiming to reconceptualize the role of the Central Asia-Caucasus space.

However, some assumptions and some conclusions in Spykman’s analysis need to be reviewed and updated.

Spykman’s approach has theoretical and analytic limits. Theoretically, being an early realist like Morgenthau, he considers only states and empires as the principal, fully-fledged actors of the international politics. They will interconnect and eventually cooperate, but their relations will be fundamentally characterized by confrontations and conflicts. States, as closed black boxes, will be able to interact but not to integrate. But, on this point, Spykman seems too much a man of his time: the ongoing transformation of the international system has shown that the interconnectedness of the world economy, the spreading of globalization, the opening of state frontiers, and the liberalization of goods and services, have led to the appearance of new private, non-state actors on the international stage. These have weakened state boundaries and forced deeper integration.

The second, analytic limit, related to the neglect of trans-boundary economic integration processes, is Spykman’s assumption, that the Rimland can be unified under one power. Indeed, his contingent strategic concern was to avoid the emergence of a single Rimland power, while balancing and containing the only heartland power existing (the Soviet Union). Against this backdrop, his

166 In this respect we disagree with Grygiel. Grygiel argues that Spykman shares with the great classical realist Hans Morgenthau the attempt to study geography as part of the social sciences. To Grygiel, both Spykman and Morgenthau turned their focus from geographic determinism to human action, which was – for all the attention given to geography – preponderant in defining the action of the state. In doing so, they tried to avoid charges of determinism and to “take geopolitics out of Nazi hands and restore its reputation.” According to Grygiel, both went so far in weakening the geographic element as an explanatory variable for defining state action that they eventually paved the way for the steady disappearance of geography from the theory of International Relations. While we agree with Grygiel on Morgenthau, Spykman’s approach to geography shows that the focus on transport and communication lines development is indeed a key factor for transforming size and location into actual strength, and hence a successful attempt to give human action “the last word” over geographic realities. However, by doing so, Spykman underpinned his analysis with soundly geographic notions, and his attention to the relief map, and to location and size as factors in human action, has to retain a crucial role in his analysis. Grygiel, *Great Powers*, 12.

analysis is strongly Atlantic-centric: although he forecast a Eurasian “world system” of multiple centers of power, and predicted the rise of China and India, he was confident in Great Britain’s capacity to keep Africa and the Middle East under direct or indirect control. This turned out to be false: after the long-lasting decolonization process and the end of the Cold War, a new era of strategic independence not only of the Far East and the Indian subcontinent, but even of the Middle East regional powers Turkey and Iran, has brought new non-European actors into the Eurasian game. The Eurasian Rimland emerged eventually as the realm of autonomous and sovereign centers of power.

Moreover, Spykman did not consider the possibility of a maritime and continental commercial unification of the Eurasian continent owing to persisting geopolitical fragmentation. He only considered a commercial unification “of the maritime highway of the Eurasian shores”, but could not forecast the opportunities arising from a Rimland-led commercial unification of the entire continent, even in presence of multiple centers of power with diverging interests, but with strong interdependencies in economics and trade. Robert Kaplan, evaluating the heritage of Nicholas Spykman, makes the point:

Still, the Eurasian Rimland will not be united in any strictly political sense. In a world of multiple regional hegemonies, the danger which both Mackinder and Spykman were concerned, that of a single land power dominating Eurasia or a single sea power dominating the Eurasian Rimland appears nowhere on the horizon [...]. Nevertheless [...] a world of subtle power arrangements, where trade and economics will erode sheer military might, will be still one of geopolitics.¹⁶⁷

In this work, Mackinder’s concept of a “closed Eurasian system” and Haushofer’s concept of Great Areas have only partial relevance for our analysis, even though these were the first geopolitical thinkers to link geographic settings, long-term history and transport connectivity in the Eurasian space.

Against the backdrop of the theoretical framework we developed in Chapter 1.1 (the indicators “shift in trade flows” and “change in the distribution of centers of economic power”), Spykman’s Rimland – his analysis of transport connectivity and center-periphery relation in Eurasia – is the basis for our modified concept of the New Eurasian Inner Rimland. This will be applied as a tool to reconceptualize the Eurasian space by re-assessing the function of the Central Asian-Caucasus space in its relation to the Rimland. It will help us to organize and conceptualize the structural, geopolitical changes the Eurasian states are faced with, before analyzing their geostrategic response, with transport connectivity at their core.

167 Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 102.

1.3 The New Eurasian Inner Rimland (NEIR): Defining, Conceptualizing and Reconceptualizing the Central Asia-Caucasus Space

By analyzing geopolitical changes in the broader Eurasian space, we intend to re-conceptualize the Central Asian-Caucasus space and its strategic position on the continent.¹⁶⁸ The region, owing to its geographically land-locked but central location, and its still inadequate connectivity, will be affected the most by the re-opening of overland continental transport connectivity following shifts in trade flows and in the distribution of centers of economic power. Meanwhile, owing to the peculiarly complex mutual interdependencies arising in the present Eurasian economic and power system, in terms of both trade and transport, a reconceptualization of the Central Asia-Caucasus space can only directly derive from an analysis of the Eurasian continent as a whole.

Indeed, the question of how this space is evolving from a “closed” region, exclusively linked to Moscow (the Heartland power par-excellence) to an increasingly open one, interconnected with the new dynamic evolving centers of economic power located along the coastal shores of Eurasia, is directly related to the potential for the development of a mutual relationship with the rest of the Continent, and specifically with the Rimland countries, as we shall see.

To introduce and define the concept of the New Eurasian Inner Rimland (NEIR) we must briefly discuss how in the past two decades the Central Asia-Caucasus space has been conceptualized in its relations with the rest of Eurasia. Different geopolitical conceptions have tended to apply a “narrow” definition of the central Eurasian space, limited exclusively to Central Asia and/or the Caucasus as sub-regions separate from each other and from the continent.

These “narrow” definitions differentiate between the three South Caucasian/South Caucasus countries and the five Central Asian “stans”, and have been strongly influenced by the external geopolitical conception of the Russian/Soviet empire (Trans-Caucasus/Srednaja Azija-Middle Asia),¹⁶⁹ and by western-centered geopolitical thinking – from Mackinder and Spykman to, most recently,

168 In this work, we refer to the Central Asia-Caucasus space as consisting of eight countries: the three Caucasus Republics Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and the five central Asian states Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirgizstan and Turkmenistan. This will be the definition we will apply in Part Three and Part Four. However, in Part Four we will exclusively focus on the geostrategic response of the most relevant player in the space, Kazakhstan.

169 The Russian/Soviet definition of Central Asia refers to the Region as “Middle Asia plus Kazakhstan”. This definition was abandoned in 1993 in favour of “Central Asia.” Meanwhile, until the end of Soviet Union, the three South Caucasus countries were referred to as the Trans-Caucasus. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the three south Caucasus Republics emerged as sovereign countries and the region was defined as the South Caucasus. Alexei, Bogaturov, *Mezhdunarodnie otnoshenija v Zentralnoi Azii: sobytija i dokumenty* (International Relations in Central Asia-Events and Documents) (Mosckva: Aspekt-Press, 2011); Gadzhev, Kavkaskii

Brzezinski (South Caucasus and Central Asia).¹⁷⁰ Both conceptions put the focus on great power dynamics in Eurasia and frame the Central Asia-Caucasus space more as an object than a subject of international politics. By doing so, they “insulate” this space from the osmotic relation it used to have with the rest of the continent.

Against this Russian and Western-centered definition, a certain “broader” redefinition of the Central Asia-Caucasus space has been attempted with the concept of “Central Eurasia”. This adds Central Europe to Central Asia and the Caucasus (defined sometimes as the Central Caucasus) in order to rebuild a strategic and historical unity around the central belt of the Continent, to escape a Russian-centric conceptualization, and to restate the geographic strategic centrality of the region as an autonomous space.¹⁷¹

While this definition is somehow consistent with the historical heritage of the time before the Russian domination of the vast Central-Eurasian area, expanding the “narrow” definition to a “wide, macro-regional approach to the Eurasian expanse,”¹⁷² shows, in fact, one big limit: it restates central Eurasia as the Pivot Area of Mackinder’s Heartland, *de facto* ignoring the role of the Rimland coastal belt.

Indeed, to escape a Western, Russian or central Eurasian-centric conceptualization of this space, we need to define it as an autonomous but organic and mutually dependent part of the broader Eurasian landmass. Under present day conditions, we need a functional definition that encompasses relations with the great and mid-powers lying on the coastal regions between the open oceans and the mountain ranges enclosing the Caspian space to the south, without denying their specific strategic value and historically strong ties with Russia. For the purpose of this work, the definition of “Greater Central Asia”, as developed by Fredrick Starr, is a very good starting point.¹⁷³

The “Greater Central Asia” concept considers the three South Caucasian, the five Central Asian states plus Northern Iran, Eastern Turkey, Western China

uzel. See also the discussion on Central Asia and the Caucasus in the context of Russian “Eurasianism” in: Eldar Ismailov and Vladimir Papava, *Rethinking Central Eurasia* (Washington D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2010), accessed August 23 2014, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/Rethinking.html>; Hauner, *What is Asia to Us?*

170 Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*.

171 Ismailov and Papava, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*.

172 Ismailov and Papava, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, 101.

173 While the definition Caspian Region comprises eight countries – the three Caucasus Republics Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and the five central Asian States Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirgizstan, Turkmenistan – the definition of Greater Central Asia incorporates Afghanistan and Mongolia, Northern Iran, Eastern Turkey and Central Siberia. See Starr, “In Defence of Greater Central Asia”.

and, most of all, Afghanistan, as a common historical and cultural space interlinked by mutual dependencies. As Fredrick Starr points out, from a strictly geographic point of view, this space is highly differentiated, showing ethnic-linguistic and socio-economic differences too (Turkic vs Persian, steppe nomads vs urban vs mountain dwellers):

Greater Central Asia is divided into three dramatically different zones. On the north lies the great steppe belt running from Mongolia to the Hungarian plain. South of the steppes and stretching from the Caspian to the eastern border of Xinjiang lies desert, among the driest zones on earth. South of the desert and with a spur (the Tien-Shan and Allatau ranges) running from south to north, is the vast mountain zone of the western Himalayas. One of these ranges, the Karakorums, includes mountains that are the highest in the world, measured from bottom to top.¹⁷⁴

But – as Starr states – while these geographic differences are evident, much more evident, based upon the premise of internal mutual dependencies, is the strategic centrality of Greater Central Asia as a region in its own right:

far from dividing groups from each other, from earliest times these differences led to specialized production in each zone and the growth of mutual dependencies among the three types of societies. [...] Summing up, then, there is a strong historical, economic, and cultural case for treating Greater Central Asia today as a central area rather than as a periphery to any external economy or state, and as a subject of international diplomacy rather than simply as an object of the actions of outsiders.¹⁷⁵

According to Braudel: “to draw a boundary around anything is to define, analyze and reconstruct it.”¹⁷⁶ In fact, the concept of “Greater Central Asia” provides the geographical “boundary” of the region for the present analysis. However, it seems to us that it is still missing a crucial element. What makes the Eurasian space a rising “closed geopolitical and geoeconomic space” more than a “closed geographical space” in a new sense, is, indeed, the re-emergence of paths of mutual dependence, not only among the internal actors, but between them and the external powers, as well as between the external powers themselves.

Northern Iran, Eastern Turkey, and Western China have been historically an organic part of Greater Central Asia, and hence part of its internal mutual dependencies. However, under present day conditions, each of these territories is formally part of external states. Hence, exclusively for the scope of this analysis, the Central Asia-Caucas space will be re-defined as “New Eurasian Inner Rimland”. The NEIR focuses less on the internal “mutal dependencies” Starr refers to when he analyses a period of steadily shifting boundaries, and more on the

174 Frederick Starr, “In Defence of Greater Central Asia,” 6.

175 Frederick Starr, “In Defence of Greater Central Asia,” 10.

176 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, Vol.2, 18.

present-day external “mutual dependencies” arising from an ongoing commercial integration that is based on transport network development and logistics integration among those state-territorial entities formally marked off from each other but historically interlinked at the sub-state level. Hence, the NEIR concept – while for the sake of analysis considering only the three Caucasus states and the five central Asian countries as a unity – focuses on their relations within the broader Eurasian space, with a focus on their relations to countries with access to the southern coastal shores. Kazakhstan plays a key and pivotal role in this reconceptualization and will be analyzed specifically in Part Four.

The NEIR assigns preeminence to the amphibian, land/sea hybrid centers of economic power located along the Rimland belt, and to their intra-Rimland connections, as the driving forces behind the emerging Eurasian interconnection, particularly the sub-continental region of China and developing Asia-East Asia. While the classical Heartland power Russia is considered as an important part of this process, some structural weaknesses, its geographic location, and the shifting of the center of gravity of the Eurasian economic system toward Asia, limit its possibility to act as the unique Eurasian hegemon. While Moscow’s relations with the South Caucasus and Central Asia are still strong, these ties are not exclusive anymore and are increasingly weakened. Moreover, Moscow faces a new environment, which is unprecedented in its “Eurasian” history. Furthermore, the Central Asia-Caucasus space has a low chance of developing as an autarchic Heartland without opening up to the broader continent, whose dynamic integration – under present day conditions – is mainly Rimland driven.

Against this backdrop, being Rimland-centered more than Heartland-centered, the NEIR conceptualization understands the Central Asia-Caucasus space as part of the Rimland. By doing so, it understands the geopolitical changes occurring in Eurasia in terms of trade integration and transport connectivity as the main factor which redefines the strategic role of the Central Asia-Caucasus region as a function of its relations with the southern Eurasian powers. It seems to us that, while geographically doubtful, this assumption is geostrategically more straightforward, historically founded and better suited to analyzing the present reality of transport and trade re-connection since – as Spykman pointed out – Central Asia will undoubtedly remain a region with fairly low power potential, if not linked-in with the Eurasian-rim as part of an open regionalism.

Hence, unlike the Greater Central Asia concept, under present-day conditions, the NEIR does not underscore the strategic “centrality” of the Central Asia-Caucasus space, but restates its geostrategic relevance only as a function of its trade relations with and transport connectivity to the Rimland powers.

Along with the Europe-Asia connection, ties between the Middle East and Asia are growing more dynamically than between any other Eurasian region.

Specifically, at the level of states, China is considered the propelling center, while Turkey and Iran are considered indispensable trade facilitators along the Rimland. Russia is considered a relevant and indispensable player in the Europe–Asia connection, but from the point of view of the Central Asia–Caucasus space, less attractive and dynamic in terms of industrial and economic power, and in the future not an exclusive gateway in terms of transport connectivity.

Indeed, an analysis of Europe–Asia–Europe and Inter–Asia trade flows from the standpoint of transport geography shows that the ongoing process of physical transport infrastructure development in the land-locked countries of the NEIR region has a transregional character. This means that the development of physical infrastructure in the Central Asia–Caucasus space is not an isolated phenomenon but fits in a continental process aimed at linking coastal developed regions, with access to the open oceans and to international trade, to hinterland, land-locked regions.

To sum up, in the first part of our theoretical framework we have re-defined geopolitics and set up the key indicators that will be applied to define geopolitical change (shift in trade flows, and in the geographical distribution of centers of economic power). Meanwhile, we have defined the indicator we will apply to analyze and evaluate the geostrategic responses of the states: national rail and logistics projects to enhance domestic and international transport connectivity. Then, with the NEIR concept, we have defined the space of our analysis, Eurasia, and reconceptualized the central, land-locked space that will be most affected by this continental geopolitical change. We will discuss in Part Two the long-term historical time frame and provide a comparison between the timeframe of our analysis and a long cycle of world history to underline continuities and differences between pre- and post-European-centered Eurasian history. This will serve to highlight the structural, long-term character of the present geopolitical changes and to explain the geostrategic responses of the countries in question.

<http://www.springer.com/978-3-658-20191-3>

Beyond Energy

Trade and Transport in a Reconnecting Eurasia

Pepe, J.M.

2018, XXIV, 486 p. 63 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-658-20191-3