

## A NEW GEOGRAPHY OF EUROPEAN POWER?



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# A NEW GEOGRAPHY OF EUROPEAN POWER?

James ROGERS



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## INTRODUCTION

The naval historian and geostrategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, understood the utility of military power perhaps better than anyone before or since. In an article called *The Place of Force in International Relations* – penned two years before his death in 1914 – he claimed: ‘Force is never more operative than when it is known to exist but is not brandished’ (1912: p. 31).<sup>1</sup> If Mahan’s point was valid then, it is perhaps even more pertinent now. The rise of new powers around the world has contributed to the emergence of an increasingly unpredictable and multipolar international system. Making the use of force progressively more dangerous and politically challenging, this phenomenon is merging with a new phase in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, many European governments are increasingly reluctant – perhaps even unable – to intervene militarily in foreign lands. The operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that when armed force is used actively in support of foreign policy, it can go awry; far from re-affirming strength and determination on the part of its beholder, it can actually reveal weakness and a lack of resolve. Half-hearted military operations – of the kind frequently undertaken by democratic European states – tend not to go particularly well, especially when there is little by way of a political strategy or the financial resources needed to support them. A political community’s accumulation of a military reputation, which can take decades, if not centuries, can then be rapidly squandered through a series of unsuccessful combat operations, which dent its confidence and give encouragement to its opponents or enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, since the Wars of the Yugoslav Succession in the 1990s, there has been a strong belief that Europeans need to be more willing and able to use armed force. Indeed, the constitution and development of the Common Security and Defence Policy was in many respects a reaction to the Yugoslav bloodbath (Rogers, 2009a; Shepherd, 2009). To this end, the *European Security Strategy* asserts that the European Union needs a ‘strategic culture’, which fosters ‘early, rapid and when necessary, robust intervention’ (European Council, 2003: p. 11).<sup>3</sup> Brussels has subsequently conducted a series of small and seemingly

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1. Others have also expressed a similar sentiment. Most well known would be Theodore Roosevelt, former President of the United States, who is credited as having once said: ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick’. Likewise, and more recently, Jo Coelmont, the former Belgian Representative to the European Union Military Committee, stated: ‘If you want to use military power, flaunt it!’ (2008).

2. It has been argued that the British Army’s political defeat at the hands of foreign and insurgent Islamists in Basra damaged Britain’s martial reputation (see, for example: Cordesman, 2007). Another example might be the well-known ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ in the United States after the country suffered defeat at the hands of the Vietcong in the early 1970s.

3. For a discussion on the development of a European ‘strategic culture’, see Cornish and Edwards (2001, 2005).

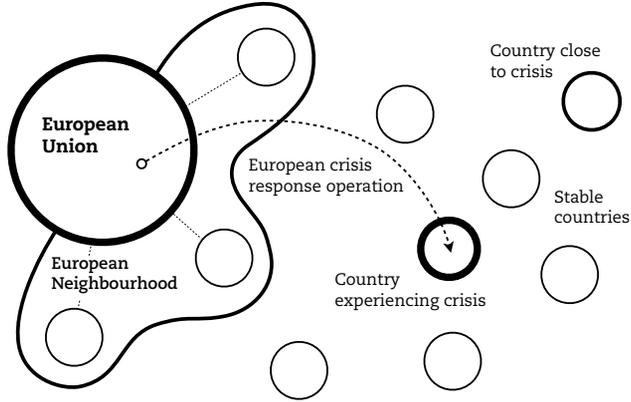
experimental ‘crisis management’ operations in a range of countries, whose crowning glory has been the anti-piracy naval operation in the Gulf of Aden, *Atalanta*. Yet, excepting those in the Western Balkans, almost all of these operations share a common theme: they have been heavily reactive and/or lack geopolitical focus. For example, while Europeans were militarily engaged in distant Sub-Saharan Africa during August 2008, a war broke out in the European Neighbourhood in a potential transit corridor for the planned Nabucco gas pipeline – which aims to bypass Russian territory and reduce European gas dependency. Likewise, it took almost two years of rising pirate infestation around Somalia – on the main European-Asian maritime communication line – before Europeans got directly involved. This lack of geopolitical focus is a consequence of an outmoded European geostrategy, which fails to integrate the maritime with the continental component (Rogers, 2009b; Rogers and Simón, 2009). Equally, it is driven by a dearth of European grand strategy, the hardening of which would draw together the European Union’s means and wherewithal to overcome foreign threats and challenges, while simultaneously working for the pursuit of common objectives (Biscop, 2009; Biscop, et al., 2009; Venusberg Group, 2007).

The aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of the geography of European power in the early twenty-first century. It will begin by looking at the sub-components of grand strategy: geopolitics, geostrategy and forward presence. This will be followed by an analysis of the European Union’s geopolitical situation, something that is frequently overlooked in contemporary European politics. The improvement and further integration of the European homeland will bolster the European Union as a base of power, which itself could then be exploited *à la* Mahan to diffuse awe into foreign governments and make them more respectful of European preferences. Most importantly of all, though, the paper will show why and how the European Union should focus less on disjointed ‘crisis management’ operations and more on the quiet and covert expansion of its political and economic power into geographic locations of particular significance (see Figure 1). The paper will identify these locations as the proximal belt of surrounding countries, buttressed by overseas maritime zones that are of specific importance to the European economy. Acquiring influence in such regions will necessitate the final completion of the ‘comprehensive approach’ through the creation of a European ‘forward presence’: firstly, to deter foreign powers from meddling in countries in the wider European Neighbourhood and secondly, to dissuade obstinacy and misbehaviour on the part of local rulers.<sup>4</sup> In other

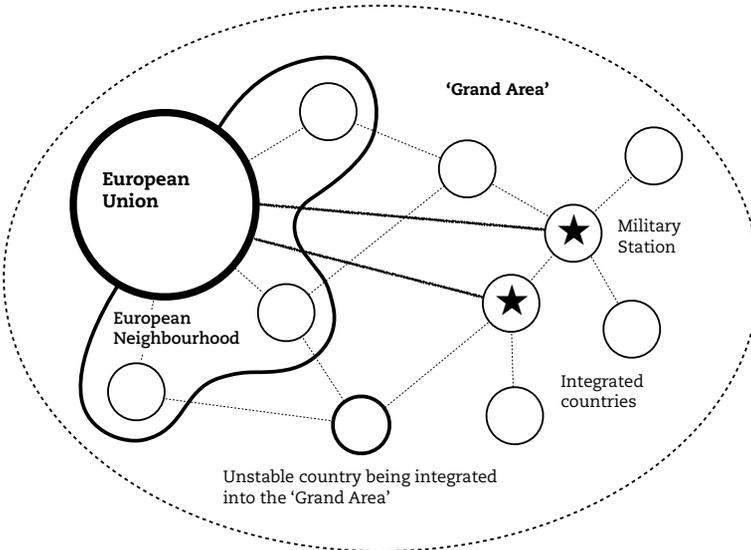
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4. The ‘comprehensive approach’ is often lauded as a fusion of civilian and military capabilities, except that the latter dimension – along with the grand strategic and geostrategic components – is often sorely lacking (Simón, 2010: pp. 16-17). Bringing the military instrument more firmly in, but in a preventative fashion, would therefore make the so-called ‘comprehensive approach’ truly comprehensive.

**Current 'crisis management' approach**



**Proposed 'Grand Area' approach**



**Figure 1: 'Crisis management' versus 'Grand Area'**

This figure shows the differences between the European Union's present 'crisis management' approach versus the proposed 'Grand Area' approach. The former approach leaves countries adjacent to the European Neighbourhood in a state of permanent flux, where European military forces and civilian services intervene periodically to arrest disorder. However, the 'Grand Area' approach would attempt to integrate those countries into a permanent European-led system, underpinned by military stations, better communication lines and tighter partnerships – a European 'forward presence' – to reduce the need for sporadic intervention.

words, a truly comprehensive European grand strategy should be inculcated with a grand design: the constitution of an extended ‘Grand Area’, a zone where European power would be progressively institutionalized by the dislocation of existing divisions and their reintegration into a new liberal order. By reducing the likelihood of having to use military force reactively, it would better connect with the conception of *preventative engagement* as outlined in the *European Security Strategy* (European Council, 2003: p. 11). And by filling political vacuums with the gradual expansion of European power, conflicts could actually be prevented from breaking out before they start or spiral out of control – and thus stifling the potential for dangerous ‘vacuum wars’.<sup>5</sup>

James Rogers<sup>6</sup>

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5. A ‘vacuum war’ is a conflict that starts in a small, weakened country but rapidly sucks in larger powers, potentially leading to a conflagration (see, for a good summary: Grygiel, 2009).

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## GEOGRAPHY, POLITICS AND STRATEGY

In recent years, the linkages between geography and politics have been ignored or downplayed. Scholars and analysts have been ‘overdosing’ on globalization, which became the main framework in the 1990s through which international relations was understood (Gray, 2004: p. 9). This approach merged with a number of laudable but nevertheless peculiar fantasies, which saw the rise of a multilateral and civilized era in international relations as inevitable, while force and coercion would be progressively and irrevocably abolished. As Toje says: ‘These movements were united in the belief that the world could be, or already had been, fundamentally changed by new ideas and new assumptions. This spawned a rejection of national interests, and national identity among intellectual elites’ (2008: p. 209). United by a Hegelian or teleological reading of History, which was further amplified by the West’s own hegemony after the Cold War, these perspectives came to see geography and geopolitics as outmoded (Fukuyama, 1989).<sup>7</sup> In short, internationalism, openness and globalization had become fashionable, while considerations of geography, power, and political interest were seen as archaic, even immoral. The enormous energies and resources poured into protecting liberal civilization, either before or during the Cold War, were forgotten or deliberately downplayed because they did not fit in with the new paradigm (Cooper, 2003; Kagan, 2008). The triumph of the liberal international trade system was no longer seen as the outcome of a European and American geostrategy that devoted the material means and political will necessary to maintain a favourable balance of geopolitical power, but rather due to the inherent superiority of the liberal order itself.

However, as European and American hegemony has gone into relative decline since its apex in the early years of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the linkages between geography and politics have started to manifest themselves again (Kaplan, 2009b; Rogers, 2009b). Geography is, after all, ‘fundamental’ and ‘pervasive’ for it ‘impose[s] distinctive constraints and provide[s] distinctive opportunities that have profound implications for policy and strategy’ (Gray, 1996: p. 248). While geography may not *determine* social and political development, either by giving certain peoples an advantage,<sup>8</sup> it should nevertheless be

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7. Gray shows aptly why geopolitics has become so unpopular: ‘Geopolitics treats the world as it is and tends to scepticism over the prospects for progress towards lasting peace. Because much of the academe holds to the liberal illusion that international relations can be transformed benignly, it associates geopolitics, and its generally realist approach to statecraft, with conditions that need to be changed’ (2004: p. 18).

8. Diamond, for example, argues that Western Europeans were aided by a number of geographic and environmental conditions in their rise to dominance. These conditions included the horizontal aspect of the European continent, thus avoiding climatic extremes; domesticable animals, to provide food, transportation, labour and disease; and a maritime perspective, to encourage new technologies (Diamond, 1997a, 1997b).

understood as the material for social and political development (Owens, 1999). Spykman used the analogy of clothes manufacturing to get this point across: ‘to admit that the garment must ultimately be cut to fit the cloth is not to say that the cloth determines either the garment’s style or its adequacy’ (1938a: p. 30). This is because a piece of land, a river or a mountain range cannot take sides with any particular group of people or force them to accept its presence in any particular way. In Gray’s words:

*The point in need of the clearest recognition simply is that all political matters occur within a particular geographical context; in short, they have a geopolitical dimension. [...] Of course, physical geography is politically “neutral.” But the combatant who adapts best to the terms and conditions of life and warfare in the jungle [for example], will count that particular terrain as an ally rather than a “neutral” geographic stage (1999: p. 173).*

A political community like the United Kingdom, for example, may be an island nation surrounded by sea, but this inescapable orientation did not *force* its inhabitants to implement a grand strategy whose objective was to become a maritime superpower with a deep reach into the European mainland, North America, Asia, Africa and Australasia. Japan, also an island nation, located on the edge of a continent, did quite the opposite: it closed itself off from the outside world for many centuries, allowing only nominal trade with the Portuguese and Dutch. The British thus took advantage of their geographical perspective and worked with it to maximize their political and economic leverage, whereas the Japanese did not, consequentially emerging much later and from a position of relative weakness.

This is where geostrategy comes in. At a very rudimentary level, geostrategy accounts for the geographic direction of a political community’s foreign policy. As Grygiel notes: ‘The geostrategy of a state [...] is not necessarily motivated by geographic or geopolitical factors. A state may project power to a location because of ideological reasons, interest groups, or simply the whim of its leader’ (2006: p. 22). Indeed, there is no a priori linkage between strategy and geography; governments have often failed to properly link the two. During the second half of the eighteenth century, for example, Simms (2007) has shown how the rise of powerful ideologies and interest groups in the United Kingdom eroded the country’s established concentration on the Low Countries and Central Europe and replaced it with a new and near-exclusive maritime geostrategy. Drunk with victory after the Seven Years’ War, London thought it could hide behind the might of the Royal Navy and focus almost entirely on its new-found and growing worldwide imperium. But this was a profound mistake, for ‘Brit-

ain's security depended on maintaining her "ramparts" in Europe. It was there, in Germany and Flanders, in the "counterscarp" of England, that Britain's fate would be decided' (Simms, 2007: p. 684). The test came just over a decade later when Britain's colonies in North America declared their independence. As a succession of European governments pledged support for the rebellion, London was forced to divide its forces to defend itself from direct foreign attack. Britain was punished for failing to maintain a favourable balance of power in its most important zones of geographic and geopolitical interest, consequentially losing its first overseas empire.

Clearly, a failure to connect geography and politics adequately is very dangerous. Gray puts it succinctly: 'the possible constraints and frictions of space and time must always command the strategist's respect' (1999: p. 173). While there has been a tendency to downplay geopolitics in the West over the past two decades, non-European countries – such as China, Russia, India, South Korea and Brazil – have been busily crafting sophisticated and entwined domestic and foreign geostrategies (see: Kaplan, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Rogers, 2009b). Agricultural and energy output has been expanded, in some cases, quite dramatically. New railways, motorways and communication systems have been built to connect various cities and provinces. And stronger and less corrupt forms of government have been implemented to rule over those provinces. Fuelled by rapid economic growth, the Chinese, for example, have built numerous new power stations, hydro-electric systems, and tens of thousands of kilometres of new road and railway – with even more planned. This building bonanza was crowned in 2006 by the construction of the monumental Qingzang railway, which links long-isolated Tibet with China's increasingly industrialized and densely populated seaboard. Beijing plans to extend this railway considerably over the next twenty years, greatly amplifying its sovereignty and continental reach over its western provinces and making possible deep demographic changes across the region – which will further entrench Chinese power (Arya, 2008; Lustgarten, 2008). Indeed, so fast has China been investing in its railway system that by 2012, the country will have more high speed lines than the rest of the world put together (Robinson, 2010). Unsurprisingly, Beijing has felt less constrained and more confident to project its domestic strength and transform it into regional and global clout, not least with plans for a 'New Silk Road' of railways, roads and energy transmission pipelines deep into Central Asia (Folath and Neef, 2010), as well as a sustained effort at naval expansion (See: Holmes and Yoshihara, 2009; Rehman, 2009; Scott, 2008; Xu, 2006 [2004]).

But there is nothing necessarily new here: governments have long sought to domesticate and integrate their domestic territory more effectively to provide a springboard for maritime reach and commercial expansion (Spykman, 1939b).

From the earliest period in history, political communities were forced to grapple with the extension of technological, logistical and armed power over the natural world – over geography – to ‘establish’ themselves over territorial space, stake out a homeland, connect it together and push back its borders so as to ensure its longevity and survival (Spykman, 1939a). The existence of physical obstructions to freedom of movement (i.e. the sheer size of a territory, rivers, hills and forests) or dangers (i.e. wild animals, rival tribes and nations and climatic extremes) could spell disaster for the community by dividing it up, or blocking its ability to exploit or take advantage of new food sources or raw materials. Those who could not circumvent geographic obstacles or dangers often died out or were overcome or replaced by those who could. Any political community with the means to master geography and connect it with politics – through good geostrategy – has tended to extend its advantages over its adversaries.

It is well known that Ancient Rome, for example, built a radial system of roads for internal communication and aqueducts for the formation of large urban settlements. More recently, the British developed better agricultural techniques to support a growing population and dug lengthy canals and built railways to connect their inland manufacturing centres to their coastal ports, while the Germans, Americans and Russians utilized railway technology to open up their interiors and make them productive on an industrial scale (Hay, 2003: pp. 306-307). Indeed, with the commissioning of the trans-Siberian railway, Russia finally linked the two ends of its continental empire together for the first time by a direct and relatively fast land route and extended its sovereignty firmly over Siberia. Alternatively, the United States – an isolationist power for much of the nineteenth century – was trapped within the Western Hemisphere until it was able to link its eastern and western seaboard by railways and a canal through Central America. The transcontinental railroads and the Panama Canal transformed the United States, amplifying its power by bringing the country geographically together into a cohesive economic unit (Spykman, 2007 [1942]: p. 51). American ships no longer had to take lengthy and dangerous voyages around Cape Horn, and were consequentially able to move between the eastern and western seaboard more quickly. Equally, American naval ships in the Atlantic and the Pacific theatres could rapidly reinforce one another, effectively doubling overnight the size of the United States naval fleet (Spykman, 1944: p. 36).

The aim of these agricultural and transportation systems was therefore thoroughly strategic: to amplify the economic output of the homeland and bring distant or isolated provinces more closely under sovereign control. And by linking core areas to the outside world, they led to the consolidation of each respective imperial or national power base. Even in the modern and increasingly glo-

balized world, a political community's territory still continues to function as a base of operations, from which it draws material and demographic strength. This power can then be harnessed to protect the territory and its people from hostile forces, whether those forces are domestic or foreign, or natural or human, in orientation.

A strong base of operations gives a political community the ability to prosecute a grand strategy in the international arena. Foreign geostrategy is predicated on the assumption that it is very difficult to sustain an 'all-directions' or truly global approach, focussing resources and resolve on key regions instead (Grygiel, 2006: p. 22). Thus, a comprehensive and balanced geostrategy represents a political community's attempt to circumvent its geographical predilection to maximize its security in the pursuit of a series of common goals, or even a grand design. For smaller powers, a Swiss-style deterrence policy might be favourable, especially if a defensive geography (like mountains) is present or if there is a lack of resources for power projection. For larger political communities, however, especially those with access to the sea, geostrategy has tended to be far more expansive and assertive, often following a series of phases: first, the consolidation of the national territory; second, the expansion of leverage into neighbouring zones; third, the control over maritime approaches; and lastly, if possible, the pursuit of influence over particularly important nodes and spaces on the Earth's surface and the crafting of a permanent and wide-ranging political presence in the international system (Friedman, 2009: pp. 38-46). Geostrategy therefore aims to enhance the community's power and prosperity by gaining access to certain communication lines like trade routes, as well as geographical bottlenecks like maritime straits, mountain passes, rivers, islands and seas. For the largest powers, it has frequently mandated the creation and maintenance of a far-reaching political presence, backed up with forwardly deployed armed forces. This has often required the opening of military stations, including the construction of warships for deep oceanic power projection (Krepinevich and Work, 2007: p. ii).

A good foreign geostrategy also requires an extensive network of alliances with key powers whose geographic interests are largely coterminous and who seem willing to assist with the maintenance of a favourable balance of geographic power. But not only the strongest powers are important. Partnerships with smaller 'lynchpin states' or 'geopolitical pivots', which are located in vital regions, are also necessary.<sup>9</sup> Georgia and Azerbaijan, for example, provide the only territorial corridor – bypassing Russian or Iranian territory – between the

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9. A 'lynchpin state' can be understood as a country, which is not a major power, but nevertheless deserves special attention because of its geopolitical location or position (see: Korski, 2010).

European Union and the the Caspian Sea (and Central Asia); the Falkland Islands provide command over the South Atlantic and Cape Horn; the United Arab Emirates provide control over the Strait of Hormuz, while Singapore provides the same in relation to the Strait of Malacca. A well-considered geostrategy should aim to provide pervasive influence over the key places on the global map, while simultaneously co-opting as many other major powers as possible into the enterprise. Brzezinski puts this very colourfully:

*To put it in a terminology that hearkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together (1997b: p. 40).*

The ultimate aim of geostrategy, then, is to link geography and politics to maximize the power and reach of the domestic territory and to entrench a favourable international order. Such an approach must be backed up by a subtle but formidable military posture, which aims to prevent potential rivals from emerging, encourages a high degree of security dependency on the part of foreign governments, and prevents dangerous non-state and state actors from working with one another.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION'S GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION

The history of the European Community has long been as a ‘civilian power’, whose aim was to ‘domesticate’ and ‘institutionalize’ the relations between its component Member States and prevent them from even considering military action as a possible option in their interactions with one another (Duchêne, 1972, 1973). European integration thus aimed to transcend geopolitics, at least *within* Europe. It is perhaps for this reason that there has been a tendency for contemporary Europeans to play down the significance of geopolitics. As Hill has noted: ‘Students of the European Union have for too long neglected geopolitics, either because they could not see its relevance to a “civilian power” or because they were uneasy with that kind of discourse for normative reasons’ (2002: p. 99).<sup>10</sup> However, as the deepening of the European Union has continued, and as progressively more of the European peninsula has come into its jurisdiction, it has become possible – and necessary – to see European integration through a geopolitical lens (Rogers and Simón, 2009: pp. 5-6). For not only does a geopolitical analysis of the European Union’s geographical position provide a better understanding of the constraints and possibilities facing Europeans in the early twenty-first century, it also facilitates better foreign policy prescriptions. In this respect, two geographic factors stick out above all others: firstly, the European Union is thoroughly anchored to the northern European plain, a vast and fertile territory stretching across most of the top of the European mainland; secondly, the European region is not so much a continent than a peninsula, which protrudes out of the Eurasian super-continent into the Atlantic Ocean, thus providing Europeans with a primarily maritime geography (Rogers, 2010). These two factors have given Europeans solid geographic foundations on which they have built their success for over five centuries – and could continue to do so well into the twenty-first.

With regards to the first factor, the European plain is a vast expanse of fertile territory stretching from the English Midlands and Western France through Germany and Poland to the eastern border with Belarus.<sup>11</sup> This territory is crisscrossed by numerous rivers and streams, which contribute to its fertility and provide Europeans with ready access to the oceans and seas. Warmed by the currents of the Gulf Stream, the European plain is ripe for agriculture and it is no surprise that the annual yield is massive: the surplus generated enabled urbanization on a vast scale and the systematic diversification of economic

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10. Biscop (2010) has also argued that European Studies needs to engage more actively with Strategic Studies.

11. For a good roundup of the role played by the European plain in European geopolitics, see: Stratfor (2010: esp. pp. 2-4).

activity. As the cradle of the agricultural and industrial revolutions in the eighteenth century, the European plain and its enormous resources ultimately propelled Europeans to accumulate and maintain the greatest concentration of technology and wealth on Earth. Today, this plain supports over two-hundred million people, who have come to live in dense concentrations, particularly in Northern France, Western Germany, the Low Countries and Southern England. These regions form the European Union's heavily populated 'core area'. Indeed, it was in this central zone that European integration began; equally, it was from this area that European enlargement radiated outwards in a series of phases through the utilization of a traditional continental geostrategy.<sup>12</sup>

The second factor, relating to geography, but a consequence of European enlargement, means that the European Union has an increasingly maritime disposition. With a contiguous space stretching from the Black Sea to the Atlantic Ocean and the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean, the European Union has come to cover almost all of the European peninsula. It now shares a relatively short land border – totalling 5,460 kilometres – with only five countries: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010).<sup>13</sup> However, the European Union is nevertheless surrounded on the other three fronts by sea, with a maritime frontier accounting for almost 66,000 kilometres – over twelve times longer than the land border (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). This maritime orientation is further compounded by the European Union's position on the global map: it sits on the western tip of the Eurasian landmass, which has been described, due to its location, size and resources, as the world's 'axial super-continent or the 'World Island' (Brzezinski, 1997b: p. 50; Mackinder, 1904). Geopolitically, any power dominant in Eurasia would also – by proximity – have command over the Middle East and Africa, as well as the surrounding seas (Brzezinski, 1997a: p. 50). Given the position of the European peninsula on Eurasia's western promontory, the sea becomes necessary to reach other parts of Eurasia. Indeed, until Europeans developed sailing vessels capable of circumventing Africa, the eastern hemisphere remained largely cut off, isolated and

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12. Spykman provided an excellent analysis of the differences between land and sea powers, especially with regard to the way that each expands: 'Their differing conceptions [...] of the conquest of space indicate one of the outstanding differences between land and sea powers. A sea power conquers a large space by leaping lightly from point to point, adjusting itself to existing political relationships wherever possible, and often not establishing its legal control until its factual domination has long been tacitly recognised. An expanding land power moves slowly and methodically forward, forced by the nature of its terrain to establish its control step by step and so preserve the mobility of its forces. Thus a land power thinks in terms of continuous surfaces surrounding a central point of control, whereas a sea power thinks in terms of points and connecting lines dominating an immense territory' (1938b: p. 224). There can be no doubt that the European Union has adopted the continental approach to enlarge, as opposed to the maritime one.

13. Of course, the European Union also shares land borders with Norway, Switzerland and the former Yugoslav states, but these are also a part geopolitically of the wider European Union's area through their participation in the European Economic Area or their 'enlargement perspective', among other initiatives.

unknown. While aeroplanes, railways and energy transmission pipelines have mitigated this problem to some extent, commercial activity still moves between Europeans and Asians primarily through the maritime domain, making the communication line running from the Suez Canal to the city of Shanghai particularly significant (Rogers, 2009b: pp. 21-30). As Map 1 shows, this shipping route passes through almost all of the world's most significant 'strategic choke-points' – such as the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, depending on destination – and along or by some of the most potentially volatile 'strategic flash-points' on Earth.

# Map 1

## The European Union and the 'Grand Area'



Maritime communication line with spur and port



Gas transmission pipeline with flow direction



Planned gas transmission pipeline with flow direction

Caucasus

Strategic flashpoint or strategic chokepoint

▲ Gas producing region

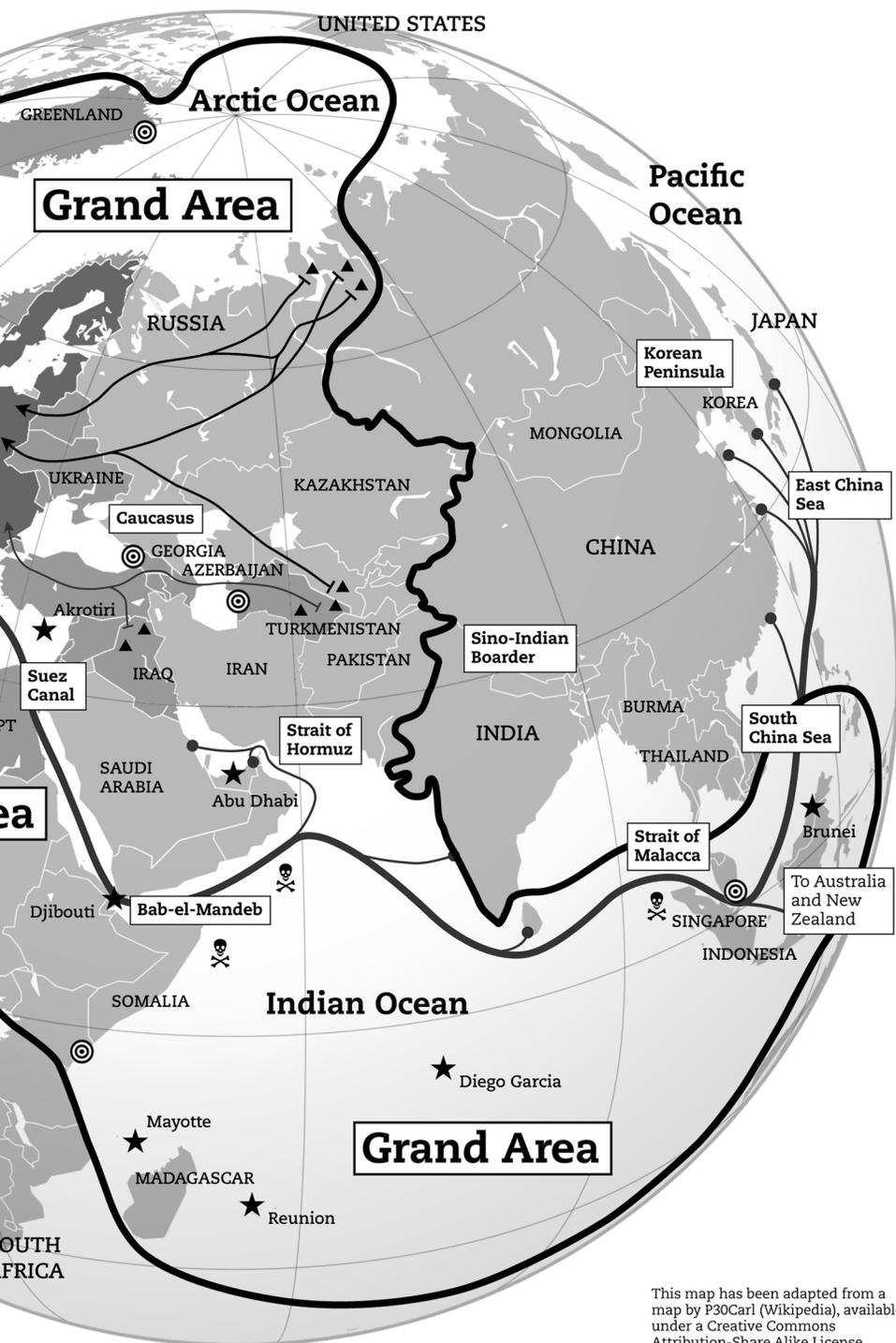
☠ Pirate infestation

★ European military station

◎ Suggested European military station

■ Countries in an extended European Neighbourhood





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## TOWARDS A NEW GEOGRAPHY OF EUROPEAN POWER

Until recently, the European Union has given little consideration to high political matters, at least when they occurred beyond its borders. When issues of foreign and military policy presented themselves, they were dealt with almost exclusively by the Member States or delegated to the Atlantic Alliance. Yet, with the functional and geographic expansion of the European Union over the past decade; the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy; the passage of the Treaty of Lisbon; the 2008 financial crisis; and the ongoing transformation in the global balance of power, the European Union has been both asked and compelled to assume an increasingly active international posture. In recent years, this posture has even begun to assume explicit geopolitical overtones. Three spaces of critical interest came to be identified in the two decades after the end of the Cold War: firstly, the Western Balkans, including all the states of the former Yugoslavia that have not yet gained accession into the European Union itself; secondly, the Eastern Neighbourhood, which includes Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Caucasus; and thirdly, the Mediterranean basin, from Turkey to Israel and from Egypt to Morocco. Further, the rise of piracy in the Gulf of Aden has drawn attention to the wider Indian Ocean, while the High North – the so-called ‘Northern Dimension’ – has also grown in prominence as the countries around the Arctic Circle have realized how further contractions in the ice sheet could have economic and political consequences.

The rapidly changing balance of power in the twenty-first century makes functional integration at the European level, particularly in the realm of foreign and military policy, increasingly important. The rise of large continental powers, which for the first time in history are criss-crossed by increasingly integrated railway, road and telecommunication networks, has finally ended what was once described as the ‘Columbian Epoch’, a maritime period dominated by the small but extraordinarily powerful West European nation-States (see: Mackinder, 1904: p. 421). While some of the individual European powers are likely to remain in the top rankings of world economic output and military spending well into the current century, the gulf between them and the largest five actors – China, India, the United States, Brazil and Russia – is projected to grow (Renard, 2009; Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003: p. 9). Moreover, the position and standing of the European powers relative to a ream of smaller powers – such as Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, South Africa – is also projected to decline (O’Neill, 2007: p. 149). These rising powers are giving considerable attention to their political and economic reach over geography, not only their domestic territories, but the world beyond them. As a former Belgian Representative to the European Union Military Committee has pointed out, Europeans cannot therefore continue to play ping pong while the rest of the world engages

in chess (Coelmont, cited in: Biscop, 2009: p. 12). The time has come for the European Union and its Member States to give far greater attention to the geography of European power, both on the domestic and international planes. Only by working together will Europeans remain dominant and retain the means to protect themselves and exert influence over other parts of the world, in line with their values and interests.

To be sure, and much like other political communities, the European Union's future success will depend on the homogeneity and integrated capacity of its domestic territory. Europeans will therefore need to think harder about how to 'shrink' geographic space and time across their entire continental area – from the border with Belarus to the Atlantic seaboard, and from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean – to make their economy progressively more efficient and productive, with an ever-increasing yield. At the very least, a dense lattice of high speed railways should be planned at the European level to link together the principal cities and manufacturing centres, synthesizing, building on, and wherever possible, accelerating existing programmes in the Member States. Not only will this curtail carbon emissions by reducing the need for intra-European air transport, but it will also make the European economy more dynamic by cutting transportation times and opening up previously isolated regions.<sup>14</sup> High speed railways should be supplemented with a pan-European motorway network similar in size and scope to the United States' Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defence Highways. Given the existing and intricate networks in many of the Member States, this could be constituted through general motorway reclassification across the continent, allied to the extension of the system to the newer Member States to the east. A common European energy policy will also be necessary, bringing together enhanced energy pipeline and electricity transmission systems, renewable energy sources and centralized research and development funding at the European level. Based on new powers provided by the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Commission has already drawn up an initial strategy with a series of proposals to enhance the autonomy, number of sources and efficiency of European energy supply systems.<sup>15</sup> This will ensure that Europeans cannot be held to ransom by the economic or political whims of a foreign power, particularly Russia.

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14. For a range of maps and visual indicators showing accessibility to various regions within the European Union and the economic impact of a lack of accessibility, see: European Spatial Planning Observation Network (2006: esp. pp. 34-42).

15. The delivery of a common European energy policy could cost in excess of €1 trillion. But, according to the European Commission, a failure to deliver such a policy could be disastrous, especially as competition breaks out for dwindling supplies of oil and gas. As it points out: 'Energy is the lifeblood of our society' (2010: p. 2).

Increasing the efficacy of the European economic space dovetails with the need to extend European political and economic leverage into the proximal belt of countries that surround this zone. As the economy of the European Union is geared towards the export of high-tech manufactured goods and financial services, Europeans are among the most trade dependent people in the world with approximately ninety percent of imports and exports travelling by water (European Commission, 2006: pp. 1-2). And due to the ‘just in time’ approach taken by modern container shipping corporations, Europeans are particularly vulnerable to short term and long term seaborne transportation disruption (Willett, 2008). Indeed, Europeans depend on unfettered access to the open ocean – part of the ‘global commons’ – which have been kept open since World War II by American naval power (Posen, 2003). However, the rise of new economic and political powers over the past decade and their adoption of new geostrategies has opened up a number of new fissures and fault lines across and around much of Eurasia, such as in the Caucasus, the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea. Given that certain powers have sought to take advantage of key regions and entrench themselves – often to the disadvantage of others – the European Union should do more to ascertain the minimal geographic area required to sustain the continued expansion of its own economy. From a geopolitical perspective, this zone would have to meet five criteria:

1. It would have to hold all the basic resources necessary to fuel European manufacturing needs and future industrial requirements;
2. Contain all the key trade routes, especially energy transmission pipelines and maritime shipping routes, from other regions to the European homeland;
3. Have the fewest possible geopolitical afflictions that could lead to the area’s disintegration and thereby harm future European economic development;
4. Show the least likelihood of significant encroachment by powerful foreign actors, relative to its importance to the European economy and geopolitical interests;
5. Represent an area the European Union can work towards defending most cost-effectively through the expansion of the Common Security and Defence Policy – in other words, without mandating an excessive and draining defence effort.

In what regions, then, should this new geography of European power be anchored, inculcated and sustained? At the very least, Map 1 shows that the European Union depends on unfettered access through a vast, adjacent zone that includes the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Russia, the Caucasus and much of Central Asia, the Arctic region, the northern half of Africa, all of the Middle East, as well as the Indian Ocean and South East Asia. This ‘Grand Area’ contains most of the resources needed by the European economy; all of the key

maritime shipping routes from Asia, Australasia, Africa and the Middle East; all of the energy transmission pipelines – current and future – from Russia, Central Asia and North Africa; all of the countries in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods covered by the Eastern Partnership and Mediterranean structures; several of the European Union’s outermost regions and a chain of European overseas military installations.<sup>16</sup> Likely to become progressively more important in the coming decades, this zone is the minimal space needed for the assured and effective functioning of the European Union’s economy, as well as the maintenance of a geopolitical balance of power that favours democratic interests.

What is clear is that the future success and integration of the ‘Grand Area’ will depend on intense collaboration between the European Union and the United States. The recalibration of America’s geostrategic leverage towards East and South East Asia means that a power vacuum may open up in the western half of Eurasia, not only in Europe itself, but also in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Middle East and the western sector of the Indian Ocean (where the United States has long been dominant) (see: Simón and Rogers, 2010). This is the space – coterminous with the ‘Grand Area’ – where Europeans will be forced and expected to fill with their influence: forced, because their security will depend on it; expected, because the United States will need European aid in maintaining a favourable balance of power in Western Eurasia as it is drawn towards stabilizing Eastern Eurasia and the Pacific rim. In this respect, the European Union should give *far* greater attention to its ‘strategic partnership’ with India, the country best placed, geopolitically and ideologically, to assist with the management of the ‘Grand Area’. The European Union should make India a truly *strategic* priority and provide New Delhi with sufficient investment to intensify the country’s economic and industrial modernization. In particular, European expertise and funding should be freed up for India’s extensive National Highways Development Project, which aims to integrate the Sub-Continent more effectively and extend Indian influence over neighbouring countries.<sup>17</sup>

At one and the same time, the European Union should seek to extend and refine its ‘strategic partnerships’ with smaller powers in the ‘Grand Area’, especially future energy suppliers and transit nations, such as Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iraq, which are likely to feed or host the Nabucco gas pipeline. Countries in geopolitically significant locations along European trade routes or

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16. The concept of a ‘Grand Area’ was first developed in an American context by the Council on Foreign Relations (1941).

17. India has the ambition of building twenty kilometres of road per day to underpin its economic modernization. At present, due to lacking funds, political inertia and engineering capacity, this goal may not be reached. European input into this project would build up India’s economic wealth, bring goodwill and provide Europeans with a more geostrategically capable partner. For a brief overview of the road-building programme, see: Upadhyay (2010).

near the ‘strategic chokepoints’, like Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates, the Maldives and Singapore, warrant a position as European Union ‘strategic partners’ due to their potential as guardians of their neighbourhoods. And states that are likely to be pressured by larger foreign powers into closer relations with them, particularly if this draws them away from the European Union, should also be given further attention.

Finally, to remain credible, and to prevent the disintegration of their own system, the European Union’s Member States will have to integrate, develop and refine their military assets – especially naval capabilities and long-range and unmanned combat aircraft – far more rapidly and effectively over the next two decades than they have over the last. In particular, new overseas military installations may be required, especially in those areas where new energy transmission pipelines from foreign gas fields and commercial distribution routes from distant manufacturing centres are built to supply the European economy. Accordingly, as Map 1 shows, new European military stations may be required in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Arctic region, and along the coastlines of the Indian Ocean. The intention behind these installations would be to contribute to a comprehensive ‘forward presence’: firstly, by representing – *à la* Mahan – a certain determination on the part of the European Union to exercise a latent but permanent power within the ‘Grand Area’; secondly, by exerting a calming influence throughout the zone to encourage expectations of peaceful change on the part of local governments; and finally, to discourage the encroachment of larger external powers into the region, whose intentions may be predatory and/or antithetical to the European agenda and the general peace.<sup>18</sup>

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18. For a succinct discussion of the concept of ‘forward presence’, albeit from an American perspective, see: Fullenkamp (1994).



## CONCLUSION

Geography and geopolitics have often been neglected in European foreign and security policy. This is a mistake. The rising powers of the twenty-first century have already begun to integrate their homelands more effectively and chart the regions where their own geographic and geopolitical interests lay. The European Union's future is dependent on the adoption of a truly comprehensive and preventative approach, which fuses together civilian and military assets for permanent power projection into the regions most vital to the maintenance of European prosperity and the democratic way of life. These regions – forming the 'Grand Area' – should be placed at the centre of a new European geostrategy, whose aim should be to lock as many countries in that area under European influence as possible. It should go without saying that this approach should not be a militarist or aggressive strategy, but should rather be subtle, gradual and firm. Insofar as European military power is deployed – and it *must* be – it should be used passively: knowledge of its existence on the part of foreign governments should count for more than its active use. Ultimately, a new European geostrategy should be guided by three simple and over-riding objectives: preventing hostile forces from coming together by drawing them all closer to European preferences; encouraging smaller, surrounding countries and those along European maritime and territorial communication lines to work with the European Union to enhance the security of all; and maximise the dynamic power of the European homeland, by investing heavily into communications infrastructure necessary to mitigate geographical impediment and increase economic efficiency. Meeting these objectives should enable the mapping of a new geography of European power, one that contributes to the European Union's economic leverage and political authority, while simultaneously increasing the security and prosperity of the European citizenry.



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