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The Shifting Geopolitics

Dev Raj Dahal [Retired Reader]

Central Department of Political Science, Kirtipur Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Corresponding Author: Dev Raj Dahal, Email: nepaldahal@gmail.com

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Abstract

Geopolitics has now taken center stage in shaping the domestic and foreign policies of nation-states. This trend largely aligns with the principles of political realism, where states aim to survive in an anarchical international order by maximizing power and wealth while minimizing losses. In an era characterized by rapid ecological, economic, and technological changes, as well as uncertainty and conflicting dynamics in international politics, geopolitical narratives have captured the attention of statesmen, journalists, academics, policy analysts, and military strategists. The traditional version of geopolitics, which was characterized by determinism, expansionism, and aggression, has given way to a more nuanced understanding of where states make strategic choices in a multi-polar world. However, this shift has also witnessed a decline in multilateralism and the rise of nationalism, populism, and fundamentalism, which has weakened international regimes and global governance institutions. These developments are occurring at a time when many global issues, such as arms proliferation, pandemics, poverty, inflation, and climate change, require international cooperation. The global power shift from the Atlantic to Asia, particularly with the ascent of China as a geo-strategic rival to the USA with global influence in security, development, and civilization initiatives, as well as the growing Sino-Russian partnership, has created new geopolitical dynamics. India's neutral stance between a resurgent Russia and the USA, while being part of America's Indo-Pacific strategy, alongside rival strategies aimed at containing, deterring, and pushing back against China, has placed small states like Nepal in a challenging position. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, driven by the latter's interest in joining NATO and the EU, has reshaped bilateral relationships among major and minor states. This ongoing conflict shows no signs of

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resolution, further complicating global geopolitics. The emergence of the Eurasian geopolitical pole and the Atlantic solidarity, along with their contest for supremacy, are affecting global security, political and economic order, and the formation and dissolution of alliances among nation-states as they strive to rebalance their relationships.

Keywords: Digital anthropology, digital nuclear bomb, metaverse, oligopoly, panopticon

Introduction

The notion of geopolitics emerged at the turn of the 20th century and has since become common in defining the geographic perspectives that influence the domestic and foreign policies of nation-states. Geopolitics is rooted in the theory of political realism, which asserts that all states seek to "survive under anarchy by maximizing their power relative to other states, to maintain the means for self-defense" (Mearsheimer, 1999, p. 109). In an era of rapid ecological, economic, and technological change, along with uncertainty and complex international relations dynamics, geopolitical explanations have garnered significant attention from statespersons, journalists, academics, policy wonks, and military strategists. The classical version of geopolitics is often seen as deterministic, anti-democratic, immoral, expansionist, and aggressive, largely due to its association with German geopolitics, which was considered a pseudoscience with strong connections to Nazi expansionism. Following World War II, Germany underwent a process of denazification, leading to its disarmament and demilitarization. With the establishment of the European Union and German unification, Germany has emerged as a leading voice for European nations in global politics. Despite its economic and political power, Germany remains militarily non-nuclear and dwarfed in comparison to countries like China and Japan. China, on the other hand, has positioned itself as a comprehensive power with a grand strategy for global influence. Geopolitics has evolved to accommodate new interpretations, taking into account historical facts. Realpolitik, as advocated by Niccolò Machiavelli, suggests that leaders should employ both the lion's ferocity and the fox's cunning for survival (Machiavelli, 1981, p. 99). Leaders who ignore historical lessons and fail to anticipate the future risk returning to a Hobbesian state of nature, characterized by insecurity, lack of freedom, justice, order, and peace.

The geopolitical compass is essential in defining the strategic framework within which a state's foreign policy operates and in shaping its destiny. The hierarchy of powers—superpowers, major powers, small states, and microstates—interact with varying degrees of cooperation, competition, and conflict, ultimately shaping the global order. Wise statespersons prioritize national interests and devise strategies to protect their nations' survival and interests, preventing crises from spilling across borders and maintaining a robust social contract. However, the success of geopolitical strategies depends on a state's diplomatic maneuvering and its understanding of its rivals' perspectives. Kautilya's geopolitical insights, rooted in a non-Western context, advise "Your neighbor is your natural enemy, and your neighbor's neighbor is your friend" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 140). Yet, he also

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advocated for virtuous governance, preserving the conquered territories' way of life and compensating them rather than exacting tribute. The relationship between knowledge, power, ideology, and legitimacy in international relations is not new. The relativism of geopolitical theories challenges the universalism of non-Western enlightenment (Acharya, 2014, p. 649) and its patterns of international relations. For example, the tributary ties between peripheral neighbors, the Chinese empire, and the governance of Ashoka's empire in the Indian subcontinent offer alternative perspectives. Modern technology has transcended traditional geographic constraints (Marshall, 2015, p. xiii), enabling cooperation beyond borders and emphasizing the importance of international norms, laws, and order, as outlined by Hugo Grotius. Geopolitics now encompasses a broader worldview, or *weltanschauung*, encompassing humanity's place in the world and regulating global affairs.

Modern geopolitics encompasses various aspects of state power, its structures, and external influences that shape states' behaviors and leaders' quests for justice, legitimacy, and peace. Renowned political geographer Martin Ira Glassner defines geopolitics as "the study of states in the context of global spatial phenomena, aiming to comprehend both the foundations of state power and the dynamics of states' interactions" (1993, p. 223). Modern geopolitics is influenced by Cardinal Richelieu's grand strategy of *raison d'etat*, which prioritizes state interests over moral and legal considerations, contrasting with the modern natural law tradition (Tuck, 1999, p. 3). It emphasizes the state's autonomous capacity (rather than religious morality) to pursue national interests, manage crises, adapt to an interconnected world, and secure essential resources for stability and progress, thereby garnering the loyalty of its citizens. Thus, the state's *raison d'etre* is justified in safeguarding its interpretation of the national way of life. Neo-realist international relations scholar John J. Mearsheimer argues "The keys to war and peace lie more in the structure of the international system than in the actions of individual states" (1999, pp. 108–9). This implies that mishandling geopolitics in a globally disordered state undermines internal cohesion and disrupts the national fabric of politics, society, and the economy. This perspective suggests that foreign policy differs from domestic policy, as internal democracy and peace do not guarantee a democratic and peaceful world that resolves governance challenges.

Geopolitics establishes the connection between a nation's geography and its strategy to organize the heartland-capital city, which serves as the center for decision-making in politics, regulation of ecological, social, cultural, and economic domains, and formulation of security and foreign policies for national sovereignty, survival, and independence. It identifies strategic zones crucial for defending and strengthening the heartland's development imperatives, mobilizing resources for national progress, and preserving the nation's historical, cultural, and linguistic identity, countering external cultural and ideological influences. The concept also addresses the nature of frontiers in promoting the nation's peripheral interests and protecting citizens from external threats. According to Professor Peter J. Taylor, the "frontier is outward-oriented, and the boundary is inward-oriented," emphasizing that "boundaries are essential to the sovereignty of territories" and

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that "sovereignty must be demarcated: a world of sovereign states is a world divided by boundaries" (1988, p. 105). Each of these elements represents the state's survival, vital, major, and peripheral interests in order of priority, which evolve based on the gravity of issues faced by nation-states. Therefore, effectively managing a nation's diverse geographical spaces is a crucial strategy and policy consideration.

There are two other important concepts in geopolitics. One is the sphere of influence needed to secure one's territory, population, security, market, and resources. The other is shattering zones—a belt of strategic value but facing chronic instability, change of borders, even reformulation of names for reasons of new politics, old festering sores—and which provide space for native rebels and global powers to fight for different motives (Glassner, 1993, p. 252), such as armed non-state actors of ISIS and inviting great powers to meddle in or micromanage internal affairs. Nepal once hosted 116 armed groups with cross-border connections, and its rebels claimed the operation of two systems within the state, which became one only after the peace accord and declaration of the nation's secular, federal democratic republic. If borders are not well managed, it might cause the state to weaken, serving as a geopolitical loophole, erosion of state capacity, and even vulnerability to breakdown. For many states, population and geography do not coincide. The existence of overlapping populations of the same ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups across borders sometimes makes people irredentist and the state anti-irredentist, thus affecting bilateral cooperation and international relations. Such phenomena is akin to "Macedonian syndrome," a term coined by political scientist Myron Weiner, where various ethnic groups speaking and practicing different religions and languages are caught in spiraling conflict entangling global powers (1971, pp. 665–683) in domestic politics. The configuration of states and the scale of issues they face often require regional and international cooperation. The conduct of international relations aims to realize foreign policy goals of security, stability, identity, status, and acceptability based not exclusively on national self-interest but also shared regional and enlightened global interests. Management of climate change, for example, requires the global cooperation of states and non-state actors. This means geopolitics runs the whole gamut from leadership skills, resources, demography, culture, and peace to war. They all operate in time and space, in particular in geophysical environments where sometimes-vital natural resources become boons and sometimes curses. Minerals in Africa, petroleum products in the Middle East, and the water resources of Nepal can be taken as examples.

Geopolitical balance addresses the centripetal (uniting) forces of the nation through the promotion of connecting tissues of society and civic nationalism that emancipates people from feudalism, frees the nation from foreign penetration, and defends people, culture, values, and land from the ferocity of centrifugal (dividing) elements of the local, national, regional, and global political scale. Without a robust heartland, great powers use their internal proxies to fan the flames of centrifugal forces, extend their influence, and reengineer societies to perpetuate instability and local conflict. Centrifugal tendencies of the population provide a context where macro and micro forces are tied to each other's

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population, thus weakening the nation-building process. Samuel P. Huntington cites the Bosnian crisis. It blew up locally, but as the war escalated, Islamic states supported Bosnian Muslims, Orthodox countries backed Serbs, and Western nations backed Croats, thus leading to its increasing internationalization and requiring global initiative to solve it (1997, p. 127). This means that in geopolitics, the management of the scale of a states or its society's positive interactions within the national space is a vital condition for crisis management and safe adaptation in international politics. Many states have adopted social inclusion, federalism, limited autonomy, affirmative action, and decentralization of power to resolve the fissiparous and centrifugal tendencies of their political parties and people and draw their loyalties to a cohesive statehood.

Geography is vital not just, because it is constant but also because of its "role in shaping the dynamics of opportunities and risks. It affects the changing perceptions of the possibilities and probabilities provided by the environment" (Starr, 2017, p. 7). With the new world order currently in flux owing to Sino-Russian and Atlantic countries' competition for deterrent, containment, and expansion, they are tempted to increase alliances and counter alliances with various scales of states, even small states on their side (Marshall, 2021, p. xiii). One state's containment is tantamount to another state's expansion (Taylor, 1988, p. 46), with hegemony and imperialism provoking resistance and resorting to collective self-reliance in defense buildup. The new geopolitics based on science and technology and the shift of international relations to global relations allowed it to escape from the deterministic and reductionist clutch (Starr, 2017, p. 2) and opened the scope for considerable choice and possibility. The modern version of geopolitics places stresses on three other variables: gravitational, topological, and attributional pulls or distances (Henrikson, 2002, p. 437) and the application of yin (soft power) and yang (hard power) ideas, institutions, and agencies in their games to minimize losses and maximize benefits. Great powers occasionally do not care about public international laws and notoriously exercise their power to bring smaller states into their foreign policy requirements. They violate the doctrine of constitutional requirements for small states rooted in equality and national determination and demand their conformity to geopolitical ambition. This article explains geopolitical theories and new geopolitical trends in the context of the budding global order.

Literature Review on Shifting Geopolitics Theories

Classical Theory of Geopolitics

The social Darwinian version of geopolitics propounded by German professor Friedrich Ratzel focuses on the organic account of state theory. He coined the term *Lebensraum* (the living space of people, their culture, and civilization), suggesting the patterns of the spatial increase of nation-states. To him, states are like living species needed by the collective social organism to survive (Taylor, 1984, pp. 20–21). They endlessly compete with each other for space and resources. They live, grow, prosper, and die based on the availability or deprivation of *elan vital*, vital impulses, grit, political will, and diplomacy. Many states share this view, and their citizens call them motherland or fatherland out of an emotional

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feeling of love and loyalty, not a transit state or a commercial bridge that only collects rents from the flow of goods and people from adjoining states. Swedish professor Rudolf Kjellén shares this organic state view. He argues that larger states compete with each other, extend their influence on small states, and often remain active and dynamic. Therefore, in the future, there will be only bigger states. For him, the state “embraces five government structures: population structure, social structure, economic structure, and physical structure” (Glassner, 1993, p. 224). This view was shared by Germany, Japan, and Italy as each of them worked to grow as a world power rivalling others, which became the cause of the world wars. This view, however, is falsified by the decolonization, democratization, and national liberation struggles of the Asian, African, and Latin American nations for self-rule. Now, the number of small states in the United Nations has swelled to 193 with two observers, while many lumbering empires, unable to adapt like dinosaurs, have callously disappeared.

Sir Halford Mackinder, the British professor, wrote a paper on “The Geographical Pivot of History,” sparking a heated political debate on the importance of Eurasian land power because it contains fertile lands, minerals, gas, and energy sources roughly equivalent to those in North America. It is a cradle of Western civilization as well. He said that there is a Eurasian core area with a huge landmass and well-protected grand geography from the onslaught of naval power. It can dominate world affairs from its fortress. “European civilization had a perfect, protected position here, as well as an abundance of inland waterways and natural resources not found on such a scale anywhere else” (Kaplan, 2017, p. 106). The pivot of the Eurasian core is rich in natural resources and can become a source of great power that would dominate East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and even Africa. He said, “Who rules East Europe commands the heartland, who rules the heartland commands the world island, and who rules the world island commands the world.”

In this context, the emerging Sino-Russian strategic partnership dominating Eurasia for a common cause now stands as a powerful leverage in world politics. The Nixon-Kissinger overture to China, therefore, sought to split this region for a stable balance of power in the world.

Nicholas John Spykman, professor of international relations in the US, expounded the theory of Rimland and formulated an American strategy for building a Western hemispheric empire by mustering vital resources to spare to create the balance of power in the Eastern Hemisphere (Kaplan, 2017, p. 134). He has underlined the importance of the geography of peace. However, Rimland is vulnerable to attack from both land and sea. Still, he said, what matters is not the heart of Eurasia but its Rimland, which spans through the Mediterranean and south of the Himalayas, where a great game was played, and across Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan, which is the entry point for acquiring great power status. He said, “Who controls Rimland rules Eurasia, and who rules Eurasia controls the destiny of the world.” The Rimland theory is thus designed to control and counterbalance expanding Soviet land power in the geopolitical and geostrategic regions through containment, pushback, and nuclear deterrence. Contrary to pessimism, the mobilization approach incorporates a

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positive perspective that the internet empowers and enables democratic opinions to come into existence.

German geopolitical theorist Karl Haushofer produced a vast body of literature on geopolitics, blending Ratzel's organic theory of the state with science and the natural growth of power among its smaller neighbors, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Southeastern Europe, and the Middle East, as leverage for German aggression in the Nazi period. His school of geopolitics died with the collapse of Nazi Germany. However, his concept of geostrategy—defining the design and strength each state owes to its structural disposition, possibilities of defense, freedom of maneuver, and chances of attack offered by its locational advantage of borders—in dealing with geopolitical problems continues to influence the scholarly discourse of strategic studies and international relations.

Another geopolitical thinker is US professor Saul B. Cohen, who linked geography with politics in a world of multipolar division and suggested that American policymakers maintain the unity of Europe and the Maghreb through subtle economic and political persuasion rather than force, as they are the gateway regions and can help stabilize an interdependent world (Glassner, 1993, p. 234). He pointed to three geostrategic regions: the trade-dependent maritime world, the Eurasian continental world, and the Indian Ocean realm, where competition over security, military, and economy will be concentrated in the future. According to Kaplan, the unity of the grand southern Eurasian rimland can bring “South Asia into the same conflict system of which the South China Sea is the center” (2014, p. 181). This is why India, favoring the status quo in South Asia, is engaged in a partnership with many Sino-phobic states of the Atlantic and Asia, including Vietnam, to support its aspirations for global power. Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is following an adventurous foreign policy across the Mediterranean region, straining ties with NATO and the US while hobnobbing with Russia, Islamic countries, and China.

The sea power view of geopolitics and history is propounded by American Navy Officer Alfred Thayer Mahan, who puts maritime interests in the foreground (1998, p. vi) for the expansion and balance of power. He stressed the importance of oceans in influencing history, protecting and promoting commerce, enabling the state to control sea lanes, maintain overseas military bases, command trade routes, and prevent the penetration of external forces through a strong national will defined by military strength and moral standing. He formulated the geostrategy of containing the Soviet Union's land power through the sea power of the US, the UK, Germany, and Japan. Modern technology has, however, provided means to overcome the benefits of sea power. Now China provides the former warm-water port for joint military drills in the Sea of Japan and the Korean Peninsula, while the US is mobilizing the littoral states of the South China Sea and India to contain China's naval expansion through its Maritime Silk Road Project that links its coastal region with South Asia, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa to Europe. Other geopolitical theorists focus less on the state and more on the concept of geostrategy. Grand geostrategy aligns means with ends (Gaddis, 2017, p. 27) and capabilities with aspirations. In doing so, it avoids the crisis of power scarcity. Superior

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technology and clear strategic foresight offer asymmetric effects on others. The survival of Israel in a hostile regional environment can be taken as an example. Geopolitics explains the geographic and political features of different sizes of states and regions and the influence of geography on their domestic and foreign policy conduct.

American Professor Alexander P. De Severksy stressed the importance of space power for both survival and victory in war. As a Russian pilot defecting to the USA, he demonstrated creativity in the development of advanced military aircraft and in the strategic use of air power in remote regions to assert geopolitical control. The term "geopolitics of space," or *astropolitik*, was coined by Professor Everett Dolman. He describes outer space as "a rich vista of gravitational mountains and valleys, oceans, and rivers of resources and energy" (Marshall, 2021, p. 311). The dawn of *astropolitik* has prompted powerful nations to compete in expanding their traditional habitats by manufacturing satellites and staking claims on existing celestial bodies (Lasswell, 1965, p. vii), moving beyond the traditional geopolitical concepts of the heartland, Rimland, and sea powers. Advancements in science and technology have diminished the significance of physical distance, facilitating travel, transport, and the distribution of goods. However, they have also exposed the interconnected world to new vulnerabilities if moral progress in states and statespersons does not accompany technological advancements. People still reside within the territorial boundaries of their states, which define their opportunities and provide security and identity. Severksy urged US leadership to prioritize air superiority for the defense of the Western hemisphere, avoid small wars, and reduce overseas military bases, which he believed weakened US power (Glassner, 1993, p. 230). The contemporary rivalry among the USA, India, Russia, China, Israel, and several medium-sized countries is escalating into a competition for dominance in outer space, creating new fault lines and flashpoints.

Geostrategic elements encompass a wide range of state activities, including planning, resource mobilization, leadership vision, and securing strategic assets. This involves positioning land and sea forces strategically and monitoring key maritime routes and chokepoints such as the Straits of Gibraltar, Hormuz, Palk, Formosa, and Malacca. These strategic locations are vital for economic activities, resource utilization, and geopolitical maneuvering. Recently, South Korea and the US demonstrated military strength by firing ballistic missiles in response to North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile test. India is securing its interests in the Indian Ocean and the Himalayas, where China is also asserting its commercial and geopolitical interests, often in opposition to US influence. These strategic locations are vital for economic activities, resource utilization, and geopolitical maneuvering. Recently, South Korea and the US demonstrated military strength by firing ballistic missiles in response to North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile test. India is securing its interests in the Indian Ocean and the Himalayas, where China is also asserting its commercial and geopolitical interests, often in opposition to US influence. This concept of geostrategy has expanded to include air transport, airpower, and innovative air combat strategies, elevating space power above land and sea power. China has modernized its

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People's Liberation Army to defend its national interests in space, geopolitical regions, and the deep sea.

The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna is set up to regulate international cooperation in the nonviolent use of outer space. However, the 1979 Moon Treaty adopted by the General Assembly has not been signed by the USA, Russia, and China. What we see now is the proliferation of intercontinental ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles laden with laser systems, or even atomic bombs to fire downwards, drones, rockets, etc., opening up the risk of the militarization of outer space. The major powers are integrating their military and scientific budgets for space exploration. Satellites are important for surveillance, intelligence, communication, weather forecasting, etc., but they face a threat as the USA, Russia, Israel, India, and China have developed the capacity to destroy satellites and create havoc in international communication, finance, commerce, security, and other vital areas. Cooperation in space beyond the Westphalia system is vital for global security and to ward off risks of global proportion. "Risks can be minimized by a culture of responsible innovation, especially in the fields of biotech, advanced AI, and geoengineering, and by reprioritizing the thrust of the world's technological efforts" (Rees, 2018, p. 225) in positive areas of global governance, security, public goods, and peace.

Modern Geopolitics Theories

The Cold War geopolitics, which began following the end of the Second World War, focused on the bipolarity of security, politics, economics, and international relations. This period witnessed the bipolar US-Soviet contest for supremacy, encompassing security and political, economic, and ideological areas beyond diplomatic regulations. This surpassed the changes in leadership in both countries in times of détente, negotiations on limiting the nuclear arms race, or cooperation in space. The end of the Cold War witnessed a process of depoliticization of international economic relations among nation-states defined by a new world order of geoeconomics where economic power outweighed military power, instruments of economic statecraft were used to promote and defend national interests, and the wheels of economic expansion through multi-national corporations are expected to reap beneficial geopolitical outcomes. The current rivalry between the United States, Russia, India, China, and Europe focuses on the use of educational, diplomatic, economic, and technological tools to achieve commercial, strategic, and political interests and goals. Its proponent, American strategic thinker Edward Luttwak, found that the convergence of economic and security competition led to a significant restructuring of the laws and institutions that govern international aid, trade, investment, and technology transfer. To him, the logic of conflict is carried out in the grammar of commerce. Power flows from "disposable capital instead of firepower, civilian innovation instead of military-technical advancement, and market penetration instead of garrisons and bases" (Luttwak, 1990, p. 17). China's primacy in geoeconomics is distinctly formulated in neutralizing rivals by the advice of Deng Xiaoping, "hiding capabilities and biding time." Now it is a major trading partner of as many as 130 nations in the world and knows how to use economic diplomacy to achieve its political objectives of making China great again, restoring its past glory, and

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emerging as an unrivalled state by the year 2049. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) affirms the standards of the UN Charter and connects the whole world by sea ports, airports, roads, railways, and communications. Until August 2023, 155 countries and 32 international organizations have signed the BRI. The participating nations comprise about 75 percent of the world's population and amount to more than half of the world's GDP. During this period, the rift between the two ideologically rival systems shifted from bipolarity to multipolarity.

Globalization and interconnectedness theory

The 2008 global financial crisis, growing distrust in the Washington Consensus, the US retreat from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and UNESCO, President Donald Trump's protectionism and America First, and friction with NATO allies have marked the beginning of de-Americanization and the decline of its global leadership. The Chinese leadership is imbued with traditional Mandarin virtues in the government and meritocratic, strong leaders (Allison, 2020, p. 239). President Xi Jinping perceived the unfolding of the global situation as a "period of historical opportunity" to expand the nation's focus from Asia to the wider globe (Doshi, 2021, p. 262) through policy initiatives, coordination, infrastructure build-up, connectivity, free trade, financial integration, and dense people-to-people contacts. Its economy has vaulted, as the world's second-largest, dominated global manufacturing, rivalled the US in technological capabilities like artificial intelligence, hypersonic missiles, and cybersecurity, and built the largest navy. China used its "large trade surpluses to purchase American financial assets, giving it, in theory, powerful leverage over American policy" (Mandelbaum, 2022: 448). These factors emboldened it to seek a stronger role in international economic governance. The creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the BRICS Bank of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the Silk Road, and BRI enabled it to play by its own rules of the game by formulating the Beijing Consensus. They have helped it catch up with the US and surpass it in a competition for global leadership, global governance, and the supply of global public goods. "China is geographically fundamental to Asia" (Kaplan, 2014, p. 166). It possesses nearly half of the GDP and military spending of all the Asian nations combined and contributes 35–40 percent of the economic growth of the region. Its rivals, the USA and India, have evolved converging interests for its military, economic, and political pushback through alliances with China's adversaries and unsettling its neighbors and even its periphery.

China's geographical centrality, economic clout, and growing military capabilities have altered the balance of power in Asia, leading to increased competition with the United States. This has resulted in the formation of various alliances and strategies, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) involving Japan, Australia, India, and the US, the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS), the Indo-Pacific Strategy, and the Five Eyes intelligence alliance (comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US). These developments reflect a situation akin to the Thucydides Trap, where a rising power challenges an established one,

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creating structural stress in the international order. Avoiding this trap requires reshaping global responsibilities based on economic interdependence (Allison, 2020). During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the USA in June 2023, US General Electric signed an agreement with India's Hindustan Aeronautics to build advanced fighter jet engines, supply modern drones, produce semiconductors, and collaborate on space exploration. While this indicates the US's willingness to trust India as a defense partner, it remains uncertain whether India will fully align with the US in its strategic competition with Russia and China or maintain its leadership role in the Global South.

Geopolitical conflicts arise when states have differing security conceptions. According to American political scientist S. P. Huntington, Chinese security policy is based on concentric circles, while Western security is based on liberal expansion, hegemony, balance of power, and collaboration. Countries like Mexico, Turkey, and Australia have their own cultures but aspire to modernize in a way that preserves their traditions, institutions, and values, rather than adopting Western models (Huntington, 1996). Historical events like the Asian Relations Conference in India (1947-1949) and the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung (1955) affirmed the values of the region, emphasizing national sovereignty and setting norms for international relations. The decolonization processes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have diversified international relations, moving away from dependency and dominance towards a more pluralist approach (Acharya, 2014).

The formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, the New International Economic Order, the New Information Order, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Boao Forum for Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRICS reflects a non-Atlantic notion of cooperation aimed at achieving collective self-reliance. Many countries have sought membership in BRICS, such as Algeria, Argentina, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. These initiatives have enabled non-Western countries to assert their independence and resist the dominance of superpowers through strategies like "people's war" and non-violent revolutions (Schell, 2005). Powerful Asian states like Japan, India, and China have advocated for an "Asia for Asians" concept. This has led to the development of pan-national organizations and the promotion of values such as Panchsheel, which advocates for international relations based on Buddha's middle path. Confucianism also emphasizes the creation of a harmonious society with multi-level governance. These philosophies contrast with the Westphalian system, which historically allowed European states to colonize others. Panchsheel, in particular, renounces the concept of just war, promoting peaceful means of achieving peace. This belief in peaceful coexistence has led to partnerships in the New International Economic Order, regional cooperation, and South-South dialogue, aimed at achieving collective self-reliance and promoting shared goals in international politics (Emmott, 2009).

Methods

A geopolitical shift is an interdisciplinary way of looking at how international relations and power relationships among nations are changing around the world. It is an ongoing process

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that alters the pattern of world power, alliances, and spheres of influence, entailing many states, big and small, to reconsider the patterns of their roles, such as neutralism, non-alignment, self-distancing mutual accommodation, and new responsibilities, and shape the emerging multi-polar world order. This shift in scale is also changing the character of international regimes such as the UN, WTO, and many other collaborating and competing regional institutions. This paper uses a wide range of terms and qualitative descriptive research techniques to elucidate the characteristics and trends of ongoing geopolitical developments, utilizing secondary sources of information to contextualize various occurrences and topics, including some progress in knowledge gathering.

Data Presentation and Discussion

New Geopolitical Trends

The resurgence of Russia, China, and India as great powers has led them to seek friendly or neutral alliances to guard against external security threats, a reaction to past invasions and security challenges. These nations are actively working to establish a new multi-polar world order and secure exclusive zones of influence. India is also pushing back against this pressure, forging closer ties with Russia while expanding economic cooperation with China. However, India appears to be maintaining its "strategic autonomy" by balancing its Look East, Look South, and Look West policies. The deepening strategic partnership between China and Russia, described as "without limits," has prompted the US to form an alliance of democratic nations, maintain the post-Cold War status quo, and contain the resurgence of Russia and China by expanding NATO, the EU, and regional and bilateral security agreements. The US has several comparative advantages over China, including a young population, financial dominance, abundant resources, secure borders, strong alliances, and an innovative economy (Doshi, 2021, p. 333).

President Joe Biden's visit to oil-rich Saudi Arabia aimed to repair strained relations and reaffirm the US commitment to the security and stability of the Middle East. On July 17, 2022, he stated, "We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran." Newly empowered states like China, India, Russia, Germany, South Africa, Brazil, and Iran are considered revisionist powers seeking to revise and rewrite international rules. Some countries, including Japan, India, Germany, Brazil, and South Africa, are even demanding permanent membership in the UN Security Council to ensure fair representation. The US strategy of an alliance of democratic states has excluded many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America from its row with what it calls "autocracies," leading to ideological and cultural differences. Chinese scholars argue that in a post-truth era, liberal democracies in the West are susceptible to misinformation, populism, social polarization, and political radicalization. Despite its global outreach, aspirations, and commitment to defend allies worldwide, the US's sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan without consulting NATO allies suggests a lack of full trust in collaboration despite ideological alignment.

The Shifting Geopolitics

International relations have undergone a major transformation into global relations, with a trend towards de-globalization characterized by the breakdown of global supply chains, inflation in food and energy prices, and an intellectual property regime that has left billions without access to COVID-19 vaccines. Some Western drug companies have reaped billions in extra profits from vaccine sales. China's socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics has been highly successful, with a growth rate "more than three times that of Europe and twice that of the US." This success, coupled with extensive foreign aid programs, has attracted many third-world countries considering their economic models (Stiglitz, 2022, p. 95). The rise of a multi-polar world coincides with a decline in multilateralism, as the WTO is deadlocked and the UN is seen as ineffective in peace negotiations, deterrence, and global governance, security, justice, and peace efforts. The influence of not only nation-states but also markets, civil society, and various associations shapes international decisions and geopolitical trends, including global energy production and distribution, financial systems, climate change management, and efforts to address vulnerabilities in global supply chains, food crises, inflation, and the rise of populism and fundamentalism. Chinese President Xi Jinping sees this as a strategic opportunity for national rejuvenation, stating in 2019, "The world today is in a state of change unseen in a century. The great struggle, great project, great cause, and great dream of our party are in full swing of national rejuvenation" (Doshi, 2021, p. 272), indicating a shift in the balance of power in China's favor. The West, Japan, India, and Vietnam are reacting to these new geopolitical trends rather than actively shaping the new global order.

Conclusion

Geopolitics involves understanding, acquiring, using, expanding, and adapting the foreign policy of nation-states in response to the rise of new powers in regional and global politics and the changing balance of power. A shift in geopolitics, assuming an interdisciplinary dimension, provides nation-states with a cognitive map to shape their internal cohesion and external policy conduct, formulate strategic courses of action, make choices, and mitigate vulnerabilities in the face of emerging global competition and the rebalancing process. Its lens is gradually shifting from old determinist concepts such as heartland, rimland, and sea power to astropolitics, with the advent of new sciences of communication, transportation, and connectivity projects. However, the importance of earlier concepts has not diminished entirely, as people still live within geographical borders that define their choices, leverage, and opportunities. . In this context, how national leadership treats its diverse population has geopolitical implications for their loyalty patterns to the state, its security, progress, and nation building. Since geopolitics is a power-based game rather than rule-based, the management of a nation's geographical configuration, population, economy, and foreign policy holds tremendous importance for constitutional stability, progress, and peace. This management helps avert the possibility of internal actors acting as centrifugal forces or proxies for outside actors' interests.

The new geopolitics has moved from an entirely state-centric approach to alliance formation, interdependence, and globalization to de-globalization, de-dollarization, and the

The Shifting Geopolitics

emergence of new patterns of security, political, and economic groupings. The rise of China, India, Russia, Japan, Brazil, Iran, and South Africa has shifted world politics towards Eurasia, the political heartland of the world. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, driven by the latter's interest in joining NATO and the EU, and renewed Hamas-Hezbollah (Palestine)-Israel conflicts have raised the prospect of a new Cold War, where proxy wars involving state and non-state actors capture political attention. The US and many European countries support Israel in countering Hamas but fear the consequences for Islamic-Western relations. In contrast, Islamic nations, Russia, and China support the Palestinian cause and call for the cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. This situation has sparked a race for nuclear arms, the strengthening of a democratic alliance and NATO, the formation of counter-alliances, and rivalry for control of sea routes to ensure the smooth supply of oil, minerals, and commercial goods.

Unlike the decoupled relationship between the US and Russia, the ties between the US and China and China and India are not entirely severed. The US is struggling to mend its relationship with China to address global responsibilities such as ending disorder, tackling climate change, resolving conflicts and arms races, revitalizing the global economy, and reforming multilateral institutions. This is despite American concerns about issues such as the South China Sea, Taiwan, trade, and technology. China, on the other hand, is wary of the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy and the QUAD (comprising India, Japan, Australia, and the US), as well as new defense pacts with Anglo-Saxon nations aimed at containing and deterring its growing friendship with Russia. While the US prefers China to accept a liberal international order, China is pursuing its initiatives for security, development, and civilization to foster win-win cooperation at various scales and create a community of shared future for mankind. India, aspiring to be a global power, seeks to play a role in the Global South and the geopolitics of the Himalayan region. It aims to maintain neutrality in the Ukraine and Hamas-Israel conflicts due to its strong ties with Russia and West Asian nations. The profitable trade relations that both India and China have with Russia discourage them from alienating Russia from each other.

To avoid falling into a rival geopolitical trap, many nations like Nepal have adopted strategies of hedging, balancing, bandwagoning, diversification, and adaptability. They engage with multiple powers to protect their identity and status without aligning with any single power. In this context, in a polycentric world order, small states can play constructive roles because they have a greater stake in international security, development, and peace. They can utilize their intrinsic attributes of size, location, population, leverage, circulation, resources, and strategies (both soft power and hard power) to independently or collectively maneuver and persuade major powers to mediate and promote peace, justice, and fair international cooperation beyond geopolitical rivalries.

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