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*Special Section:  
Discussing Geopolitics*



# Prologue: The Origins of Geopolitical Thinking

Christian W. Spang

(in cooperation with Naoto Aizawa, Kuanish Beisenov,  
Igor Milovanovic, and Nurlan Tussupov)

University of Tsukuba

**Editors' note:** We are pleased to showcase the work of Dr. Christian W. Spang and four of his graduate students in this issue of the *OTB Forum*.

Many bright and promising ideas are lost because postgraduates have little chance to publish their views. This problem seems to be most significant in the humanities, particularly for Master's students and Ph.D. candidates at Japanese universities. Therefore, we are very pleased that the editors of the *OTB Forum* have accepted this roughly 14,000 word special section and thus given some of the Tsukuba's graduate students a voice.

The following three papers are based on a graduate-level intensive course taught in Spring 2010. "The Origins of Geopolitical Thinking" was part of the Postgraduate General Course (大学院共通科目). It brought together 14 registered postgraduates (11 M.A. students and 3 Ph.D. candidates) from five different graduate schools and eight countries, many of them from (now independent) former Soviet republics. Roughly half of the participants were enrolled in the Master's Program in International Area Studies.

The course followed an intensely discursive approach, i.e., we discussed geopolitics as a field as well as some original geopolitical concepts. At the end of the term, participants handed in short assignments about some of the texts they had read for the class. This special section is based on these term papers. All contributions have been corrected, thoroughly revised, and considerably enlarged by Christian W. Spang. Therefore, it was unanimously decided to consider all articles co-authored. Authors are mentioned in the order of their individual contribution to the article. It should be noted

that the final paper developed by merging two assignments and therefore features three co-authors. Finally, it is our pleasure to thank the unknown reviewers, whose suggestions helped us to improve the three papers to a considerable extent, particularly in the case of the last contribution. All remaining mistakes are naturally ours.

The special section includes the following articles:

1. An Introduction to Early 20th Century Geopolitics by Christian W. Spang and Igor Milovanovic;
2. The Pivot Moves Eastward: Mackinder and the Okinawa Problem by Naoto Aizawa and Christian W. Spang; and
3. Civilizations in International Relations: Huntington's Theory of Conflict by Nurlan Tussupov, Christian W. Spang, and Kuanish Beisenov

## Acknowledgments

It should be mentioned here that the Postgraduate General Course has supported this project by granting a substantial subsidy to buy most of the texts used in class.

**About the author:** Christian W. Spang is an associate professor at the University of Tsukuba. His major research interests are German-Japanese relations, geopolitics, and German as well as Japanese contemporary history.

# Introduction to Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Geopolitics

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**Keywords:** Brzezinski, geopolitics, Haushofer, heartland, Kissinger, Kjellén, living space, Mackinder, paranoia, pivot of history, Ratzel, rimland, Rōyama, Spykman, taboo, trans-continental bloc

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to familiarize the reader with some of the most important “classical” geopolitical theories. Our interpretation is somewhat based on Klaus Dodds’ recent four volume compilation called *Geopolitics* (2009) as well as on the second edition of *The Geopolitics Reader*, edited by Gearóid Ó Tuathail and others (2006). Even though the preliminary texts<sup>1</sup> of the latter are concise and focused, the general introduction by Dodds might be more readily accessible to readers who have little prior knowledge about geopolitics. Yet, his description of the political, geographical, and economic situation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is based on a rather Eurocentric point of view, focusing mostly on contemporary European great powers, while Japan, for example, is barely covered at all. Keeping this limitation in mind, Dodds provides a clear picture of the circumstances under which geopolitics arose as a new discipline. The text explains the principal motives of the Western imperialistic powers of the time, especially the strategic goals of the British and the French, and their influence on contemporary world affairs. It describes how fear and xenophobia affected the development and implementation of geopolitical concepts.

Dodds distinguishes between “classical”, “critical”, and “popular” geopolitics. Classical geopolitics was developed around 1900 to explain the manifold relationships between state, territory, location, resources, and power. This kind of geopolitics was mostly based on the writings of Friedrich Ratzel (Germany, 1844-1904), Rudolf Kjellén (Sweden, 1864-1922) as well as Sir Halford J. Mackinder (England, 1861-1947), and was strongly influenced by social Darwinism along with

imperialist and often Eurocentric perceptions. The notorious concept of “Lebensraum” (living space), particularly if connected to deterministic theories like in Ratzel’s expansionist “Gesetz der wachsenden Räume” (to be discussed later in this article), is an infamous example of these ideas. Furthermore, application of the organic-state theory, which interpreted the state as a living being, was perceived essential for securing “state health”. Parallel to the ancient “Rota Fortunae” (wheel of fortune) idea, states were interpreted as either growing or dying. Yet, in a world where all lands had been claimed, there was no space left for the territorial growth these theories called for. The “diplomatic claustrophobia” that developed on this basis around 1900 might therefore be called “*closed space paranoia*”.

In the 1970s, the writings of political scientists and politicians such as Henry Kissinger revived public interest in geopolitics. Yet, it was the extensive oeuvre of critical scholars such as Mark Bassin (UK), Simon Dalby (USA), Yves Lacoste (France), Gearóid Ó Tuathail (Ireland) as well as the late Takeuchi Keiichi (Japan) and Peter Schöller (Germany) that elucidated the shortcomings of classical geopolitics. At the same time, their works proved the importance of geographical knowledge as an essential element within the execution of political power, thus leading to a stimulating discourse about geopolitics, in other words, “critical geopolitics”.

Popular geopolitics deals with various types of geopolitical interpretations, narratives, and symbols, spread by visual and non-visual means of communication within

Spang, C. W., & Milovanovic, I. (2011). Introduction to early 20th-century geopolitics. *OTB Forum*, 4(1), 8-17.

<sup>1</sup> There is one general introduction to the *Reader* and separate introductions to the five parts of the book.

popular culture, including anime, cartoons, comics, radio, and television programs. Additionally, this trend within geopolitics emphasizes the importance of civil groups and non-government organizations. State domination, public acquiescence and resistance against trans-national corporations, recent U.S. neo-conservatism, corporate globalization, as well as declining U.S. and growing Chinese power are its most common focal points.

In *The Geopolitics Reader*, geopolitics is analyzed in no less than six introductory chapters: a general introduction and separate prologues for each of the five sections of the book. In his overall introduction, Ó Tuathail critically reviews geopolitics, analyzing crucial geopolitical discourses by putting an emphasis on their imperialist origins, frequent racist overtones, and lack of objectivity. He promotes critical thinking beyond elitist conceptions, pointing out the significance of cultural interpretations, geopolitical imaginations, and traditions. As a consequence, Ó Tuathail divides geopolitics into “formal”, “practical”, and “popular” branches, according to the way in which domains such as economy, ideology, military, politics, and religion interact with each other in creating structural networks of power either within any given society or between states.

The prologues to the first three sections were also composed by Ó Tuathail, the final two were written by Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge. The introduction to Part I (*“Imperialist Geopolitics”*) analyzes the rivalry between Great Britain and Germany from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the end of World War II, and simultaneously looks at the rise of U.S. power. Some of the main ideas of politicians such as Theodore Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler as well as the theories of Halford J. Mackinder, Karl E. Haushofer (Germany, 1869-1945), and Isaiah Bowman (USA, 1878-1950) are discussed. The introduction to Part II (*“Cold War Geopolitics”*) deals with the causes of hostility between the USA and the USSR in the postwar period. Ó Tuathail sheds light on the basic geopolitical forces and motives of policy-makers in East and West, and explains

the key decisions that helped ending the Cold War.

The opening chapter of Part III (*“Twenty-First Century Geopolitics”*) covers the strategic policy decisions of the Clinton (1993-2001) and George W. Bush (2001-2009) administrations in an attempt to reveal the roots of neo-conservatism in the USA. American interests have often been expressed by military means; an environment of fear and general paranoia about possible terrorist attacks lead to (unjustified) interventions, which were often based upon deep-rooted geopolitical illusions. Simon Dalby in his introduction to Part IV (*“The Geopolitics of Global Dangers”*) analyzes some of the most pressing problems mankind faces at the beginning of the new millennium, including environmental hazards, and the limitation of natural resources. He also deals with questions of global security, bio-terrorism, and the unjust distribution of wealth, predicting future “resource wars”. The introduction to the final part (*“Anti-Geopolitics”*) by Paul Routledge deals with the term “anti-geopolitics”, described as a struggle of various indigenous groups against the political, economic, military, and cultural hegemony of a state and its elites. These counter-hegemonic struggles “from below” have been manifested either through peaceful forms (non-violent resistance, demonstrations, strikes) or aggressive forms (military actions and terrorism). Analyzing these movements and their direct consequences, Routledge describes them as “Colonial Anti-Geopolitics” (2006, pp. 234-237), “Cold War Anti-Geopolitics” (2006, pp. 237-240) and “Contemporary Anti-Geopolitics” (2006, pp. 240-246), each of them representing a different historical era.

### **The Struggle for Space**

States have been competing for resources and markets worldwide at least since the Age of Exploration half a millennium ago. But the struggle for space became much more ruthless after the Industrial Revolution changed production and trade worldwide. The drive for raw materials (at first timber and fur, later coal, gas, and oil) was an important factor behind the Russian conquest of Siberia as

well as parts of North America, and it was also at the heart of the subsequent American purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Moreover, it was one of the reasons for colonial rivalries during the Age of Imperialism before World War I. Japan's expansion in East Asia (Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, China, and other parts of South East Asia) from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the end of World War II is just one of many modern examples of imperialistic policies. However, if we take a look at the rise of postwar Japan, we realize that the country managed to become one of the most developed and (economically) powerful nations without either an abundant "Lebensraum" or natural resources. This seems to indicate, that due to late 20<sup>th</sup> century economic and technological developments, "Lebensraum" has become less important than Hitler and others had earlier believed.

### The Birth of Modern Geopolitics

One of the trailblazers of geopolitics was Friedrich Ratzel. In his book *Politische Geographie* [Political Geography], published in 1897 in his native German, Ratzel developed the theory of states as life forms, which was very influential until World War II. Inspired by his first-hand knowledge of the USA, where he experienced the American frontier spirit (Turner, 1893), Ratzel believed that a state, like a (primitive) organism, must either grow or die but can never be idle. On this basis, he developed the concept of "Lebensraum" and his already mentioned "Gesetz der wachsenden Räume" (law of the growing spaces, or rather laws of growing political units). Before we discuss Ratzel's theory, it has to be mentioned here that the term "Lebensraum" itself was not coined by him, but most likely by one of his contemporary compatriots, Oskar Peschel (1826-1875). Still, it was Ratzel who popularized it. Along with "Blut und Boden" (blood and soil), it was later used by the Nazis in their catchphrase "Lebensraum im Osten" (living space in the East), and has thus often been interpreted as a pretext for starting World War II.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Ratzel (1896). *Die Gesetze des räumlichen Wachstums der Staaten*. The English

Reading Ratzel's "laws" (Table 1), it becomes obvious that Ratzel was strongly influenced by biologism and social Darwinism. His ideas also reflected German colonial ambitions after the foundation of the new Empire in 1871.<sup>3</sup> Yet, by the time his *Politische Geographie* (1897) was published, there was barely any room left for further aggrandizement without risking a major war.

One of the academics most thoroughly influenced by Ratzel's ideas was Rudolf Kjellén, a Swedish political scientist, who invented the term *geopolitics*, firstly used in an article published in the Swedish journal *Ymer* in 1899. Kjellén eventually further developed the organic state theory, particularly in his book *Staten som livsform* [The State as a Living Form]<sup>4</sup>, originally published in Stockholm in 1916.

Even though his ideas and the terminology he used turned out to be very influential worldwide, the availability of his works in foreign languages remains very limited. While *Staten som livsform* was translated into German twice (1917 and 1924), it has never been fully translated into either English or French. There are, however, two Japanese

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translations shown in Table 1 are partly taken from Ratzel (1896). The territorial growth of states. Yet, as Ratzel's English article is a mere abstract of his German work, not every aspect of his law(s) can be found in the English text. Therefore, some of the translations were done by the authors. When the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, the organ of German geopolitics, was launched by Karl Haushofer and others in 1924, it opened with an article by Fritz Hesse, which discussed Ratzel's "Gesetz der wachsenden Räume". See reference list for details.

<sup>3</sup> Until the 1880s, Germany and Italy were the only major European powers that did not have any colonies. Ratzel supported German colonial acquisitions and was directly involved in the foundation of the Kolonialverein [Colonial Society] in 1882, and its successor, the *Kolonialgesellschaft* [German Colonial Association] in 1887. He was also among the founders of the jingoistic *Alldeutscher Verband* [Pan-German League] in 1891.

<sup>4</sup> In chapter five of his book, there are two subchapters whose titles clearly elucidate how far Kjellén promoted the "state-as-organism" theory: "Die Geburt des Staates" [The birth of the state] and "Der Tod der Staaten" [the death of the states]. Quoted here from Kjellén, 1924, p. 125.

Table 1. Friedrich Ratzel's "Gesetz der wachsenden Räume"

English	Original (German)
1) The areas of states grow with [the level of] their culture.	1) Der Raum der Staaten wächst mit der Kultur.
2) The [territorial] growth of states follows other incidences of growth amongst peoples, which necessarily precede them.	2) Das Wachstum der Staaten folgt anderen Wachstumserscheinungen der Völker, die ihm notwendig vorausgehen.
3) The growth of states proceeds through the annexation of smaller territories to amalgamation, while at the same time the attachment of the people to the soil becomes ever closer.	3) Das Wachstum der Staaten schreitet durch die Angliederung kleinerer Teile zur Verschmelzung fort, mit der zugleich die Verbindung des Volkes mit dem Boden immer enger wird.
4) Borders are the external organ of states and thus a means of growth as well as fortification. Borders change along with the state as an organism.	4) Die Grenze ist als peripherisches Organ des Staates sowohl Träger seines Wachstums wie auch seiner Befestigung und macht alle Wandlungen des Organismus des Staates mit.
5) The state in its growth strives for the possession of politically important points.	5) Der Staat strebt im Wachsen nach Umfassung der politisch wertvollen Stellen.
6) The initial incentives for territorial growth derive from the outside.	6) Die ersten Anregungen zum räumlichen Wachstum der Staaten werden von außen hineingetragen.
7) The general tendency towards a territorial balance [between states], spreads the territorial growth from state to state and increases [the desire for growth] continuously.	7) Die allgemeine Richtung auf räumliche An- und Abgleichung pflanzt das Größenwachstum von Staat zu Staat fort und steigert es ununterbrochen.

translations of the book (Kjellén, 1932, 1936), as products of the Japanese geopolitics boom in the 1930s and early 1940s (Spang, 2006, pp. 146-149<sup>5</sup>). Assuming that only rather few international scholars worldwide read either Swedish or Japanese, most academics who want to study Kjellén's works have to rely on

the previously mentioned early 20<sup>th</sup> century translations into German.

Kjellén not only dealt with geopolitics but emphasized five main aspects of the state, which – according to him – can be interpreted as the basic features of every (academic description of a) nation. It must be noted that Kjellén mentions geopolitics first, while he

<sup>5</sup> The forthcoming book *Karl Haushofer und Japan* by the same author will deal with this topic more extensively.



discusses questions of government at the end<sup>6</sup>:

1. ***Der Staat als Reich (Geopolitik) [The state as empire. Geopolitics]***. Refers to the geographic peculiarities of the territory (in German: *Raum*) of a nation, its borders, and possible problems arising from its location and shape;
2. ***Der Staat als Volk (Ethnopolitik) [The state as a people. Ethno policy]***. Deals with the general public, focusing on its racial and psychological characteristics and the question of loyalty towards the state;
3. ***Der Staat als Haushalt (Wirtschaftspolitik) [The state as a national budget. Economic policy]***. Deals with state finances and questions of self-sufficiency and autarky, which Kjellén interpreted as the best way to avoid the risks of ever-changing international relations;
4. ***Der Staat als Gesellschaft (Soziopolitik) [The state as a society. Social policy]***. Concerned with the society in general as well as social and cultural aspects of a nation;
5. ***Der Staat als Regierungsgewalt (Herrschaftspolitik) [The state as governmental power. Governing policy]***. Refers to a nation's bureaucratic, political, and military management, and discusses the question of how far they are rooted in the national territory (in German: *Wurzeln im Boden*).

### Sea Power vs. Land Power

One of the most long-standing modern geopolitical discourses is based on the famous sea power theory of the American naval historian Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914). In his 1890 book *The influence of sea power upon history*, he emphasized the predominance of naval supremacy over land power, a debate that to some extent has continued ever since. This question is also at the heart of Mackinder's geopolitical thinking.

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the language problems mentioned in the main body of the article, the terminology represented here is in German, based on Kjellén (1924).

Representing a decidedly British point of view, Mackinder developed a guideline to protect the most important strategic interests of the major sea powers. In his famous 1904 article "The pivot of history", Mackinder emphasized that a possible German-Russian joint control over Eastern Europe and Northern Asia might pose an imminent danger to the contemporary status quo, i.e., the British-dominated colonial world order. In 1919, he summarized his ideas in three famous sentences (Mackinder, 1919, p. 194<sup>7</sup>):

*"Who rules East Europe commands the heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island controls the World."*

After World War I, Karl Haushofer became the leading proponent of geopolitics in Europe. While he was strongly influenced by Ratzel's concepts from his early days, he most likely learned about Mackinder's theories much later. Most of all, it was his journey to East Asia along with his sojourn in Japan and his return trip via Siberia (1908-1910) that shaped his world view. During an extended leave of absence, Haushofer got a Ph.D. in Geography in 1913, before World War I helped him to quickly rise through the middle ranks of the army's officer corps. After his military career, which ended with his promotion to Major-General, Haushofer taught political geography and geopolitics at Munich's Ludwig-Maximilians University until his retirement in 1939. In 1924 he (co-) founded the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (Journal for Geopolitics), which he (co-) edited until it was suspended due to Germany's "total war" effort in 1944.

His military background, international connections, and extensive knowledge of

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<sup>7</sup> The "heartland" consisted roughly of most Russian territory east of Moscow up to, but not including, the region close to the Northeast Asian coastline. The southern parts of the "heartland" reached into the northern regions of today's Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and China. This landmass was not accessible by sea, and therefore considered a fortress. By the term "world-island", Mackinder meant the combination of Europe, Asia, and Africa. For a map of Mackinder's 1904 "pivot of history" concept, please go to the following article by Aizawa and Spang.

geography enabled Haushofer to become an influential figure in academic, military, and political circles in Germany. He constantly emphasized the importance of geographical knowledge as a prerequisite for any ambitious German foreign policy. His own grand design advocated a tripartite cooperation between Germany, Russia (later the USSR), and Japan. This conceptual alliance, which Haushofer called “trans-continental bloc”, was well-known in policy circles in contemporary Berlin, Tokyo as well as in Moscow (Spang, 2006, pp. 146-149).<sup>8</sup> Although this contradicted important parts of National Socialist doctrine, such as anti-Communism as well as Hitler’s anti-Slavic racism, and – most importantly – the 1941 attack on the USSR, Haushofer’s well-known close relation with Rudolf Hess, the deputy leader of the Nazi Party, meant that he has often wrongly been viewed as a friend of Adolf Hitler, and as an integral part of the Nazi regime by contemporaries and later observers<sup>9</sup>. This misinterpretation is one of the main reasons why the term “geopolitics” fell out of favor after World War II.

### Early Postwar Geopolitics

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say the term had become a total taboo. As early as 1948, it was Japanese political scientist Rōyama Masamichi, who called for a revival of a renewed Japanese geopolitics, while the

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<sup>8</sup> The forthcoming book *Karl Haushofer und Japan* (2012) by C. W. Spang will deal with the Haushofer boom in Japan, as well as – to a lesser degree – with the reception of Haushofer’s ideas in the USSR.

<sup>9</sup> See Bassin (1987) for a detailed description of the relation between German geopolitics and National Socialism. The forthcoming book *Karl Haushofer und Japan* (2012) by C. W. Spang will deal with this relation as well. To give just one telling example of what ordinary Germans thought about Haushofer’s connection with Hitler, we want to draw our readers’ attention to a quote from Stefan Zweig. The Austrian writer had met Haushofer and his wife on board a steamer in Asia before World War I, and later referred to Haushofer in the following way (1943, p. 146): “*I kept up cordial relations with the Haushofer family; we exchanged letters and visited each other in Salzburg and Munich. [...] But one day in Munich, when I chanced to mention his name, someone said, in a matter-of-course tone, ‘Ah, Hitler’s friend.’*”

*Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* was re-launched in Germany in 1951. Furthermore, geopolitics was continuously taught in military academies and staff colleges, particularly in the USA and the Soviet Union, often under labels such as “strategic studies” or “political geography”. It is therefore not surprising that geopolitical concepts continued to shape foreign policy views in East and West alike.

Similar to Mackinder’s fears of 1904, early U.S. postwar administrations were worried that unlimited Soviet control over Eastern Europe could turn out to be the first step towards Soviet domination over the globe. To counter such a “worst case” scenario, Washington strove for limiting Soviet influence in Europe and elsewhere. Therefore, the wartime writings of Nicolas J. Spykman (Dutch-American, 1893-1943) were studied closely. In opposition to Mackinder’s heartland theory, Spykman had come up with his so-called “rimland” theory, putting the main emphasis on the territories encircling the heartland, but not on the heartland itself. Rejecting Mackinder’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century prediction regarding the looming prospect of German-Russian world dominance, Spykman believed in the following paradigm: “*Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world*” (Spykman, 1944, p. 43). Dominating the areas surrounding the USSR (i.e., the “rimland”) would – according to Spykman – mean obtaining control over the Eurasian continent. Thus, his idea became one of the main pillars of Washington’s “containment policy<sup>10</sup>” vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the early postwar era.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Containment” was the key concept of U.S. foreign policy during the early phase of the Cold War. The term was initially coined by American diplomat George F. Kennan, and is often used to describe the foreign policy of the Truman administration (1945-53), which aimed at restraining the spread of Communism and Soviet influence worldwide. To reach these goals, diplomatic, economic, and military efforts were undertaken to establish a joint Western front against the Communist bloc, which culminated in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. As a result, its eastern counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, was created in 1955.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, Spykman’s ideas are still discussed with

While geopolitical ideas were thus applied, the word itself did not reappear in public discourse before the extensive usage of the term by Henry Kissinger and other U.S. foreign policy advisors such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, who popularized it again in the 1970s. As a result of this trend, a number of Japanese books appeared with the word *chiseigaku* [geopolitics] in their titles as well<sup>12</sup>. In that period, numerous studies started to revive the use of geopolitical perspectives on global strategy, possibly because the economic crisis (first oil shock in 1973) and the rising influence of the People's Republic of China, which took over Taiwan's UN Security Council seat in 1971, meant that the West had lost some of its dominance. Geopolitical language once again entered discussions about foreign policy strategies. Eventually, this continued during the final stages of the Cold War, when U.S. foreign policy was frequently interpreted as a "chess game" in order to achieve supremacy over the USSR and its allies.<sup>13</sup>

## Outlook

Classical geopolitical thinking influenced international relations before and after both

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respect to U.S.-Russian relations. See for example the abstract of M. P. Gerace (1991), which ends with the following interesting prediction: "*An irony here is that while the flaring up of U.S.-Soviet conflict in the 1980s reassured Mackinder's relevance, the decline of this conflict may make Spykman more timely than ever.*" See also Boon von Ochssée (2007).

<sup>12</sup> The short-lived Japanese geopolitics revival around 1980 is beyond our main focus, and therefore cannot be dealt with in detail. It should be mentioned here, though, that some of these books explicitly referred to German geopolitics as a model. See, for example, Kuramae, 1982, pp. 192-96. The author went as far as interpreting Haushofer's ideas as the basis for Ronald Reagan's Near Eastern policy.

<sup>13</sup> In this respect, it is worth noticing that the 1972 World Chess Championship match between Bobby Fischer (USA) and Boris Spassky (USSR) in Reykjavík (Iceland), received unprecedented publicity due to its character of a proxy war between the two superpowers. Fischer won the match 12.5 to 8.5. The image of chess was later taken up by Brzezinski for the title of his 1997 bestseller *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*.

World Wars. Yet, all of these theories are somewhat flawed. A common dilemma is the fact that none of them is nearly as objective as they claim to be. In fact, they all show rather nationalistic and ideological traces. This problematic aspect of geopolitics has been aptly summarized by Peter J. Tayler, who wrote: "In the case of geopolitics, it has always been very easy to identify the nationality of an author from the content of his or her writings" (Tayler, 1993, p. 53).

Also, the unprecedented degree of technological development since many of these theories were formulated, have often rendered the original conclusions irrelevant. While the geographical realities have remained stable, travel, warfare, and the exchange of information have seen revolutionary changes, particularly since the introduction of the personal computer and the internet. Ratzel's "Lebensraum" concept, for example, was influenced by the American frontier spirit of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet nowadays the earth is much more populated and marked by economic and political globalization as well as regional integration. Mackinder's "pivot of history" (or heartland) theory aimed at the prolongation of British control over the globe, but colonial empires are a thing of the past now. Just like Mahan's theory of traditional sea power, all these early 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas did not take into account air power and nuclear weapons because they did not exist a century ago.<sup>14</sup> Since the Soviet launching of the Sputnik 1 satellite in 1957 and the American Apollo 11 lunar mission in 1968 (to name just the most famous endeavors), space and missile technology has also become more and more important in international relations.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>14</sup> Looking at the latest development of sea power, it must be mentioned here that the recent upsurge of pirate attacks in the Arabian Sea and the Malacca Strait as well as the military actions against these commercial pirates mean that conventional sea power is currently experiencing some kind of revival.

<sup>15</sup> The "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI) – started by Ronald Reagan during his first term in office – was the initial move towards space-based defense systems in U.S. military strategy. Despite much enthusiasm about SDI, often dubbed as "Star Wars", the ever rising costs of the project lead to its suspension by Bill Clinton in 1993. It took until

(mostly) uncensored flow of knowledge and capital has been changing the world, thus having a strong and lasting effect on relations not only between states but also between other “global players” such as international organizations, multinational companies, as well as NGOs.

Nevertheless, if we scrutinize the moves of the major powers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that classical geopolitics has had a remarkable influence. Fifteen years ago, Colin S. Gray (1996: 258) summarized this with respect to U.S. foreign policy in the following way: “From Harry S. Truman to George Bush, the overarching vision of U.S. national security was explicitly geopolitical and directly traceable to the heartland theory of Mackinder.” This can be shown by the fact that the West continued to be afraid of Russia after Communism collapsed. Various moves to counter Moscow’s influence, like integrating many Eastern European nations into NATO and the EU, seem to verify Gray’s argument. One might interpret these steps as a modernized version of the old World War I idea of a German dominated “Mitteleuropa” (Central Europe), or the liberal but decidedly catholic Pan-European movement, initiated by Tokyo-born Austrian Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi.<sup>16</sup> More recently, there are some Russian geopoliticians who want to counter this policy by arguing for some kind of trans-continental bloc between Paris, Berlin and Moscow.<sup>17</sup>

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2002 before George W. Bush revived it again. SDI has affected international politics significantly and brought along serious implications for U.S.-Russian relations, especially with regard to the planned missile defense shield over Eastern Europe. Since the 1980s, investment in space exploration, space technology and weaponry has developed into an integral part of national security, not only in the U.S. and Russia but also in fast-developing China, which in 2003 became the third country capable of sending human beings into space.

<sup>16</sup> During World War I, Friedrich Naumann and others dreamt of a German-dominated Central European “Großraum”. In the mid-1920s, Coudenhove-Kalergi founded the Pan-European Union and later influenced European integration after 1945. As the project was strictly anti-Communist, Coudenhove-Kalergi did not consider the USSR as a possible part of the suggested union.

<sup>17</sup> Amongst them is Alexander Dugin, currently one

Nowadays, the world’s most powerful nations are again directing their attention to securing the resources they need. An example of this is the ongoing race for the North Pole and its natural resources.<sup>18</sup> The USA, particularly during the George W. Bush administration, unilaterally tried to secure its own wide-ranging strategic interests, and by doing so acquire a position of world dominance. Similar efforts by non-U.S. allies often lead to sanctions or other forms of international interference.<sup>19</sup>

Since the infamous 9/11 attacks, the USA have been waging a “war on terrorism”, initially considered legitimate but later severely criticized by a number of traditional U.S. allies such as Germany and France, as well as the United Nations. The fact that the “war on terrorism” has so far often included bombardments with frequent collateral damages means that the second invasion of Iraq in 2003 in particular can be interpreted as a scantily disguised effort to secure access to the rich oil reserves of the region.

Looking at the ideas of Nicolas Spykman, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington and others, it seems that

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of the most prominent Russian geopoliticians. Dugin actively advocates anti-American ideas and somehow seems to be inspired by Haushofer. Promoting opposition to the USA, his publications have become highly influential in Russia since the Jelzin era. For a brief account of his ideas in English, see an interview that was published in *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* in 2004. In a 2008 interview with Megan Stack (LA Times), Dugin advanced similar ideas.

<sup>18</sup> That is why Norway with its long northern coastline, which could be used as a springboard to the North Pole, might become more and more important as a key ally and NATO partner in the future. While Mackinder’s heartland and the North Pole are otherwise not comparable, they share at least cold temperatures and virtual inaccessibility.

<sup>19</sup> If we compare the international excitement about the (suspected) nuclear weapons programs by Iran as well as North Korea, and compare this with the never officially declared Israeli possession of nuclear armaments – which is generally accepted by Western governments – it is obvious that there are double standards at work. An historical example in the academic field would be the way Karl Haushofer and German geopolitics was demonized by Allied wartime propaganda, while U.S. geopolitics flourished concurrently.

international relations theory has long been influenced by some (American) intellectuals whose thinking was based on classical geopolitical thinking.

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# The Pivot Moves Eastward: Mackinder and the Okinawa Problem

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**Keywords:** China, geopolitics, heartland, Mackinder, Kissinger, Korea, Okinawa, pivot of history, Taiwan, U.S. bases

## Introduction

More than one hundred years have passed since the distinguished British geographer and politician, Halford J. Mackinder, revealed his fundamental “pivot of history” theory (1904), which he later modified and adapted to a changing world. The first step of this revision process appeared immediately after World War I in his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. In 1919, he renamed the “pivot of history” as the “heartland” and formulated his famous dictum: “*Who rules East Europe commands the heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island [Africa, Asia, & Europe]; Who rules the World-Island controls the World*” (Mackinder, 1919, p. 194). At the height of World War II, Mackinder reinterpreted his original idea in an article entitled “The Round World and the Winning of Peace”. In this 1943 *Foreign Affairs* piece, he argued for a continuation of the grand alliance between the USA, the British Empire, and the USSR and suggested a containment policy vis-à-vis Nazi Germany.

Even today, Mackinder’s heartland idea remains among the most influential geopolitical theories.<sup>1</sup> This fact deserves special notice because world affairs have changed completely since Mackinder first presented his views in 1904<sup>2</sup> only three years after the death of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). In this paper, we will first introduce the

author, then summarize his above-mentioned theory and finally apply it to one of the most controversial topics in current Japanese-American relations: the discussion about a possible removal of U.S. military bases from Okinawa. In order to understand their importance within U.S. military strategy, it is necessary to consider the growing economic and military power of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). To do this, it might be helpful to perceive mainland China as the south-eastern part of Mackinder’s heartland.

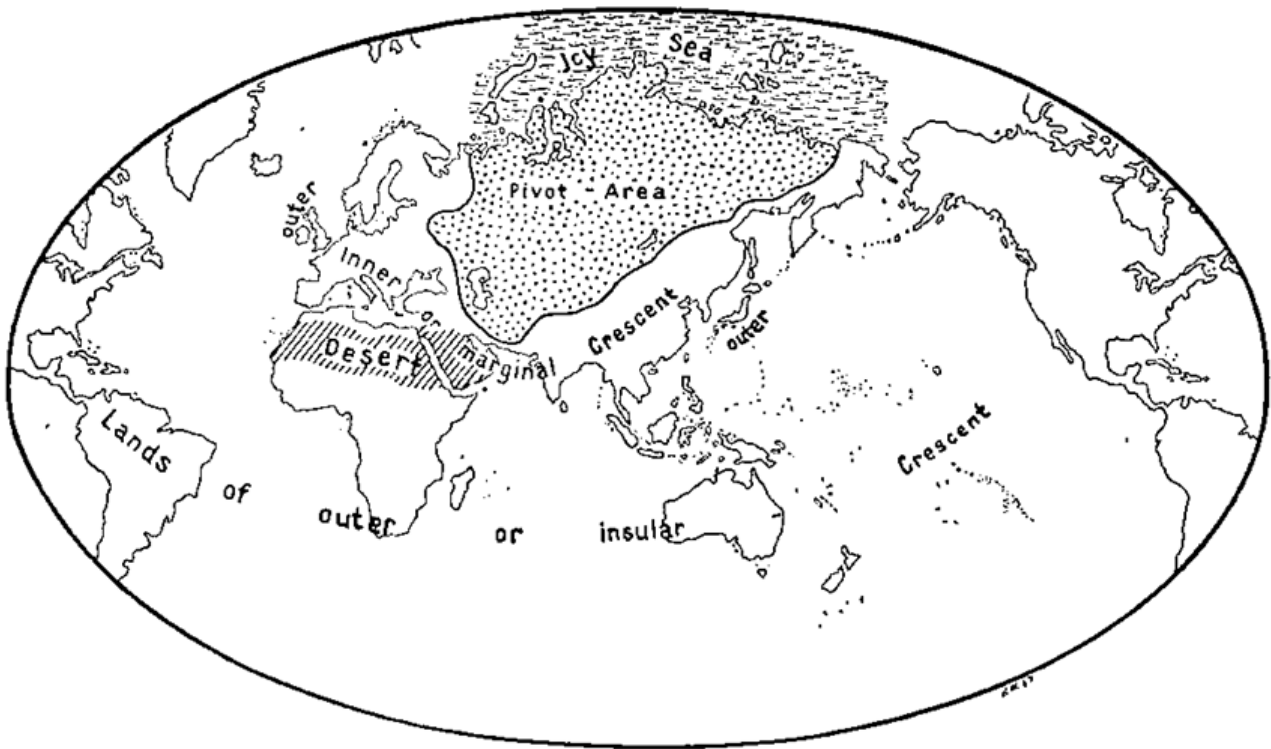
## Halford J. Mackinder and “The Geographical Pivot of History”

Born in 1861, Mackinder studied geology, history, and law at Christ Church College, Oxford University. He started to teach geography at his alma mater soon after graduation and was appointed Reader (Associate Professor) in 1887, at the exceptionally young age of 26. In the 1890s, he was involved in the founding of the Geographical Association (1893), the London School of Economics (LSE, 1895), and the Oxford School of Geography (1899). As Oxford University was nevertheless reluctant to give him a full professorship, Mackinder moved on to become the director of the LSE (1903-08). After that, he concentrated on politics. While continuing to lecture part-time, he became a Member of Parliament in 1910 and stayed on in the House of Commons until 1922. In 1919, he served as British High Commissioner for South Russia, staying in Odessa (current Ukraine), a major port city on the northern shore of the Black Sea, where he tried to increase British support for the anti-Bolshevik forces. Although he did not

Aizawa, N., & Spang, C. W. (2011). The pivot moves eastward: Mackinder and the Okinawa problem. *OTB Forum*,4(1), 18-23.

<sup>1</sup> This did not stop one of the more recent proponents of geopolitical (or geostrategic) thinking, the American Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997, p. 38), from misnaming the British geographer as “Harold” Mackinder.

<sup>2</sup> It should suffice here to mention the current multi-polar international system; globalized industry and finance; the possibilities of modern means of communication like mobile phones and the internet etc.; the ongoing transport revolution including fast long-range aircrafts and high-speed trains as well as military technology such as ballistic missiles etc.



**Figure 1.** Mackinder's threefold division of the globe: (a) the pivot area, (b) the inner or marginal crescent, and (c) the outer or insular crescent. Reprinted from Haushofer, 1940, p. 406.

succeed, Britain conferred the rank of Knight Bachelor on him in 1920. Six years later, Mackinder was appointed to the Privy Council. In 1923, he finally got his own chair of geography at LSE although it took until 1934 before the first chair of geography was introduced at Oxford.

Mackinder first mentioned his “pivot of history” idea in a lecture he delivered at the Royal Geographical Society (est. 1830) in London in January, 1904, i.e., shortly before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05). Around that time, Russia looked like a huge threat to the British Empire. To counter this alleged challenge from Saint Petersburg,<sup>3</sup> the government in London had already given up its long cherished policy of “splendid isolation” by concluding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902) with Japan, a country that a few years earlier was hardly considered an equal match to any of the major European powers.

A few months after his speech, Mackinder published his paper in the *Geographical Journal*. On the first few pages, he explains

<sup>3</sup> Until 1918, the seat of the Russian government was Saint Petersburg, not Moscow.

the geography of Eastern Europe and the northern part of Central Asia, the combination of which constituted the “pivot of history” in Mackinder's world view.

After that, Mackinder reflected on the major international conflicts before 1904. Following this, he went on to indicate the importance of the pivot area and to formulate his famous theory. Due to the fact that no serious military air power existed at that time, Mackinder focused on the opposition of land-power and sea-power. As a representative of the British Empire, which had been ruling the oceans with its Royal Navy for centuries, Mackinder naturally argued from a navy point of view. He claimed that this part of the world must be the “pivot of history” that cannot be attacked by means of sea-power. In concrete terms, he feared that Russian land-power would, in the long run, become more important than British sea-power.

In 1919, Mackinder altered the focus of his concept. In *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, he paid special attention to Germany and the new communist Russia. Mackinder stated that both sea-power as well as the newly developing air-power are essentially based on territory



and resources. He predicted that possible future cooperation between Berlin and Moscow could lead to the establishment of an invincible combination of air-, land- and sea-power. What made this scenario even more threatening to the British Empire was the fact that most of Russia's territory cannot be attacked by sea-power. Thus, Mackinder concluded that there was no chance for Britain to challenge a possible German-Russian alliance. As a result of this analysis, he suggested the creation of buffer states in Eastern Europe, which would prevent any close cooperation between Berlin and Moscow.

In 1943, Mackinder revisited his heartland theory again, considering the question whether it was still significant four decades after its creation. Between 1904 and 1943, the growing ideological divide along with two World Wars had overturned international structures completely. However, while borders had changed during these decades, geographical conditions had not. Furthermore, the build-up of industrial and military power in the heartland area underscored the significance of Mackinder's original idea. Therefore, he concluded in 1943 that his pivot/heartland concept was more valid than ever before.

Even though Mackinder's 1943 paper "The round world and the winning of peace" appeared after the battle of Stalingrad (July 1942 – February 1943), he wrote it before this crushing German defeat marked the turning point of the European war. Therefore, Mackinder was far from certain of an all-out Allied victory. His preoccupation was how to establish a lasting peace. He mentioned a new balance of power system, arguing for a continued alliance of the sea-powers with the heartland-country (USSR). This cooperation would leave Nazi Germany isolated and would eventually lead to some sort of stability by separating Eastern Europe and the heartland, i.e. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Mackinder's 1943 point of view, a global balance of power system was essential to the construction of happiness and freedom of the people – an idea that bears some resemblance to Henry Kissinger's 1970s

world view.<sup>4</sup> Having summarized the development of Mackinder's thinking in the European context, let us now turn to East Asia to find out if his heartland theory is still worth studying today.

### **China's Growing Power and the US Military in Okinawa**

Until 40 years ago, things looked much different in East Asia. The turning point came in 1971/72, long before industrialization and globalization finally reached most of Asia. Between 1946 and 1971, the Chinese seat on the Security Council of the United Nations in New York was occupied by Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (ROC), representing the island of Taiwan, not mainland China. While the Nixon-Kissinger administration was negotiating the opening of diplomatic relations between the United States and the communist regime in Beijing<sup>5</sup>, Taiwan not only lost its seat on the Security Council but also its membership in the United Nations due to a vote by the UN General Assembly in October 1971.<sup>6</sup> Since then, the Republic of China (Taiwan) has been in a tenuous position, depending on U.S.-military support against a possible attack from the People's Republic of China (PRC, i.e. mainland China,). South Korea, now a successful democracy, was controlled either by autocratic rulers or by military dictators until 1987; and Okinawa was under direct U.S.-administration until 1972, a situation that allowed the U.S.-military to build as many bases on the Ryukyu Islands as they deemed necessary.

Since the 1970s, mainland China has transformed itself in many ways. Products made in China are ever present in our daily lives. Due to this fact and its abundance of

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<sup>4</sup> See Kissinger, 1979, p. 914: "By geopolitical, I mean an approach that pays attention to the requirements of equilibrium."

<sup>5</sup> Relations between Washington and Beijing eased when Richard Nixon signed the Shanghai Communiqué on February 27, 1972, but it took until January 1, 1979 before diplomatic relations were officially established.

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758, October 25, 1971. It is noteworthy that the exclusion of the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan happened against the explicit wish of the Nixon administration.

human as well as natural resources, Beijing has gained more and more clout worldwide. The large number of Chinese emigrants, mostly in Asia and America, should not be overlooked either. Thus, in recent years, economically as well as militarily, the People's Republic of China has become one of the most powerful states in the world.

Looking at these developments from Mackinder's point of view, the emergence of China suggests that the "pivot of history" has shifted farther to the East.

Examining the controversy about the massive presence of the U.S.-military in Okinawa, it is obvious that the difficulty of relocating the bases has something to do with the geographical position of Okinawa between the main islands of Japan to the North, Taiwan to the South, and mainland China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) to the Northwest. China's increasing power and Okinawa's position relatively close to the new "pivot area" explain the reluctance of the U.S.-military to shift the bases to other places. Thus, even in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with its completely different weaponry and military strategy, land-power and location-value remain of essential importance, as indicated by Mackinder more than a century ago.

## Conclusion

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century geopolitics has been summarized the following way:

*"Fundamentally, classical geopolitics is concerned with the inter-relationship between territory, location, resources and power"*

(Dodds, 2009, p. xx). Yet, this is by no means a thing of the past. Mackinder's classical theories as well as other contemporary geopolitical ideas are still thriving today. In Japan, for example, there seems to be a revival of public interest in geopolitics. It is noteworthy that a 1985 translation of Mackinder's book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was re-released in Japan as recently as September 2008. Similarly, a 1940 Japanese translation of Karl Haushofer's book *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans* was republished in 2005.<sup>7</sup> Even in the arts,

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<sup>7</sup> The Japanese translation was based on the 1938 (third) edition of Haushofer's book, which first

geopolitics seems to be *en vogue* in some quarters. In 1994, science fiction author Aramaki Yoshio published two novels with the word "地政学 (geopolitics)" in their subtitle, and they were then re-issued in 2005. Last year, one of Aramaki's works featured a short appendix about geopolitics in which he dealt with Mackinder's heartland theory in some detail.<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the Okinawa problem, it is obvious that the bases cannot be removed due to the paramount geopolitical importance of their location. The significance of Okinawa remains unchanged, or might even increase in the future, due to the following circumstances:

1. The geographical position of the island(s), close to the new "pivot area".
2. Land possession near the new "pivot area" is crucial to guarantee military efficiency, even in an era in which air-power is arguably the main means of military action.
3. The growing military and economic power of mainland China and the uncertainties around future developments in North Korea and in Taiwan have increased rather than weakened Okinawa's geopolitical importance over the last decades.

Finally, it should be noted that in Samuel P. Huntington's hotly debated 1993 article about the prospect of future conflicts between civilizations, both China and Japan constitute their own civilization while the United States of America represent yet another, i.e. "Western" civilization. Therefore, one might also turn to Huntington to explain why the bases are most likely to stay where they are: They can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid a "Clash of Civilizations".<sup>9</sup>

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appeared in 1924. The re-issued 2005 version features two articles by Christian W. Spang as research material (研究資料).

<sup>8</sup> Aramaki, 2010, p. 405-408.

<sup>9</sup> For a closer look at Huntington's classic theory, please refer to the following article in this special section. Huntington calls the Chinese civilization "Confucian" not "Chinese", i.e., it can be seen as going beyond China.

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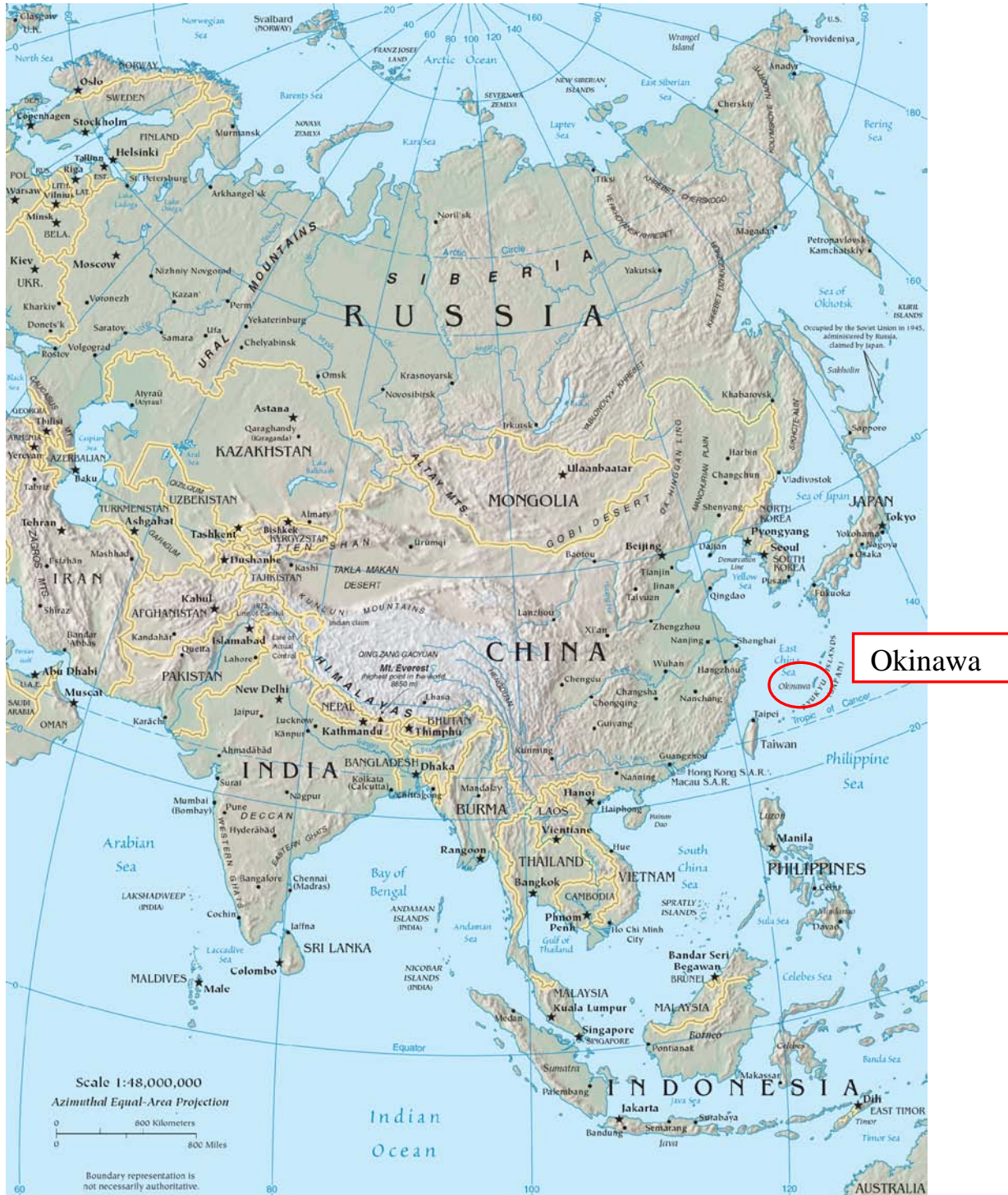


Figure 2. Map of Asia with Okinawa highlighted. Retrieved September 24, 2011, from [wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a8/Asia-map.png](http://wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a8/Asia-map.png)

# Civilizations in International Relations: Huntington's Theory of Conflict

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## Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, many scholars predicted the future course of world affairs. Arguably, the two most influential views were Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" (1989) and Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993). Both men later extended their argument and published books, in which they elaborated their original theses further.<sup>1</sup> At first, there was much debate going on between supporters and critics of both views,<sup>2</sup> yet a few years later, globalization, the Internet, and global warming attracted more interest than theoretical discussions about an effectively unpredictable world future.

This changed with the notorious 9/11 attacks in 2001, the subsequent military intervention in Afghanistan, and the Second Gulf War. These developments revived interest in Huntington's thesis, leading to a new wave of critiques, some of which are

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<sup>1</sup> See the reference page, where the original articles as well as the later books are listed. In this critique we are mostly concerned with Huntington's original 1993 *Foreign Affairs* manuscript, though.

<sup>2</sup> Chiozza, 2002, p. 711, summarized the effect of the 1993 article the following way: "According to the editors of *Foreign Affairs*, the article that Huntington wrote in 1993 generated more discussion [...] than any other article they had published since the 1940s". Rose/Hoge/Peterson compiled the most important contributions to the early discussion in a 1999 edited volume. A concise summary of the most important strands within the heterogeneous group of critics can be found in Fox, 2002, pp. 417-418.

listed in the reference section of this paper.<sup>3</sup> It should be kept in mind, though, that the former Harvard professor had originally presented his thesis shortly after the end of the Cold War. Following more than four decades of ideological conflicts between Capitalism and Communism, he was arguing in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, that the main source of future struggles would be the cultural divisions between civilizations rather than ideology.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper we want to elucidate some of the basic problems of Huntington's concept by assessing how valid his division of the world into a limited number of "civilizations" really is. We are skeptical if the eight civilizations Huntington suggested are really homogeneous enough to be portrayed as units. While this might be the case for some, others seem to be far too heterogeneous. If this assumption is accurate or if his partition is unjustified, we would argue that the whole hypothesis loses much of its potential validity.

## Contents

At the outset of his 1993 article, Huntington claims that nearly all wars up to the French Revolution had been based on disputes among monarchs; most 19th century conflicts were derived from tensions among nation-states, while 20th century hostilities since the Russian Revolution were mainly

<sup>3</sup> We want to thank one of the reviewers of this paper for drawing our attention to Bilgrami (2003), Chiozza (2002), Fox (2002), and Said (2001), all of which provide valuable ideas, which we tried to incorporate.

<sup>4</sup> One of Huntington's most severe critics, Edward Said (2001, p. 2), calls Huntington himself "an ideologist". He sees Huntington as "someone who wants to make 'civilizations' [...] into shut-down, sealed-off entities".

characterized by the struggle between incompatible ideologies (Communism, Democracy, Fascism/National Socialism, etc.). Huntington argues that future confrontations are going to be much less based on ideological (or economical) differences but derive from the cultural incongruity of civilizations. With the end of the Cold War, he states, the “principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations” and goes on to formulate his key-argument: “the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics” (Huntington, 1993, p. 22).

This being Huntington’s world view, it is surprising that he does not provide a clear definition of “the nature of civilizations” (Huntington, 1993, p. 23). Instead, he describes the term rather vaguely as “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity” (Huntington, 1993, p. 24<sup>5</sup>). Huntington asserts that after the end of the Cold War, many people, having grown up in a dangerous but easy to understand bipolar world, began asking themselves, “Who are we?” In other words, citizens were looking for a new common identity and ended up redefining themselves in cultural terms. Huntington later clarified this point, saying that at a time of crisis “people rally to those with similar ancestry, religion, language, values, and institutions” (Huntington, 1996, p. 126). To him, religious identity is one of the most potent forces to form a coherent cultural unity, which is – for example – not convincing in the Western and Central European case, where the schism between Catholics and Protestants has been a source of conflict for centuries but is now considered rather irrelevant in countries like Germany.

### Characterizing Civilizations

At first sight, Huntington’s idea seems easy enough to understand. However, we would argue that the main problem is how many civilizations exist and who as well as

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<sup>5</sup> It is therefore no surprise that Edward Said (2001, p. 1) criticized that Huntington’s whole argument “relied on a vague notion of something Huntington called ‘civilization identity’.”

what defines them.<sup>6</sup> In 1993, Huntington distinguished eight major civilizations. Yet, he did not clearly specify the criteria he used to do so. According to him, a civilization may be characterized by a single religion (such as Islam or Hinduism), a nation (such as Japan), a group of nations (such as “the West”) or even an entire continent (such as Africa). If we take a closer look at the (major) civilizations Huntington distinguished, we can see that the basic concepts and categories he applied are very heterogeneous.

1. Western civilization (geographical category, subcategories: ideology, economics, politics)
2. Confucian civilization (philosophical concept, subcategory: geography)
3. Japanese civilization (ethnic category, subcategories: geography, politics, possibly religion (Shintō))
4. Islamic civilization (religious concept)
5. Hindu civilization (religious concept, subcategories: ethnicity, geography)
6. Slavic Orthodox civilization (linguistic and religious concept, subcategory: geography)
7. Latin American civilization (geographical concept, subcategory: language(s))
8. African civilization (geographical category, subcategory: ethnicity).

Even though Huntington might not have insinuated any ranking, the order in which he lists the civilizations elucidates a distinctly white American intellectual point of view. Apparently without a second thought, he puts “the West” on top, while Africa comes last, which is just one of many indications that Huntington is most concerned with the

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<sup>6</sup> Between 1934 and 1961, the British Historian Arnold J. Toynbee, published *A Study of History* in 12 volumes. Influenced by Oskar Spengler, he traces the development of more than 20 major civilizations since ancient times: Egyptian, Andean, Sinic, Minoan, Sumerian, Mayan, Indic, Hittite, Hellenic, Western, Orthodox Christian: Russia, Far Eastern: Japan, Orthodox Christian: general, Far Eastern: general, Persian, Arabic, Hindu, Mexican, Yucatec, and Babylonian. He also mentions four so-called “abortive civilizations” as well as five so-called “arrested civilizations”.



Figure 1. The world according to Huntington

Note: The eight civilizations include (1) Western (dark blue), (2) Confucian (dark red), (3) Japanese (bright red), (4) Islamic (green), (5) Hindu (orange), (6) Slavic Orthodox (medium-light blue), (7) Latin America (purple), and (8) African (brown). The remaining colors indicate countries which do not fit into Huntington's system of eight major civilizations, most notably Southeast Asia, Mongolia, and Turkey. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/ylxrbtv>

“Western” civilization. At first glance “the West” appears to be a geographical category but has, of course, much wider implications. Following this thinking, one would assume that other civilizations had some kind of geographical denominations as well. Yet, this applies only to some of the other civilizations, most notably the “African”, the “Latin American”, and arguably the “Japanese” ones. The latter is the only example where a single nation forms its own category. If narrowly applied the “Confucian civilization”, similarly, covers only one nation, and could therefore be called a pseudo-geographical category. Still, Huntington does not call it “Chinese” but “Confucian”, thus making it the only case where a philosophical concept is used to define a civilization.

“Islamic” and “Hindu” are examples where Huntington takes up religion as the basic principle to define civilizations. While this seems to be rather convincing in the case of Hinduism because it is considered to be a mono-ethnic religion, the same cannot be said about Islam as the main factor constituting a distinct civilization. Along with Christianity and Buddhism, it has to be considered a world religion because people of various ethnicities and in different continents practice it. Finally,

in the case of the “Slavic Orthodox civilization”, Huntington reverts to two jointly applied criteria: a branch of Christianity and a language group.

Overall, the criteria to define Huntington's major civilizations are rather arbitrary, a point that Jonathan Fox (2002, p. 421-42) stresses by presenting various cases, which do not fit into this rather limited system. Huntington's entities certainly reflect cultural units, but they refer to different levels of self-identification. The use of incompatible criteria to define civilizations indicates some insufficiencies of such divisions. Furthermore, Huntington himself admits that they are not all-encompassing even though some actually overlap considerably. If we just think about the term “the West”, it becomes obvious that his world view is still based on the Cold War. Yet, there are obviously many layers of connotations involved with this terminology concerning culture, history, etc. The real question is if we can in fact talk about a unified “Western” civilization. Even between societies that seem to be close because they are predominantly Christian, there are as many differences as similarities. If we randomly compare Finland or the Baltic states with New Zealand or Malta, this becomes

obvious. It is also perplexing to see that Spain and Portugal fall into a different civilization than their former colonies in South and Central America even though cultural, political, and economic ties between the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America are still strong.

The African civilization is another example of a vague and unclear category. It is impossible to determine any common feature applicable to all African states except the fact that they are located in the same continent. In other cases, Huntington asserts that civilizations are defined on the basis of religion or culture, yet in the case of Africa there is no such linking factor. A look at the distribution of religions in Africa illustrates this. In the north of the continent, there are some Arab states which are part of the Islamic world, while in sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity is the predominant religion, which is depicted in the world map shown above where Africa is actually divided in two parts, a fact which the recent establishment of the predominantly Christian Republic of South Sudan seems to aptly exemplify. From this, it follows that there is no unified "African" civilization, which clearly shows that the usage of the geographical term "Africa" to denominate a distinctive civilization does not suffice.

As for Huntington's Islamic civilization, it seems to be as diverse as the African or the "Western" one. Differences in lifestyle, economic and political situation, and the local culture of Muslims in Europe (mostly Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia)<sup>7</sup>, Asia Minor (Turkey), the Arab world, the Indian sub-continent, and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei etc.) are so huge that it seems to be a gross oversimplification to talk about one common

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<sup>7</sup> Muslims also live in areas most people would not consider European, but which are officially part of Europe: the westernmost region of Kazakhstan and the northern part of Azerbaijan. Bosnia is dealt with by Fox, 2002, p. 424. He stresses Bosnia's character as a melting pot where three civilizations closely interact: Half of the population is made up by Moslem Bosniaks, while over one third are Slavic-Orthodox Serbs, and the remaining roughly 15% Catholic and therefore "Western" Croats.

civilization. Huntington was apparently aware of this problem: at one point he enumerates "Western, Latin American and Arab civilizations" but continues by referring to "Arab, Turkic and Malay subdivisions" of the Islamic civilization (Huntington, 1993, p. 24). As Islam and Hinduism are singled out as forming civilizations, it would seem logical to call for a distinct Christian civilization as well. However, Huntington elaborates on "Western", "Latin American" and "Slavic-Orthodox" civilizations, without uniting them into one entity.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the divide between the 80-90% Sunni and the 10-20% Shia followers is at least as important to Muslims as the differences between Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox adherents are to Christians. Another question that remains open within Huntington's system is the position of Israel and the Jews. Supposedly, Huntington assumed they belong to "the West" (Fox, 2002, pp. 422-423), thus stretching this concept to the limit.

Huntington refers to various aspects of international relations, but his interpretations are sometimes biased, as the following statement clearly shows: "Islam has bloody borders" (Huntington, 1993, p. 24). Here we can see again Huntington's above-mentioned decidedly white American point of view. He uses an incomplete picture to defend his concept. In fact, many confrontations on the edges of the Islamic world are not directly related to issues of religion or civilization at all. For example, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has little to do with Azerbaijanis being Muslims and Armenians being Christians. In fact, it is mainly a territorial dispute based on the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh is a predominantly Armenian-inhabited enclave in Azerbaijan. If

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note here that Huntington apparently did not group the Orthodox churches together but separated them into Eastern and Greek. In the map presented in the text above, however, Greece is shown in the same group as the Eastern Orthodox countries. Whether this reflects Huntington's idea correctly remains open to discussion. Drawing the line between Western and Eastern Europe, Huntington, 1993, p. 31, writes: "The Velvet Curtain of culture has replaced the Iron Curtain of ideology as the most significant dividing line in Europe."



Huntington's statement about Islam holds up to any critical scrutiny at all, it is not because Muslims are aggressive or warlike people, but because Islam is a widespread religion practiced by more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, mostly spreading over the three continents (Africa, Asia, Europe) that Sir Halford J. Mackinder (1919, p. 194) used to call the "World-Island".

While the above-mentioned civilizations encompass many diverse countries, the opposite is true for the "Japanese civilization". Huntington does not provide any convincing reason why Japan forms a civilization of its own. Instead he just writes: "Japan has established a unique position for itself (...). It is the West in some respects but clearly not the West in important dimensions" (Huntington, 1993, p. 45). The question remains why other Asian countries, such as Korea, the Philippines, or Thailand are not given the same status in Huntington's system.<sup>9</sup>

### **Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity**

The key assumption of "The Clash of Civilizations?" would be applicable only if governments acted according to the (nowhere specified) principal convictions of the civilization that their nation belongs to. Nonetheless, supposing that a causal relation can be established between diverse civilizations and the handling of (armed) conflicts, that link is far from being properly demonstrated by Huntington. On the one hand, he plays down the differences between peoples belonging to the same civilization and on the other hand, oversimplifies international relations by interpreting states as representatives of civilizations on the world stage. Against this, many critics argued that conflicts are more likely to erupt within than between civilizations. Akeel Bilgrami (2003, p. 88-89) for example describes the "clash within Muslim populations as a clash between secularists and absolutists." He concludes in optimistic fashion that "sheer arithmetic suggests that democratization in Muslim

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<sup>9</sup> It remains unclear how many civilizations Huntington sees in total. The only small civilization he actually mentions is the "Anglophone Caribbean". See Huntington, 1993, p. 24.

societies will help end this clash in a secular direction" (Bilgrami, 2003, p. 92).

Another aspect that makes Huntington's theory increasingly doubtful is the trend towards ethnically heterogeneous societies. By now only about 10% of states can be said to be more or less ethnically homogenous.<sup>10</sup> In an Oxford University Press publication, Sujit Choudhry (2008, p. 5) therefore wrote the following statement: "The age of the ethnoculturally homogeneous state, if ever there was one, is over." The benevolent influence of individuals to solve intercultural problems is a further aspect Huntington pays little attention to. Yet, to take just one example, a look at South Africa shows that the country's fast track out of the Apartheid regime, and thus back into the international community, would hardly be imaginable without Nelson Mandela at the helm.

Huntington (1993, p. 25) states that "civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future", but it remains unclear why he is so certain about this. Even if clashes will occur between the major civilizations, the question remains why this will be the case. Huntington explains this by saying these differences refer to our most "basic" understanding of life, which is of course correct in some cases but does not seem to be true in others.<sup>11</sup> Comparing "Western" and "Latin American" civilization,

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<sup>10</sup> See Welsh, 1993, p. 45. Out of roughly 180 states, Welsh suggests that less than 20 can be interpreted as homogenous because minorities make up less than 5% of their population. In the USA, the percentage of Hispanic, African, and Asian Americans is increasing, so that at some point in the not too distant future, their combined numbers will surpass 50% of the whole population. Japan is considered to be a homogeneous nation, but even here, foreigners account for more than 1% of the population. With the new government-sponsored "Global 30" program, which aims at attracting 300.000 foreign students, this number is bound to rise further in the long run.

<sup>11</sup> Inglehart/Norris, 2003, point out that while the World Values Surveys 1995/96 and 2000-2002 illustrate that Westerners and Muslims value Democracy equally high (approval rates: 68% - 68%), the real cultural divide can be seen in areas such as gender equality (82% - 55%), divorce (60% - 35%), abortion (48% - 25%), and homosexuality (53% - 12%).

for instance, it is hard to think about “basic” differences. Huntington (1993, p. 25) takes the fact that “the world is becoming a smaller place” as another reason why the predicted clashes are going to increase. Yet, growing interactions between different civilizations might actually relieve tensions instead of creating them. His argument that religion is most important seems convincing, at first glance. Huntington (1993, p. 27) writes, “A person can be half-French and half-Arab and simultaneously a citizen of two countries. It is more difficult to be half-Catholic and half-Muslim.” However, he fails to take two aspects into account. First, what seems to be virtually impossible to Huntington is common in Japan, where many people practice both Buddhism and Shintō. Second, while the number of religious fanatics might be on the rise, the number of atheists may also grow, thus potentially reducing this problem in the long run.

Surely, some of Huntington’s observations are valuable but his conclusions are only one way of interpreting them. One reason for skepticism is the fact that the basic character of his eight major civilizations remains unclear because his explanations do not get beyond statements of rather superficial cultural differences. Economic, political, or social factors seem to be either absent from his analytical framework or their connection to his basic thesis is arbitrary. Generally, one gets the impression that Huntington avoids mentioning anything that does not support his theory. As we have already stated, Huntington asserts at the beginning of his article, that the bloody conflicts that occurred within any given civilization during the 20th century were ideologically based. While this is true for the Chinese Civil War between communists and the Kuomintang, most of the numerous border disputes in Latin America or Africa cannot be said to be ideological. Furthermore, one has only to think about the infighting between many EU member states (most notably France and Germany) and the US administration of George W. Bush over the Second Gulf War or the European origins of both World Wars, to see that “the West” has not always been a harmonious group. The World Wars are also an example that shows

that the “kin-country syndrome”<sup>12</sup> that Huntington refers to, is far from being a general rule. Muslim states have also fought each other as the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 or the participation of some (predominantly) Arab countries in the liberation of Kuwait and the invasion of Iraq during the “Desert Storm” operation in 1991 show.

In some ways, Huntington’s overall idea and his focus on a balance of power between the civilizations reminds the reader of realist international relations theory.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, his reference to “the West versus the Rest” (Huntington, 1993, pp. 39-41) means that his world view can be interpreted as a set of bipolar relations, an idea that seems to be strongly influenced by the earlier binary Cold War system.<sup>14</sup> Huntington (1993, pp. 31-32) elaborates at some length on the history of Western-Islamic conflicts. But his particular concern seems to be possible frictions between the West and the “Confucian-Islamic military connection” (Huntington, 1993, pp. 48-49), a scenario that lacks any solid basis in late 20th century international relations. Actually, many political alliances as well as conflicts have reasons that cannot be explained by the concept of civilizations, i.e., they are not based on cultural or religious similarities or differences but on other – often geopolitical or economic – reasons.

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<sup>12</sup> Huntington, 1993, p. 35 mentions H. D. S. Greenway in relation with the “kin-country syndrome”. In his 2006 *New York Times* commentary, “The ethnic card”, Greenway described the phenomenon the following way: “But there is also a kin-country syndrome, in which nationals of one country care deeply about the affairs of another because of ties of blood, language or religion. Consider Russia’s pro-Serbian sentiments when Yugoslavia fell apart, or the early recognition of Catholic Croatia and Slovenia by Germany and Austria.” Retrieved May 13, 2011, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/09/opinion/09iht-edgreenway.html>

<sup>13</sup> See Donnelly, 2000, for a discussion of this.

<sup>14</sup> A very interesting comment in the same direction comes from Said, 2001, p. 2. Comparing Huntington’s original article with the later book, he wrote: “The basic paradigm of West versus the rest (the cold war opposition reformulated) remained untouched [...] and has persisted”.

## Conclusion

Despite much criticism, Huntington's article has remained an object of attraction in academic as well as non-academic circles, and it must be said that the term "civilization" is widely used today. However, equipped with ill-defined concepts and at some points rather selective use of data, Huntington's claim to explain the future of international relations fails to survive careful scrutiny because he does not specify what factors are used to determine the eight major civilizations he presents. If one uses certain criteria in one case, the same or at least similar criteria should be applicable in all cases. This kind of consistency is lacking in Huntington's conceptual framework.

His theory was developed in the early 1990s. Therefore, it is a good example of the discomfort experienced at that time by politicians and scholars who had been busy explaining the Cold War for their entire professional life. Consequently, Huntington presents a rather alarmist vision of the future, in some ways comparable to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (Der Untergang des Abendlandes) of 1918/22. As a result of World War I, Spengler had developed a cyclical theory of the rise and fall of civilizations. Like Spengler 75 years before him, Huntington predicted the decline of Western civilization. As one of the reasons for this, he mentions the constant progression of multiculturalism within Western societies, whereas at the same time other civilizations (and especially the Islamic one) remain – according to him – more homogenous. Due to the fact that Huntington's article is nearly 20 years old, his point of view does not take the forces of transnationalism (culture, globalization of the economy, the Internet, modern telecommunications and transportation) into account that nowadays exert influence on world politics from the individual to the systematic level.

Furthermore, empirical studies on international conflicts by Chiozza (2002) and on ethnic disputes within multiracial states by Fox (2002) for example have shown that actual developments in the second half of the 20th century do not support Huntington's thesis. Based on different sets of empirical

data, Chiozza (2002, p. 711) and Fox (2002, p. 433) conclude similarly that "state interactions across the civilizational divide are not more conflict prone" and "civilizational conflicts constitute a minority of ethnic conflicts both during and after the Cold War".

Huntington's 1993 article surely provides a thought-provoking academic hypothesis. If taken at face value, it could even create a serious political problem. Were world leaders to adopt this somehow "messianic vision" (Bilgrami, 2003, p. 88), world peace could be seriously threatened, and Huntington's speculation could turn out to become a self-fulfilling prophecy: "The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations."<sup>15</sup> Huntington's text should be read as a stimulating paradigm of international relations, representing the immediate post Cold War era, when – according to Huntington (1993, p. 39) – the West was "at an extraordinary peak of power". Huntington's theory itself seems to be one of the results of this feeling of superiority.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Huntington, 1993, p. 39. It has to be mentioned here, though, that this pessimistic prophesy contrasts with the last sentence of his article, in which he calls on the different civilizations "to learn to coexist with each other."

<sup>16</sup> Said ends his article, "The clash of ignorance", 2001, p. 4, with a similar argument, saying that Huntington's thesis was "better for reinforcing defensive self-pride than for critical understanding of the bewildering interdependence of our time."

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