

Transformation in Global Geostrategic Realms: From Maritime Order Fragmentation to Continental Order Transition

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Abstract

Geostrategic realms refer to large-scale spatial zones on the Earth shaped by the rivalry among major global powers, forming extensive blocs of confrontation. These realms are structured through a combination of political, cultural, economic, social, military, security, commercial, technological, and media-related factors or a subset thereof and are typically led by a dominant actor assuming a guiding role. At the global level, two primary realms can currently be identified: the maritime realm and the continental realm.

Transformations within geostrategic realms are infrequent and evolve over the long term, as dominant powers strive to preserve their superiority and stability by leveraging the aforementioned variables. In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which intensified cohesion among maritime powers, a new geopolitical window has opened for China to strengthen its position within the continental realm. Moreover, the rise of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the resulting transatlantic tensions over the Ukraine war present the potential for reshaping the global geostrategic landscape.

This study investigates these emerging fractures and examines the prospects for realignment among global realms and the rise of new strategic actors. It analyzes geostrategic configurations through the lens of prominent geopolitical theories and interprets the shifting dynamics between the maritime and continental realms in the current global context. The research is primarily based on library and documentary sources and follows a descriptive-analytical methodology.

Keywords: Geostrategic Realms, Maritime Realm, Continental Realm.

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1. Introduction

The concept of “geostrategy” was first introduced by Giacomo Durando (1807–1894), an Italian general and politician, in his 1846 book *On Italian Nationality: A Political–Military Essay* (Mouro Foudvarge, 2013:185). In this work, Durando used the term geostrategic contest to describe military positions in Europe, such as the strategic location of the Iberian Peninsula and the dispersion and concentration of forces across different parts of the continent (Losano, 2011:47–64), applying it to analyze 19th-century Italy from a geostrategic perspective. Durando’s interpretation of geostrategy emphasized the interaction between geography and strategy—an understanding later echoed by Colin S. Gray, who described geography as the “mother of geostrategy” (Gray, 1999). Durando’s thinking, as reflected in the concepts and methods used in his book, valued both geographical and strategic components equally, with an emphasis on military goals and battlefield superiority. However, his ideas did not gain immediate traction in academic discourse.

The conditions of early 20th-century Germany provided fertile ground for the development of theories aimed at analyzing geopolitical realities, prompting scholars such as Karl Haushofer to engage with the concept. In his 1932 book *Wehrgeopolitik*, Haushofer coined the term to address the post–World War I intra-European rivalries, Germany’s defeat, and the perceived humiliation of the ideal of a superior nation. Although closely related to geopolitics, *Wehrgeopolitik* differed from it (Safavi and Romina, 2024:7–12), and became the starting point for more systematic academic exploration. Haushofer’s interpretation presented *Wehrgeopolitik* as a fusion of applied geopolitics and strategic planning used to justify military objectives.

During World War II, British and American scholars sought an equivalent to the German term *Wehrgeopolitik*. Austrian-American geopolitician Robert Strausz-Hupé (1903–2002) proposed “war geopolitics” as a counterpart, but the term remained vague and failed to gain scholarly acceptance (Gyorgy, 1943:347). In 1942, Frederick L. Schuman introduced the term geostrategy as a substitute in his article titled *Let Us Learn Geopolitics* (Schuman, 1942: 161–165). Thus, a term initially used by Durando to analyze Italy gained prominence during World War II and has since become widespread in academic literature.

Over time, the emphasis on the two components of the compound term geostrategy has shifted and been subject to varying interpretations. As the term was frequently used by state authorities, its political nature became more pronounced, with increasing focus on the “strategy” component. This interpretation gained traction during the Cold War, when global power strategies were being formulated. Geopoliticians used geostrategy in their writings to explain Cold War dynamics and to analyze global power rivalries from a geostrategic standpoint.

In its simplest Persian interpretation, geostrategy can be understood as “geographic strategy.” The term highlights the connection between “geo” (earth) and “strategy.” “Geo” refers to the Earth and the dynamic processes unfolding across its surface, while “strategy” refers to planned action—traditionally in a military sense. The prefix “geo” implies that the strategy in question applies to the entire globe—or at least to large regions of global relevance. In this sense, “geo” is an abbreviation of geography, suggesting that geostrategy refers to spatial configurations such as landmasses, seas, or combinations of both, with the aim of gaining or denying control over vast territories (Lacoste, 2012:269).

A review of strategic concepts suggests that geostrategy involves the mobilization of resources against an adversary or rival, aiming to limit or eliminate their influence in targeted areas. Geostrategy can be understood as a plan—or a set of plans and rationales—formulated based on the means and capabilities available to the actor. Its key characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- ❖ Geostrategy is formulated at the highest levels of political decision-making.
- ❖ It is inherently a long-term endeavor.
- ❖ Its tools, once primarily military, have diversified significantly.
- ❖ It concerns large-scale geographic spaces, where both continental and maritime domains play crucial roles.
- ❖ Economic drivers increasingly underpin contemporary geostrategic dynamics.
- ❖ Local geographical elements often serve specific military purposes—e.g., control of straits, chokepoints, or other strategic locations.
- ❖ Geostrategic plans may be developed through political, military, or economic groupings.

Given these features and the evolving global context, this study adopts a different approach from traditional strategy frameworks. It examines the contemporary world through the lens of emerging global processes and transformative dynamics that shape the modern geostrategic environment.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive–analytical research method. In the descriptive phase, geostrategic spaces in the contemporary world are examined using library resources and credible documentary evidence, with the aim of identifying and characterizing the main geostrategic powers. In the analytical phase, these descriptive findings are interpreted through established theoretical frameworks and the researcher’s own reasoned analysis.

Data for this research were collected through visits to academic centers, libraries, and research institutions, as well as through online searches of reputable digital sources. Every effort has been made to gather and utilize the most reliable and relevant data to ensure the accuracy, validity, and credibility of the study’s findings.

3. Theoretical Framework

Geostrategic realms can be considered macro-spatial units within which the strategies of global powers are exercised, depending on their levels of capability. These realms encompass geographic spaces and associated human societies that fall under the sphere of influence of one or more political, cultural, economic, social, military, security, commercial, technological, or media-related variables controlled by a geostrategic actor possessing superior global power. Given the diversity of theoretical discussions concerning global geostrategic realms (Roumina and Bidar, 2018:2), multiple conceptual frameworks are relevant to this study.

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), a U.S. Navy officer and prominent American geostrategist, authored influential works such as *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812*, and *Sea Power in Its Relation to the War of 1812*, alongside numerous articles and lectures. Mahan regarded sea power as a fundamental element in global politics (Modelski and Thompson, 1988:8).

The power struggles of the 17th century between the Dutch Republic, England, France, and Spain, and the 19th-century naval wars between France and Britain—studied alongside the military theories of Antoine-Henri Jomini—inspired Mahan to focus on the maritime domain. This focus aimed to explain the mobility and strategic maneuvering of great powers based on historical data, culminating in his theory of sea power (Crowl, 1986:448–454).

Mahan's writings became some of the most influential strategic literature of the 19th century and attracted the attention of global powers seeking to expand their strategies worldwide. Several countries began to strengthen their naval forces inspired by his ideas. He argued that oceanic powers consistently held the upper hand in global affairs. Four key geographical factors shaped Mahan's geostrategic thinking:

1. The expansion and continuity of global water bodies, facilitating uninterrupted spatial movement;
2. The Eurasian landmass as a cohesive space accessible via the Arctic Ocean and other global waters;
3. The presence of accessible peripheral regions around Eurasia, including Europe, Southern Europe, and Southeast Asia;
4. The ability to access Eurasia from discrete land spaces such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Hafeznia, 2016:235).

Mahan viewed land power as being encircled by a dominant naval power, using Britain as the prime example of a maritime nation. Historical evidence from Britain supported this perspective. He further contended that the United States could also become a superior naval power due to its secure geographic position, access to two oceans, and distance from other major powers—provided it controlled the Hawaiian Islands and constructed the Panama Canal (Dikshit, 1995:99). Mahan's theory of sea power elaborates on the role of naval strength in the 17th and 18th centuries and the factors influencing the development and maintenance of maritime dominance.

In contrast, Sir Halford J. Mackinder (1861–1947), President of the Royal Geographical Society in the UK, proposed the Heartland Theory a land-based perspective on power in a seminal paper published in the *Geographical Journal* in 1904 (Mackinder, 1904:421–437). He divided history into the "Columbian epoch," spanning 400 years, identifying the year 1900 as the end of this age of exploration. Mackinder emphasized the need to advance geography toward deep field-based studies guided by

philosophical principles. He argued that recognizing real-world conditions would help explain the geographical causes of global processes and establish rules for understanding emerging power rivalries.

According to Mackinder, European civilization was shaped by the clash between secular Western powers and invading forces from Asia (Mackinder, 1904:422–424). These ideas formed an abstract conceptual map of geostrategic realms that has guided scientific inquiry for over a century and arguably remains influential today.

4. Research Findings

4-1. Geostrategic Realms in Drawn Maps

The map drawn by Alfred Mackinder should be considered one of the first geostrategic maps of the world. This map contains detailed information whose operational aspects became evident approximately fifty years later after the Second World War.

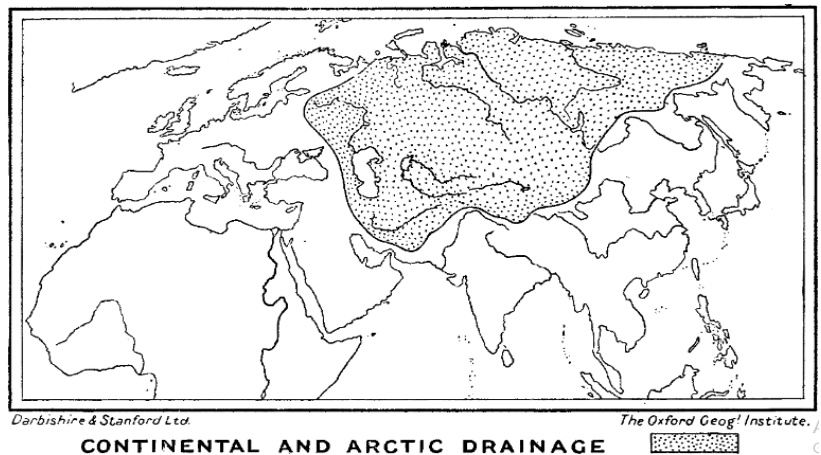


Figure (1): The Heartland Map in Mackinder's Theory

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention—which effectively divided Iran between the two great powers—the formation of the Soviet Union and its dominance over all the areas identified in Mackinder's map, and the rise of leftist groups in northern Iran all demonstrate the practical relevance of Mackinder's geopolitical vision.

Mackinder stated: "I have spoken as a geographer. The real balance of political power at any given time is, on the one hand, the result of

geographical, economic, and strategic conditions, and on the other, the product of the relative number, power, equipment, and organization of competing states, the exact size of which must be known. ... The replacement of Russia with a new power controlling the Inner Area would not reduce the importance of the Pivot Position. If the Chinese were organized by the Japanese to overthrow the Russian Empire and seize its territory, then the Yellow Peril might become real" (Mackinder,1904:421–437).

According to this theory, power lies on land, specifically within the Eurasian continent. This vast landmass forms a space inaccessible to maritime powers and functions as a natural fortress—bounded by the Volga River to the west, Siberia to the east, the Alborz and Hindu Kush mountains to the south, and the Arctic Ocean to the north. This region lacks penetrable maritime corridors and has historically acted as a center of pressure, launching invasions outward rather than receiving them. Mackinder referred to this area as the Heartland, a source of great power capable of dominating East Asia, South Asia, and Europe, which he collectively called the World Island. He considered Eastern Europe as the gateway to the Heartland.

Mackinder's geostrategic map was later revisited and reinterpreted by Nicholas John Spykman (1893–1943), a Yale professor and director of its Institute of International Studies. In his book *Geography of Peace*, Spykman critiqued Mackinder's theory (Ó Tuathail,1996:50). Contrary to Mackinder, Spykman emphasized the importance of the Inner Crescent or Rimland, arguing that true power lies in this intermediary zone. The Rimland lies between the land and sea powers and is vulnerable from both sides. Consequently, major global alliances often arise within this region (Glassner,1993:227).

In his 1942 article *The Geography of the Peace*, Spykman asserted that America's isolationist policy—relying on oceanic buffers—would ultimately fail (Glassner,1993:227). According to Mackinder, the mixed (land-sea) countries forming the Inner Crescent around the Heartland include:

- ❖ The European coastal zone,
- ❖ The Arab lands of the Middle East,
- ❖ The monsoonal lands of Asia.

The first two are defined as distinct geographic regions, while the third, monsoonal Asia, holds historical importance as a representation of British

imperial interests. India and the Indian Ocean coast differ geopolitically from China. In the future, we may witness the emergence of two powers in this region, connected only in the southern Indochinese peninsula by land or air forces, and near Singapore by naval power. Should this occur, the Asian Mediterranean would gain strategic significance and fall under the vital influence of Western sea power.

The periphery of the Eurasian landmass must be understood as an intermediate region between the Heartland and the coastal zones—functioning as the main theater of conflict between land and sea powers. Due to its dual land-sea character, it must defend itself on two fronts. The completion of the Suez Canal diminished the strategic immunity once attributed to this zone against maritime penetration. Unlike the northern hemisphere, the southern hemisphere lacks political powers with the potential to exert influence, and historically it has never projected pressure toward the outer crescent. Therefore, it cannot function like the northern Heartland in global geopolitical analysis.

Saul Bernard Cohen (1925–2021), an American geostrategist, developed the theory of Geostrategic and Geopolitical Regions in his 1963 book *Geography and Politics in a Divided World*. He proposed a two-part global system:

1. Maritime Geostrategic Realm: outward-looking, based on sea trade and transportation, accounting for 70% of global trade. It includes the following geopolitical regions:
 - ❖ Western, Southern, and Central Europe
 - ❖ North America (NAFTA area)
 - ❖ South America
 - ❖ Caribbean Basin
 - ❖ Coastal Asia (Japan, Australia, Korea, etc.)
 - ❖ Sub-Saharan Africa
2. Continental Geostrategic Realm: inward-looking, covering Eurasia (China and the Soviet Union), with limited global trade and closed political systems. It includes two geopolitical regions:
 - ❖ The Heartland
 - ❖ East Asia (Dikshit,1995:129; Cohen,1994:35)

In his later work, *Geopolitics of the World System* (2003), Cohen revised his earlier theory in light of global transformations. He introduced the idea of a spatial hierarchy in the global structure.

At the top of this hierarchy are geostrategic realms—vast world regions significant enough to shape global strategic dynamics and fulfill the strategic needs of major powers. These realms are structured through circulation flows—of people, goods, and ideas—and solidified through control of strategic land and maritime spaces. The key distinguishing feature of a realm is whether it is maritime or continental. In today’s world, three geostrategic realms have evolved:

- ❖ The maritime trade-focused Atlantic-Pacific realm
- ❖ The continental Eurasian Heartland of Russia
- ❖ The continental-maritime realm of East Asia

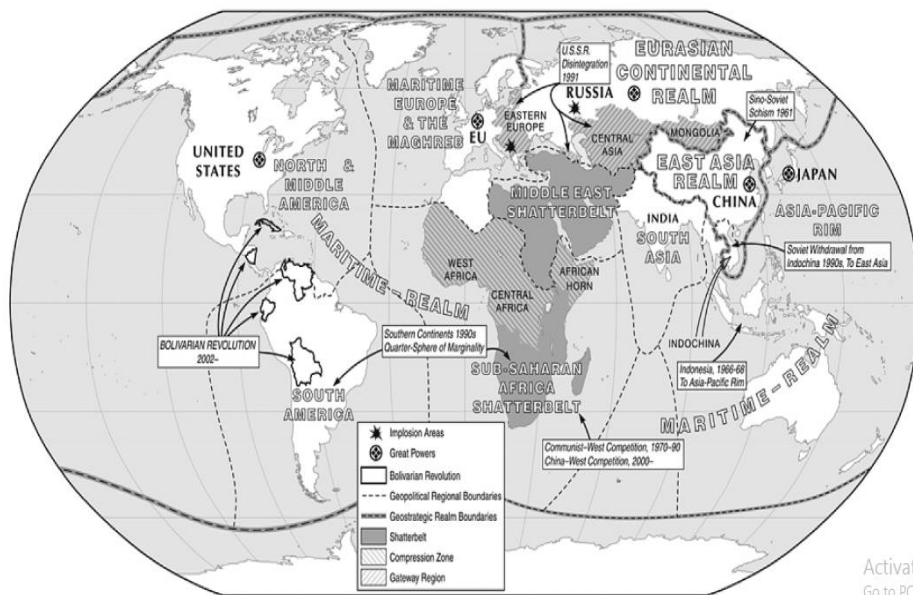


Figure (2): Evolution of Realms and Regions since World War II
(Source: Cohen,2010:164)

Geostrategic Realms have been a factor of global vitality since the emergence of the first empires. In the modern era, geostrategic realms were shaped by the maritime power of Britain and the land power of Tsarist Russia. Currently, the maritime trade-oriented realm—which includes the

Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and their internal seas—has been formed through international exchanges.

The expansion of global trade, investment, and large-scale migrations over the past century and a half has defined the maritime realm. From the mid-1890s until World War I, European and then American imperialism created a global trade system supported by military power and strengthened by advances in transportation and communications. After World War II, the global economy was rebuilt and revitalized under the leadership of the United States. By the 1970s, the share of global goods in trade expanded. This share continued to rise until the 1990s, partly due to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and has maintained an upward trend since (Krugman and Obstfeld,2018).

The maritime realm countries hold a very large share of global trade. Four European members of the Group of Seven account for more than 40 percent of world trade. The United States is considered the largest country in the field of global trade. A country's presence in global trade reflects its maritime and continental background.

The "Continental Eurasian Realm," currently known as the "Russian Heartland," is an inward-looking region less influenced by external economic forces. Until the mid-20th century, its main modes of transportation were land and river-based (Kaplan,2012). The nature of economic self-sufficiency, late industrialization, and lack of maritime access to global resources all contributed to the development of closed political systems and societies in this realm.

The continental dimension that envelops the Eurasian realm is both a physical and psychological condition within which Russia/the Soviet Union has historically been confined. Even when technology changed previous realities, this mindset has persisted. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the threat of the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reinforced Russia's perception of encirclement by the outside world.

During the Cold War, China was located in the continental axis of Eurasia. However, thereafter, a strong maritime economy and orientation were added to its continental and closed characteristics, enabling China to achieve the position of the world's second-largest economy by gross domestic product. These conditions allowed for a change in China's position in the international system (Ghadiri Hajat and Nosrati,2012:73-74; and Others,

2019:210). China's coastal regions, known as the "**Golden Coast**," have formed the basis for its development and allowed Beijing to break free from the constraints of Eurasia's continental characteristics and adopt a distinct geostrategic position.

Despite China's emergence as a commercial country from the 1990s, especially as a major exporter to the United States, as Mackinder, Spykman, and later Nixon predicted, it has not yet become fully part of the maritime world.

For the Chinese people in the continental realm, it is the mountains and plains—and not the sea—that hold spiritual and emotional significance and its shared border with Russia is seen both as a lure and a threat. The Sino-Soviet border disputes have deep historical roots, stemming from China's claims over territories seized by Tsarist Russia between 1858 and 1881. Approximately 1.5 million square kilometers of land east of Lake Baikal and in eastern provinces created a divide between these two powers within continental Eurasia. After the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the peak of tensions in 1960 marked by the severing of diplomatic relations, this issue gained greater importance than ideology or strategy.

The withdrawal of the United States and the Soviet Union from Indochina enabled China to expand the "new East Asian continental-maritime geostrategic realm" southward to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, forming a separate geopolitical area within the East Asian realm.

The Eurasian continental geostrategic realm also includes two geopolitical regions:

- ❖ The Russian Heartland
- ❖ Transcaucasia and Central Asia

The Eastern geostrategic realm is divided into two regions:

- ❖ Mainland China
- ❖ Indochina, including Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

The "**hegemonic control**" of the Soviet Union over the Eurasian realm was broken when China declared its strategic independence. The result was that the two former allies began to limit each other's actions in South and Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Taiwan. The European Union also plays a similar role in limiting U.S. hegemonic control over the maritime realm. After World War II, in reaction to the loss of its global power and economic and military dependence on the United States, Europe began building a set

of economic and political institutions aimed at regaining strength through regional unity (Cohen,2008:84-98).

In the theory of the "World's Geostrategic Fault Lines," the main global geostrategic confrontation lies on both sides of the Eurasian landmass. Based on this geostrategic classification, the world is divided into two blocs:

- ❖ The United States, Europe, and their allies in East and Southeast Asia, under the maritime strategy;
- ❖ Russia, China, and their allies under the land-based strategy, as strategic actors of Eurasia's landmass.

Today's world has five strategic and powerful players on a global scale who, along with their allies, form two major global geostrategic fronts. These players are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The United States, the United Kingdom, and France represent the maritime geostrategy front; Russia and China represent the land-based geostrategy front. The leader of the maritime strategy is the United States, while politically China and operationally Russia lead the land-based strategy (Figure 3).

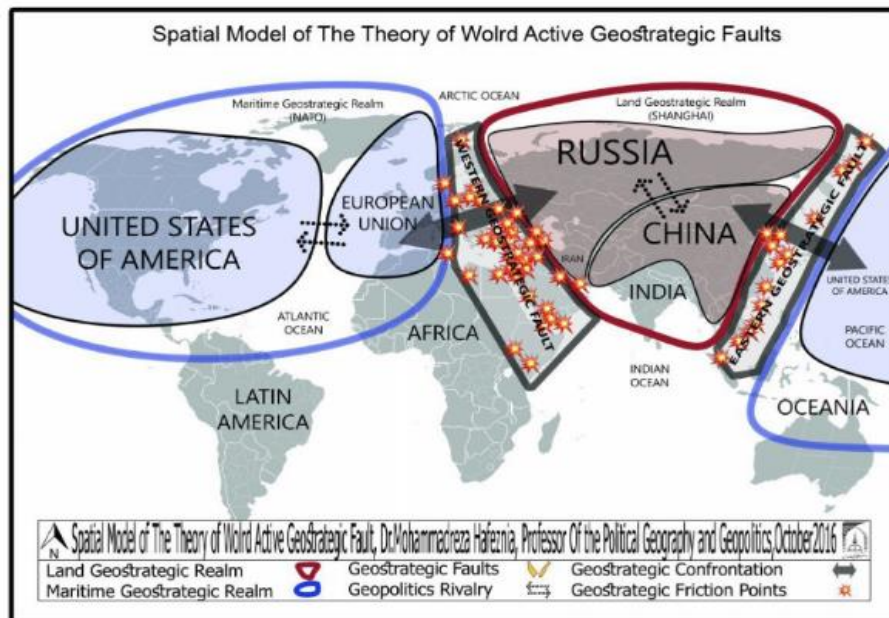


Figure (3): World's Geostrategic Faults
(Source: Hafeznia,2017:2)

4-2. The Gap in Maritime Realm and Instability in the Continental Realm

From 1945 to 1989, the Soviet Union extended the traditional buffer of Eastern Europe into the central parts of the continent. This effort, which lasted nearly half a century, reverted to its original seat after the collapse of the Soviet Union—where many Western geopolitical theories had placed the Ural Mountains as the traditional boundary. With the consolidation of the Russian Federation in the first two decades of the 21st century, the former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe were again considered as a buffer zone. This issue has been pursued with great sensitivity in the strategic thinking of Russia's new leaders. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine—marking the largest conventional military assault on European soil since World War II. Prior to this, Russian President Vladimir Putin had criticized NATO's eastward expansion since 1997 as a threat to Russian national security and demanded a legal prohibition against Ukraine joining the alliance. He also invoked the theory of “reunification” (restoring former Soviet territories). This invasion has cost both Russia and Ukraine hundreds of billions of dollars (Lasocki, 2023).

Following the war and a wide range of political and economic sanctions imposed by the West, Russia expanded its relations with China. However, this cooperation between the two countries lacks strategic depth and remains largely tactical. In contrast to the instability seen in the continental geostrategic realm, the maritime geostrategic realm united in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, forming a unified front (Hafeznia, 2022:B-V). With the election of Donald Trump in the United States, however, cracks began to emerge within the maritime geostrategic realm. The reasons for this fragmentation include:

- ❖ Divergence in strategic goals: President Trump sought to reduce military support for Ukraine and prioritize negotiations with Russia, while European allies continued to emphasize military support and maintain a confrontational stance toward Moscow.
- ❖ Disagreement on the type and amount of military aid: Trump decided to suspend military assistance to Ukraine, prompting criticism from European officials. Countries such as Germany and France continued their support and stressed the importance of strengthening Ukraine's defense.

- ❖ Economic and energy-related concerns: The U.S., having reduced its dependence on Russian energy, has experienced fewer economic consequences from the Ukraine war.
- ❖ Internal divergence within Europe: Some European countries witnessed political disagreement over continuing support for Ukraine, with nationalist and far-right parties opposing military aid.
- ❖ Strategic fatigue and pressure on the Western alliance: As the war dragged on, signs of "strategic fatigue" began to appear within the West. Some European governments urged the U.S. to seek diplomatic solutions instead of prolonged military engagement (Reuters,2025).

5. Analysis of Contemporary Global Geostrategic Realms

Geostrategic power is a function of global reach—that is, the ability to influence events worldwide. History has shown that such power depends on control over the oceans. Therefore, the scope of geostrategic power is determined by a nation's capacity for oceanic projection, measured through its commercial and military fleets.

More important than material metrics, however, is the conceptual distinction between a world leader and a hegemon—a theme highlighted in Modelski's theory of power cycles. Modelski defines the most powerful country not as a hegemon, but as a leader—one with loyal followers rather than dominance through coercion.

A global leader is capable of offering "innovation" to ensure geopolitical order and security. In Modelski's terms, innovation includes a system of institutions, ideas, and practices that shape the world's geopolitical framework. A leader's power depends on its ability to set and implement this framework.

According to this dynamic model, global leadership has shifted from one country to another in roughly hundred-year cycles throughout history (Flint, 2011:59–63).

Based on this model, Russia has attempted to enter the initial phase of global leadership in competition with the Western system, but it lacks the necessary capacity and is too dependent on land power to effectively influence global processes.

China, on the other hand, is in the preliminary stage of Modelski's leadership cycle entering a phase of global power regeneration. Until the end of the 20th century, China had a continental nature. In the 21st century,

it has begun developing a hybrid strategy combining land and maritime power.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the global geostrategic structure is shifting from Mackinder's geographical Heartland toward a dual maritime-continental configuration centered in Asia. The maritime structure, in particular, is characterized by functional cohesion and institutional integration. In the current rearrangement of global geostrategic realms, the following points are noteworthy:

- ❖ Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that the Western world can form a united front against any extra-regional threat (a theme emphasized in most geopolitical theories), though this unity can fluctuate depending on changes in republican systems and political leadership.
- ❖ The war also showed that Russia, as the self-proclaimed heir to the Soviet Union, is militarily vulnerable as a land-based power (evident in its reliance on Iranian military capabilities and North Korean manpower).
- ❖ As Russian power diminishes due to the costs of war, China's influence in Central Asia will increase—a reversal of the 20th-century trend, where China was merely a peripheral land power in Mackinder's Inner Crescent.
- ❖ The global geostrategic realms, particularly the Western geographic bloc with its maritime extensions in South and Southeast Asia, will continue to compete with China (emphasizing Spykman's Rimland over the Heartland).
- ❖ The 20th-century continental geostrategic core centered in Eurasia's Heartland is shifting toward China in the 21st century, where China is building a combined land-maritime realm (as reflected in its Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses on both land and maritime connectivity).
- ❖ Over the past few centuries, the maritime realm has consistently prevailed over the continental one. The continental realm's occasional prominence has stemmed from temporary weaknesses or internal rifts in the maritime bloc.

- ❖ The continental realm has not held global leadership or normative influence in recent centuries. Even during the Cold War, its brief ideological dominance through communism could not translate into sustainable leadership due to structural weaknesses.
- ❖ The maritime realm, shaped by major wars and long-term interactions, has built a cohesive alliance. Yet, this cohesion is vulnerable within democratic systems.
- ❖ The maritime geostrategic realm is vibrant, expansive, and, despite its Western concentration, is dispersed across the Southern Hemisphere and the peripheries of Eurasia. In contrast, the continental realm is smaller, more centralized, and unable to resolve deep-rooted structural issues.
- ❖ Militarily, the maritime realm relies on NATO—the world’s most powerful defense alliance. Geopolitically, it holds a 3-to-2 advantage at the core level and a globally distributed economic sphere.
- ❖ Within the continental realm, a structural rift exists between China and Russia east of Lake Baikal, rooted in a historical territorial encroachment post-1850. This history has instilled in China (the rising continental power) a distrustful view of Russia.
- ❖ China's supportive neutrality in the Ukraine war is shaped by its Taiwan perspective; thus, its stance is tactical rather than strategic.
- ❖ Maritime power in today’s world is shaped by the post–World War legal-institutional "software" that has established behavioral norms for political systems globally. These norms have shown resilience and continue to reinforce the superiority of maritime power over continental power.

In sum, we are witnessing a transitional phase in global geostrategy, where the continental realm is shifting eastward and likely to be anchored in Mackinder’s Inner Crescent. This shift aims to draw Russia into the maritime system to prevent a China-Russia alliance.

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