PART I

Principles of political geography
I

The meaning and scope of political geography

Political geography as understood today is concerned with the study of those geographical aspects of politically organised areas that affect the political life and activities of such areas. In most writings on political geography the unit that is most commonly employed as a basis for study is the state; but in fact any unit, whether large or small, that is politically organised can serve as a legitimate basis for study.

The German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, who lived between 1844 and 1904, is generally regarded as the founder of political geography in the modern sense, and his book, Politische Geographie, published in 1897 is considered as the first modern treatise on the subject. Ratzel did not offer a precise definition of the subject, but he expressed the view that what was known as political geography in his day was nothing more than what we would today describe as ‘regional geography’. He held that this kind of geography could be raised to a higher plane if more attention were given to the relations between the state and the land or space which it occupied. For Ratzel this relationship between the state and its land area (German: Raum) was the real essence of political geography. He saw the state and the land area it occupied as bound together in a close organic relationship in which the land offered the state certain opportunities for growth and expansion, while it was the duty of the state to grasp the meaning and range of these opportunities and utilise them to the full.

The relationships between states and the land they occupy are, of course, infinite in their range. But Ratzel did not concern himself with all of them: the ones that particularly engaged his attention were those that tended to the enhancement of the state and the fulfilment of its political destiny. It is obvious from this that what Ratzel understood by political geography was not the subject as we understand it today but rather the study of the territorial basis of national power.

Apart from its rather limited scope, Ratzel’s interpretation of political geography led to some unfortunate developments, especially in his own country, Germany. The idea that states have a destiny inherent in their geography which it is their duty to recognise and fulfil led to an excessive preoccupation among certain of his countrymen, especially
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military leaders and politicians, with the destiny of Germany and the opportunities which its geography offered for its fulfilment. And since their principal objective at the time was national power, they tended to place excessive emphasis on those aspects of political geography which supported their desire for territorial expansion or, as Adolf Hitler subsequently called it, Lebensraum, that is, living space.

Despite the shortcomings in Ratzel’s conception of political geography and the voluminous literature that has appeared on the subject since his day, the importance of his pioneering efforts still remains unchallenged.

Within the present century many writers have produced works on political geography or on special facets of the subject. It would be impossible to mention all of them, but such names as Halford Mackinder, Isaiah Bowman and Derwent Whittlesey are bound to stand out in any list. Of these by far the most outstanding, without any doubt, is the American geographer, Isaiah Bowman, who in the opinion of Harriet Wanklyn (Wanklyn 1961) is the only twentieth-century geographer to have had anything approaching Ratzel’s grasp of the field. Like Ratzel, Bowman did not in any of his writings offer an explicit definition of political geography, but in his classic work, The New World, first published in 1921, he gave a clear enough indication of what he understood by the term by his general method of approach and his selection of topics. His really important contribution in this respect was that, unlike Ratzel and his disciples, he concerned himself with an objective analysis of contemporary world problems as seen in the light of geography, thus underlining the very important point that what constitutes the political geography of any area depends upon the particular problems and circumstances of the area concerned within the context of the prevailing local, national or international situation.

Many subsequent writers since Bowman’s day have sought to define the subject in rather more explicit terms. Derwent Whittlesey, for example, another of the outstanding American pioneers, stated that the essence of political geography is ‘the differentiation of political phenomena from place to place over the earth’ (Whittlesey 1944), while Richard Hartshorne, who is probably the best known living exponent of the subject in America, defined it as ‘the study of areal differences and similarities in political character as an interrelated part of the total complex of areal differences and similarities’, and went on to state that ‘the interpretation of areal differences in political features involves the study of their interrelations with all other relevant areal variations, whether physical, biotic or cultural in origin’ (Hartshorne 1954). Six years later he restated this definition more simply and lucidly and described political geography as ‘the study of the variations of political phenomena from place to place in interconnection with variations in
other features of the earth as the home of man’ (Hartshorne 1960). British geographers have also offered a variety of definitions. In his book, The New Europe, written in 1945, Walter Fitzgerald put forward the view that the ‘objective of political geography is an investigation of the extent to which the nature of States, together with their organization and interrelations, is influenced by, and adjusted to, conditions of geography’. A. E. Moodie in his book, Geography Behind Politics, stressed the importance of the internal and external relationships of states and the need to harmonise them if the state is to function successfully, while S. W. Woolridge and W. G. East in their important book, The Spirit and Purpose of Geography, published in 1951 expressed the view that ‘political geography focuses attention on both the external and internal relations of states’. But perhaps the most explicit definition of all is that put forward by Norman J. G. Pounds, who states in his book, Political Geography, published in 1963, that ‘political geography is concerned with politically organised areas, their resources and extent, and the reasons for the particular geographical forms which they assume’.

Varied as these definitions are, most of them appear to agree with Ratzel’s view that political geography involves a study of the relationships between the state as a political phenomenon, on the one hand, and geographical conditions and circumstances, on the other. However, not all of them refer to the State as the focal point of study; rather they talk in terms of areas or places. Although there is no doubt that the State forms the supreme political entity in all parts of the world, there exist other entities of a political nature which also play a significant role in human affairs. All such entities, whether they be tribes, cantons, countries, electoral districts, constituencies, provinces or regions, constitute valid political units capable of study within an identifiable geographical milieu, and any definition of political geography that aims at completeness must take them into account. This is why the term ‘politically organised areas’ is preferable to the word ‘States’ as a description of the basic unit upon which the study of political geography is based.

Political geography is not concerned solely with the relationships between politically organised areas and geographical conditions. Every politically organised area, however small, forms part of a larger whole, whether or not its inhabitants recognise the fact.

No politically organised area, however small or however parochial it may wish to be, can live in complete isolation; hence the need to extend our field of enquiry in political geography to the relationships between different political entities from the smallest to the largest and the way in which these relationships are influenced by geographical conditions. These external relationships are especially important in the present
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world because of the tremendous advances in transport and communications which have brought all parts of the world much closer together than at any previous time in recorded history. The study of international relations has now become a very important aspect of political geography, and consequently organisations like the United Nations, which are concerned to contain, reduce or eliminate conflict and promote harmonious relations between different states and nations, must necessarily engage the attention of political geographers.

Having established the nature of the political entities or units which form the subject matter of political geography, we need next to consider the nature of the relationships between these entities and the geographical conditions to which the political geographer must give his attention. As we observed earlier when discussing Ratzel's definition of the subject, these relationships are infinite in their range, and it is necessary to decide just which of them are truly relevant.

No two politically organised areas are exactly alike in their political conditions and circumstances. Similarly, in no two cases shall we find the same geographical factors operating in equally decisive ways in the political life of such areas. In other words, the criteria for selecting the geographical aspects to be considered in any study of political geography must vary from one area to the next, depending on the peculiar circumstances of each particular area at any given time. This is the outstanding lesson to be learnt from Isaiah Bowman's *The New World*, where the treatment of each area is unique. For what the political geographer must aim to do is not to make a stereotyped study or analysis in which all the geographical features alike simply provide a uniform backdrop without any attempt to distinguish between those which are really significant and those which are not, but rather to examine those aspects of the geography of the area in question which significantly affect its political life, having regard to the need for every politically organised area to achieve viability and to maintain its territorial integrity.

Taking all the foregoing points into consideration, we may define political geography as the study of those aspects of the geography of politically organised areas which are relevant to the existence and effective functioning of the areas concerned as political entities both internally and in their external relationships.

Apart from its simplicity, this definition has the merit of being sufficiently broad and general to accommodate any scale of politico-geographical investigation. It is also valid whether we are considering purely local and internal problems or whether we are concerned with the wider problems of international politics involving several countries or indeed the whole world.

Although any politically organised area qualifies as a subject for
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study in political geography, in practice the units that are most commonly considered are states and countries. This is not surprising. After all, these are the units with which the exercise of political power, especially sovereign political power, in its most complete and obvious forms is associated.

In studying political geography, our principal concern must be with the territorial rather than with the purely political aspects. Every state, as Ratzel pointed out, consists of people and a definite space or territory which they inhabit. The way in which the people utilise their territorial base depends very largely on their social and political organisation, while the nature of the territorial base can influence in important ways the mode of life of the people and their outlook.

It is obvious that the student of political geography must have some acquaintance with political science, for he must be familiar with the way in which political entities function. But first and foremost he must be a geographer, capable of relating political activities and needs to geographical circumstances, which collectively form the milieu in which political entities actually exist and function. Within geography itself, political geography belongs more to the human than to the physical branch, and it leans heavily on most of the subdivisions of the human branch, in particular economic and historical geography. Economic geography is important because political life is so very closely connected with economic activity in the modern world, while historical geography is relevant because most political and associated phenomena cannot be adequately understood except in relation to the past.

In most modern works on political geography the word ‘geopolitics’ invariably crops up, and indeed certain writers, especially in America, tend to use the term as if it was synonymous with political geography. This is a mistake; for the two terms mean quite different things, although they bear a certain relationship to one another. The originator of the term ‘geopolitics’ was Rudolf Kjellen (1864–1922). Kjellen was a professor of political science at Uppsala and a close follower of Ratzel. The actual word he used was ‘Geo-politik’, which he defined as the science of the state as a realm in space (Kish 1942). Ratzel had envisaged the state as a natural organism capable of growth and expansion in accordance with simple organic laws, but Kjellen went a step further and suggested that in seeking territorial expansion the state was at liberty to employ modern cultural advances and techniques in the achievement of its desired goals. He argued that the final objective of a state in its development of power was ‘to acquire good natural frontiers externally, and harmonious unity internally’.

Kjellen saw geopolitics as one of the five basic divisions of political science, the others being: (1) Krato-politik, the science of the legal
organisation of the power of the state, (2) Demo-politik, the forms of the political organisation of the masses, (3) Oeco-politik, the science of the forms of the production and consumption of goods, and, (4) Socio-politik, the science of the social organisation of the state.

Geopolitics was obviously a ready-made tool in the hands of any state intent on territorial expansion and national power, and it is not surprising that it was enthusiastically espoused by Germany between the First and Second World Wars. The man responsible for popularising geopolitics in Germany was Karl Haushofer (1869–1946).

Haushofer was a gifted scholar, who early in life abandoned an academic career for a military one. Later, after travels in Japan and the far East, he taught geography at Munich and subsequently rose during the First World War to the rank of major-general in the German army. After the armistice he returned to Munich to teach political geography and military science and in 1924 helped to found an influential journal known as Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik, which was devoted to the furthering of geopolitics.

It is said that Haushofer was influenced very greatly in the development of his ideas by the British geographer and statesman, Sir Halford J. Mackinder (1861–1947), who was almost an exact contemporary of his. Mackinder was responsible for two very important publications on political geography. The first was a paper entitled ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’, which was read to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904 and made a great impact on the geographical world at the time; the second was a book entitled Democratic Ideals and Reality published in 1919 in which he underlined and developed further the ideas contained in the earlier article. Mackinder was one of the first geographers to appreciate the role of space relationships in the development and interplay of national power, and such was the sweep and force of his arguments that it is not surprising that his work should have had so much influence on Haushofer. However, his sole concern was to make an analysis and a prognostication based on history and geography and not to advance the cause of any one nation or group of nations.

It is noteworthy that Haushofer himself considered political geography to be quite distinct from geopolitics. In his view, ‘political geography represents the science of the distribution of political power over the different regions of the world and the conditions of political power by, and its dependence on, surface features, climate and other aspects of physical geography’. In contrast to this, he saw geopolitics as essentially dynamic, ‘a way of educating the masses in the concept of space’ (Kish 1942).

It would seem, therefore, that what Haushofer defined as ‘geopolitics’ was almost identical with what Ratzel had earlier described as political geography, except that Haushofer bent the subject much more
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obviously and directly to the needs of his own fatherland, Germany.

Geopolitics was greatly exploited by Hitler before and during the Second World War in the pursuit of his territorial ambitions, and consequently the word and everything it stood for became greatly repugnant to scholars in the rest of Europe, especially in Britain and France. Thus, although it is quite possible that under normal circumstances the word geopolitics might gradually have replaced the term political geography as being more impressive and less unwieldy, especially in its adjectival form ‘geopolitical’ as contrasted with ‘politico-geographical’, a sharp difference has come to exist between them.

Political geography is considered in respectable geographical circles as an objective study based on the examination and analysis of facts as they truly are, while geopolitics is regarded as a tendentious and biased study, a distortion and prostitution of political geography which is quite unworthy of serious scholars. Professor E. G. R. Taylor described it as ‘political geography charged with emotion’ (Taylor 1945), while the American geographer, H. Weigert, described it as ‘the application of geographical principles . . . in the game of power lusts’ (Weigert 1942). The French geographer, A. Demangeon, talking specifically about German geopolitics, observed, perhaps with excessive though understandable acerbity, that it had deliberately rejected the scientific spirit in every way and become an instrument of war (Demangeon 1932). In view of all this, it is essential not to confuse geopolitics with political geography.

Nevertheless, there is still a need in the vocabulary of political geography for a word which conveniently describes those aspects of world strategy and of space relationships whose special significance lies in the fact that the earth is a globe and not a flat surface. Mackinder’s writings clearly brought out this global concept of terrestrial space and its importance in world military strategy, although he did not offer a specific word for conveying the meaning of the concept. Immediately after the Second World War, when the widespread use of air transport began to create a new awareness of the global character of the earth and its strategic implications, a number of writers, especially in America, attempted to revive the use of the word geopolitics for the purpose of conveying this global concept, but without much success, no doubt on account of the earlier unfortunate historical connotations of the word. Perhaps a more acceptable, and certainly more explicit, word might be the word geo-strategy as employed by Blouet in a recent article on Mackinder (Blouet 1976). This does not mean that the word geopolitics has no relevance whatsoever in political geography; it can still be legitimately and usefully employed to connote the use and exploitation of global space relationships for the securing of political advantage.
2

Elements of political geography

As has been shown in the preceding chapter, political geography is concerned with the study of politically organised areas. Of all the many different kinds of politically organised areas to be found in the world the state is the most important and the most widely recognised in international terms. Every state consists of five basic elements: (1) a territorial base, (2) a resident population, (3) a system of government, (4) an economic base, and (5) a system of transport and communications. Each of these elements will now be considered in turn.

TERRITORIAL BASE

Territory is the most fundamental of the five elements of the state. Without territory no state can claim existence. In simple terms the word territory means an expanse of land, whether large or small.

Location

Every territory or territorial base must have a definite location as well as boundaries which define its physical limits. Location may be given in terms of latitude and longitude. It may also be given in terms of latitudinal zones, e.g. the equatorial zone lying between 5 and 10 degrees of the equator, the two tropical zones lying between these limits and the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, i.e. 23½°N and 23½°S, the two temperate zones or middle latitudes, as they are sometimes called, between the tropics and the Arctic and Antarctic Circles, i.e. 66½°N and 66½°S, and finally the two polar zones lying between these Circles and the poles. This method of showing location is of particular geographical importance because of its strong climatic undertones and the basis it provides for making various inferences regarding geographical conditions in any particular place.

The location of places by reference to longitude is of little use here, since few geographical phenomena except for the incidence of day and night depend on it. More significant is the division of the world into an eastern and a western hemisphere based on the longitudinal arrangement of the continents. But an even more practical division of the world
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today is into the western world, the eastern bloc and the third world or the developing countries.

While location in global terms is undoubtedly important, the political fortunes of states are often affected much more directly by their own size, shape and physical characteristics and their spatial relationships with their immediate neighbours. All states need to ensure the safety and integrity of their territory, and most require access to their neighbours for purposes of trade and communication. For this reason every aspect of location that conduces to easy defence as well as to reasonable access to neighbouring states is important.

Accessibility is very closely related to the available means of transport. Practically all states are able to employ one or other of the three principal means of transport available to man: land, water and air transport. While states with access to the sea can have uninhibited and often easy access to many other states owing to the time-honoured and established ‘freedom of the sea’, states which are landlocked cannot communicate either by land, or by air or by water with any other states, except their immediate neighbours, without the consent and goodwill of all the intervening states, since there is as yet no ‘freedom of the air’ and every state can lay claim to the air space immediately above its territory. That is why the question whether a state has an insular, continental or maritime location and whether it lies on or comprises a peninsula, an isthmus or an archipelago, etc. is of such importance in political geography, and terms like enclave, exclave, glacis, corridor\(^1\) all form part of the vocabulary of political geography (Fig. 1).

Another aspect of location is the extent to which it confers special advantages for obtaining certain important natural resources either locally or from external sources. It is well-known that the distribution of certain natural resources, such as agricultural, vegetable and animal resources, is broadly related to latitudinal position and sometimes to altitude. But even here all kinds of irregularities supervene on account of irregularities in the sizes and spatial distribution of the continents and of the various factors responsible for climate and vegetation. When it comes to the distribution of minerals, however, location in terms of latitude or longitude is almost totally irrelevant, except in the case of a very small number of minerals, such as bauxite, whose

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\(^1\) enclave – A state or an outlying portion of a state wholly surrounded by the territory of another state. The term is used from the point of view of the surrounding state.

exclave – The same as ‘enclave’ but as seen from the point of view of the parent state.

corridor – A narrow strip of territory belonging to one state which interrupts the territory of another state in order to give access to a port or some other geographical feature or facility of importance, e.g. a river or coastline.

glacis – A relatively small portion of a state which extends across a mountain divide forming the boundary between that state and another.