Geography and International Studies: the Foundations

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Geography’s Core Concepts

Within the social sciences and humanities, disciplines are separately identified by a combination of their subject matter and how this is studied. Geography is a broad discipline, straddling the natural sciences as well as the other two (Bonnett, 2008; Matthews and Herbert, 2008). However, its concerns cohere around a small number of core concepts – environment, place, space, and scale – which are introduced here. Having outlined those four concepts, their importance is exemplified with sections on competition for environmental resources and the importance of territoriality as a strategy for its management, on imperialism and international conflict, on place-making within the world state system, and on current global environmental issues. All illustrate the essay’s core argument, that the study of international relations must be built on geographical foundations.

Environment

Environment is the foundation on which places are built and spaces organised. It has many meanings in everyday usage; its employment here refers to the earth’s surface, sub-surface, and atmosphere, which together provide the basis for all life. The environment, either directly or indirectly, is the source of all resources – vegetable, animal and mineral – deployed by individuals not only to sustain everyday lives but also to provide the raw materials transformed into the wide range of consumption items prized within contemporary societies. The environment has always been, and is now increasingly, a focus of competition and conflict. As either resources become more prized or demand outstrips supply, competition over them is exacerbated.

Competition for and conflict over environmental resources has increased as human societies have modified the environment to their own ends – so much so that in many parts of the world virtually all of the environment has been very substantially modified anthropogenically (Thomas, 1956; Turner et al., 1990). Early hunter and gatherer societies realized part of the potential available in locally-accessible resources. Some occupied fixed locations and were able – at least for relatively substantial periods of time – to sustain themselves, and perhaps even expand, on the available resource base. Others were migratory, at different temporal and spatial scales, realizing what they could and then moving on when the available, known resources were exhausted. In many cases, the abandoned resources self-resuscitated
over time allowing people to return and once again enjoy their fruits. Some resources are not renewable, however; once used they can never be replenished and alternatives have to be found – either other locations where the same resource is available or alternative resources which can be used for the same, or a similar, function. There is, of course, no deterministic relationship between the nature of a resource and how it is realized – or even if it is identified as such. As geographers have long argued, the environment offers opportunities, some of which might be realized by different groups in similar situations in very different ways whereas others may be ignored by some whilst capitalized on by others.

Increasingly societies became fixed in their location, in part because inter-group competition for environmental resources limited the possibility of moving to new areas once a territory’s resources were exhausted. They had to ensure either that the local environment continued to meet their needs or that they could do so from other locations, through either trade or some form of appropriation. This, almost invariably, involved transforming their local environment, which took two main forms. By far the most widespread was experimenting with practices to make the environment more productive by changing it, perhaps in ways that ensured it could never be returned to its former condition. Such changes included clearance of woodland and forest, replacing them with a plant cover that could either provide food for grazing animals, in turn used as a source of food and/or other products for human consumption, or be harvested and transformed into foodstuffs or the raw materials for a range of products (Darby, 1951; Hoskins, 1955; Williams, 2003). They also involved the draining of wetlands and the engineering of water courses to improve land productivity (Cosgrove and Petts, 1990); indeed many early, non-European, ‘civilizations’ were based on autocratic control of water resources and were termed ‘hydraulic civilizations/empires’ (Wittfogel, 1957). Such humanized landscapes came to dominate and the ‘natural’ disappeared; humans so appreciated what they found in the environment that they substantially modified it to increase their satisfaction (Sack, 2001).

Landscape change was often irremediable. As civilizations progressed, other types of change were wrought. Raw materials for an increasing range of products were extracted, leaving nothing in their place, as with the mining of coal, iron ore and a wide range of other minerals. And increasing segments of the landscape were covered by buildings so that – although the activities within some of them involved production – the land beneath was no itself longer a basis for productive activity. As urbanization gathered pace the proportion of the land surface it occupied increased and that remaining to sustain human life was reduced, putting greater strains on efforts to make it even more productive.

Human-induced environmental changes involve more than altering its appearance and extracting some of its parts (Blaikie, 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). There are inputs as well as outputs. Early changes included sustaining and enhancing yields by, for example, adding manure. Many inputs have resulted in detrimental changes – or pollution. Some were immediate, others emerged much later, as with land salination consequent on irrigation and the impact of CFCs on the ozone layer. Both land and air have received increasingly large volumes of waste matter; some have a negative but nevertheless reversible impact but others have been sources of permanent damage. In using the environment to sustain and enhance their lives and
livelihoods, therefore, human societies may have had the opposite effect; an expanding proportion – not only of the land and its resource base but also the oceans and the atmosphere – is either no longer available or its productivity has declined. What were once renewable resources have been at least substantially removed from the productive process, whilst as the demand for non-renewable resources increased and the search for alternative sources became increasingly difficult other bases for production became difficult.

All of these changes have become increasingly problematic as the world’s population growth and demands on environmental resources have expanded at ever faster rates, with higher levels of consumption generating increased pressures on the environment (as predicted by Thomas Malthus: Dupâquier, 2001). In an ideal market economy, these changes in supply and demand should not only have an impact through the price mechanism but also stimulate investment in the search for alternatives – ways of making the environment even more productive to sustain ever more people at ever-higher living standards. But the market mechanism is increasingly characterized by failure in this area; as the price of oil rose in 2008, for example, those firms/countries that continued to extract it at a cost of c.$10 a barrel gained a large economic rent relative to those extracting it at six or more times that cost.

Place

Making, re-making, and sometimes de-making, places is central to human activity (Cresswell, 2004). The processes partly involve transformations of the physical environment, whereby different types of change, based on different resource foundations, result in different landscapes/townscapes. But many other processes are involved. The result is a mosaic of places with separate identifying characteristics – what geographers have long called regions.

The regions geographers study comprise much more than a mosaic of landscape types. Places are characterized not only by how they look but also by the people who occupy them and who vary in some of their characteristics, often very substantially and in a myriad complex ways. Thus, as pioneering French geographers argued, regions can be characterized by their genres de vie – the ways in which local people organize their lives, built upon the resources realized from the physical landscape (Buttimer, 1971). These reflect not only the ability of the soil to sustain certain crops and/or livestock combinations but also locational characteristics, such as site and situation; what is done somewhere depends not only on what is there but also where it is.

Human societies, at all scales, have a wide range of identifying features marking them off from others; some are major differences, others are variations in detail rather than kind. Among the former, for example, are language, religion and other belief systems, household and family structures, land ownership arrangements, the arts, music and other types of popular culture, and forms of government (Todd, 1985, 1987). All such cultural traits evolve over time – usually slowly, occasionally rapidly. Many emerged when societies were small and largely isolated from their neighbors, with anthropological evidence suggesting that 150 was the average population of a place (or community) for many centuries (Dunbar, 2009). Over time,
however, contact – some forced, some voluntary – between societies (usually, but not necessarily, neighboring) stimulated mixing and hybridization. In some cases, one society emerged as dominant and eliminated many of another’s identifying cultural features; in others, mixing and hybridization were more organic and ‘natural’. Whichever occurred, the cultural matrix was, and remains, ever-changing.

Cultures also change through their own internal dynamics, partly in response to changing patterns of production and consumption. Language evolves to reflect modern needs – new words to describe new things, new ideas, new concepts etc. (It was announced in June 2008 that the millionth different word in the English language had been identified.) Attitudes and behavior change, along with belief systems and family and household structures. The world’s cultural mosaic is never fixed.

At large scales, a small number of cultures now dominates the global map, albeit in far from straightforward ways. Thus a few religions claim the allegiance of a large proportion of the world’s population, although with considerable internal variations – each with its own geography. Many belief systems have either died out or been extinguished, however, as have a myriad languages. But others remain and sustain a still very complex map despite a growing convergence.

These cultural milieux – places, or locales – are not only the outcomes of social, economic, political and other processes operating over generations if not centuries of cultural evolution and also the contexts within which people are socialized; they also form the arena within which further changes emerge, adding layers to the cultural geographical palimpsests (what Giddens, 1984, termed structuration). We learn attitudes and behavior patterns from exemplars encountered in personal milieux. The homes in which children are raised, for example, provide most of the role models on which they draw early in their lives when developing their personalities and identities – by observation, imitation and inculcation. As their activity spaces widen, they encounter more, and more varied, exemplars – in neighborhoods and schools, other’s homes, cultural arena and associated organizations, workplaces etc. Some reinforce those already encountered – to some extent they are chosen (by parents) to do so, as with selection of schools and urban residential environments. Others offer alternatives – some quite similar to those already encountered and adopted/adapted; some very different. Thus as people follow their life paths through different places (what Hägerstrand, 1976, 1982, termed time geography), they may change as a result of their encounters, while at the same time stimulating change in others, as part of a continuous structuration process.

Two maps of the world have so far been identified – of the world’s physical environment and of its cultural milieux – recognizing that both can be drawn at a range of scales, or levels of resolution: large-scale general patterns contain many local variations. Integrating the two produces a map of the world’s places. The defining characteristics of some reflect more strongly on one of those maps rather than others. The prime distinction is between urban and rural areas, with the physical environment a more potent immediate influence on the latter. Places differ, and because they differ people differ – and vice versa.

Space
Human imprint on the earth’s surface has involved not only transforming the ‘natural’ environment and creating places but also imprinting onto both a spatial structure within which societies – increasingly global in their scope – operate. The foundation for that spatial structuring is interaction. Early societies were almost invariably small and self-contained; means of sustenance were derived from the immediate environment and there was little – if any – contact with societies elsewhere. Over millennia, and especially the last few centuries, that isolated self-sufficiency has disappeared for all but a very small number of societies and a tiny minority of the world’s population. The great majority of places are no longer self-sufficient, though the degree of self-sufficiency varies with scale: France is more self-sufficient than Nice, the European Union more so than France. Sustenance now depends on trade – exporting goods and services in order to pay for those that have to be imported because the home society produces them in insufficient quantities (if at all) to meet its own needs. Increasingly, too, trade depends on other forms of movement – of investment and people, for example. Over time, larger areas have become more integrated economically until, some argue, the trend towards globalization widely identified as characteristic of the last few decades means that virtually the entire earth’s surface is now integrated into a single global economic system (Dicken, 2007; Johnston et al., 2002).

The nature of that spatial structure can be synthesized by separately identifying three major features which are interlocked parts of integrated wholes (as in Haggett, 1965). The first are the nodes, points such as a market places where buyers and sellers congregate for transactions. Such arrangements may occur at prescribed times only – the remnants of weekly markets, for example – or they may be permanent meeting places where trade occurs on most days, in which case the settlement almost certainly has a resident population servicing the trading function (perhaps including some processing of goods); the market place becomes a town. Some towns grow more than others: some serve larger, more prosperous hinterlands; others develop major manufacturing and/or processing facilities and high-level service industries. The result is a geography of settlements of varying sizes and functions.

Interaction depends on movements, particularly of goods and people, which require transport systems – networks plus vehicles. Most networks are fixed and expensive to install and maintain – roads, railways, canals (including canalized natural waterways) etc. Others – such as oceanic shipping lanes and air routes – have no defined trajectory linking the nodes at their end-points, although marine and aircraft movements are increasingly regulated into prescribed corridors for safety and other reasons.

Finally, there are territories, divisions of the earth’s surface into formally-defined segments, many with designated boundaries (Storey, 2001; Delaney, 2004). These vary in scale from the individual room in a home defined as somebody’s territory over which they claim control, if not exclusive use, to a country. In between are others – individual homes, for example, many with designated separate portions of surrounding land; fields within which animals are penned and crops grown; various land-holdings; administrative authorities such as towns and counties etc. Many have emerged in parallel with the growth of capitalism and market trading based on private property, of which land is one of the most important components.
One of these territorial constructions – spatial containers impressed on the world map – of particular relevance here is the nation state. Many argue that a state – or some equivalent body – is necessary to capitalism’s survival, because it exercises powers of control and regulation without which that mode of production would eventually collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions (despite a range of strategies – some of them spatial – deployed to prevent that outcome: Harvey, 1982). Further, many argue that to operate the state needs to deploy territoriality strategies, dividing space into exclusive units over which it exercises sovereign power. This aspect of geography, the spatial structuring of the earth’s surface into a world of containers, is central to modern societies’ operations. (Initially only the land surface and internal waters were claimed as components of a state’s territory, but increasingly the marine environment is implicated too with states claiming exclusive control – generally recognized internationally – of oceanic space within 200 miles of their coastlines; the growing use of air power has similarly led states to claim and exercise exclusive control over the space above their territories.)

Linking individuals to territories not only provides them with an identity – frequently exaggerated through nationalist and similar agenda; it also provides the state apparatus with a regulating mechanism. Because territories are bounded their extent can be readily communicated, but much more importantly boundaries can also be used to depersonalize the exercise of power; relationships between controller and controlled can be represented as ‘the law of the land’ rather than ‘this is what I tell you to do’. Territoriality, according to Sack (1986, 216-219; see also Vasudevan et al., 2008) is thus:

The basic geographic expression of influence and power … an essential link between society, space and time. Territoriality is the backcloth of geographical context – it is the device through which people construct and maintain spatial organizations … [It] is not an instinct or a drive, but rather a complex strategy to affect, influence, and control access to people, things and relationships. … A society, simply as a complex organization, will need territoriality to coordinate efforts, specify responsibilities, and prevent people from getting in each other’s way … [it] is not only a means of creating and maintaining order, but it is a device to create and maintain much of the geographic context through which we experience the world and give it meaning.

*Scale*

Scale’s role as a key geographical concept has already been noted. In common usage, the concept usually refers to cartographic scale – a large-scale map is one that covers a considerable area, whereas a small-scale map presents local detail. (In some technical usage, however, a large-sale map covers a small area and vice versa.) Although cartographic scale is formally mathematically precise, much usage is less exact. Thus there are often discussions of, say, global scale, regional scale, and local scale. The intention is the same – to distinguish areas of different magnitude.

In some geographical work, scale is linked to non-cartographic conceptions. One such is Taylor’s (1982) conception of the political economy of scale. He identifies three main scales: the *scale of experience*, which is the most local and refers to the relatively constrained action space within which most individuals play out their
daily lives; the scale of reality, which in the modern world is the global (or virtually so) economic system; and, in between those two, the scale of justification, comprising the spatially-defined elements (usually though not always bounded nation-states) within which an ideology of the scale of reality is formulated and presented. The world-economy is globally organized, locally experienced, and regionally regulated.

One feature of this and many other conceptions of scale is that it is hierarchically organized; one level nests within a larger one, much like a Russian matryoshka doll. Most hierarchies are social constructions created to simplify territoriality strategies and to structure institutions – as with levels of government in many countries (local, federal and national, for example) as well as private organizations (parishes, deaneries, archdeaconries, dioceses and archdioceses in the Church of England).

**Geographical Dimensions**

This outline of four fundamental geographical concepts – environment, place and space, with all three decomposable into a variety of spatial scales – provides a matrix for exploring many aspects of society. Much of the discussion so far has been phrased in economic terms: the environment is the ultimate source of human sustenance, people have created places to realize that potential, and a spatial structure has been erected within which the interactions necessary to extended sustenance can be organized. But although sustenance and, under capitalism, economic interactions are foundational to contemporary societies the spatial structure encompasses much more than economic dimensions; cultural, social and political elements of society are also part of this spatially-structured organizational matrix (Johnston, 1991).

Spatially-defined communities’ relationships with their environment are reflected in aspects of their culture, not just elements directly linked to winning a livelihood from the earth (such as landholding and inheritance arrangements) but also many others – such as their language (some societies have many words for snow, others for heat), religion, rituals, and holidays. As trading among communities becomes more complex social arrangements develop to reflect and accommodate them, such as class systems. Finally – and in the current context most importantly – political systems are constructed to manage conflicts within and between societies.

Each place has not only its particular means of organizing human-nature inter-relationships, therefore, but also its cultural norms, social arrangements and political structures. Almost all are spatially situated, although not necessarily associated with clearly-demarcated territories; many, at best, have fuzzy boundaries. Nor are their elements fixed: cultural norms, social arrangements, and political structures continually change, sometimes as responses to changing economic and other circumstances, in others as a result of inter-place contacts. The world is in continual flux, including its geographies.

**Environmental Conflict, States and Spatial Structuring**

Expanded demands, reflecting both population growth and increased living standards, have stimulated competition and conflict over environmental resources. One management strategy to regulate this involves a growing role and importance for the
territorially-defined state. Its rationale is illustrated through the linked metaphors of the tragedy of the commons and the prisoner’s dilemma. (On the tragedy of the commons, see Laver, 1984; on the prisoner’s dilemma, Taylor, 1987; Poundstone, 1992.) The former depicts a potentially emerging situation if the environment is treated as a free resource, which all can seek to realize (Hardin, 1968). An example of a commons is a relatively small block of land on which a defined group of households can graze animals. As the number released onto the land increases the law of diminishing returns sets in, with each extra animal producing a marginally smaller yield (of milk, say), thereby reducing the average productivity of all animals. Eventually the commons’ carrying capacity is reached, from which point each additional animal grazed there generates a reduction in gross as well as average productivity. Adding further animals is thus counter-productive, but unless this is regulated no one animal-owner will voluntarily stop increasing herd size, since each extra animal generates a marginal additional yield for its owner – a slightly larger proportion of a diminishing total; the average may be reduced, but the individual placing the extra animal on the commons increases her/his relative share. If one commoner adds another animal, therefore, others will feel obliged to follow, otherwise their gross return will fall. And all the while the commons’ productivity declines until, potentially, it is entirely eroded.

Each individual pursuing her or his own interests beyond a certain limit is therefore acting contrary to the collective long-term interest; the latter is best served by an (equitable?) restriction on the number of animals allowed to graze on the commons. That can be brought about, as the classic prisoner’s dilemma ‘game’ illustrates, through collaboration – which however may not readily be achieved. In a small group of commoners a voluntary agreement to limit grazing may be reached (Ostrom, 1990). It is one thing for an agreement to be finalized, however; for it to work it has to be sustainable. In a small group the internal dynamic may ensure this; nobody is prepared to break ranks because of the opprobrium and sanctions this may generate. Failure to conform is much more likely in larger societies, where it is in an individual’s interest either to decline to join the voluntary agreement or, having done so, to contravene it and graze more animals than permitted (Olson, 1977). If one opts out, others will almost certainly follow, generating the tragedy of the commons, in which free-riding dominates.

Implementing any contractual agreement that will sustain the commons requires trust. If this is absent, an alternative mechanism which will ensure compliance has to be invented; that alternative – according to many arguments – is the creation of an apparently non-partisan body which will if necessary broker the agreement (or contract), police it and, if it is broken, enforce sanctions. Such a body needs power to demand compliance. The type of organization that has emerged to exercise such power is the state, which – initially through the imposition of power by one group on others – has both taken to itself and been recognized as the only apparatus that can, through its claimed and respected monopoly of certain types of violence, require certain types of behavior and outlaw others. That monopoly is sustained by a necessary characteristic of all states – their territorial definition. All contemporary states are not only spatially bounded – identifying the area wherein their sovereignty holds sway – but that geographical defining characteristic is also recognized by other states; each recognizes all others’ rights to predominate within their own territories, thereby securing its own.
Within its sovereign territory, the state apparatus can use territoriality strategies in exercising its powers. In some environmental conflicts such as those represented by the tragedy of the commons, their resolution may involve further spatial structuring. The territory may be divided into smaller spatial containers, for example (as with the enclosure movement in much of Western Europe: Chapman and Seeliger, 2001), within which individual or collective owners have certain powers, including the ability to exclude others and use the land as they see fit. (This is subject, in most cases, to the state’s role in promoting the general good, which, when not exercised arbitrarily, can be used to limit individual freedoms – as with land-use planning.) Landowners lack the ultimate power, the use of violence to defend their ‘private space’, however, because this is retained by the state apparatus which, in return for the owners’ loyalty and support (not least through taxation), enacts and implements laws protecting their rights to occupy and, within limits, use their territory as they wish. (In some countries such as the USA, of course, the right to bear and use arms is constitutionally enshrined, whereas in others – such as the UK – courts have recently recognized the rights of individuals to use violent means to protect their persons and property.)

The creation of private property rights is a crucial foundation of the capitalist mode of production and actions such as enclosure of common lands and granting them to prescribed owners have been at the core of capitalism’s success, not only in long-settled countries such as the UK but also those – such as Australia and the USA – where the land has only relatively recently been appropriated from its indigenous occupiers and transferred/sold to capitalist owners. Contemporary capitalism is indeed built on property ownership, on the division of the environment into a complex mosaic of territorial containers within which wealth can be realized from natural resources, other wealth created, and the various proceeds consumed. That mosaic is not fixed: property can be bought and sold, or transferred in other ways, thereby changing not only the map of territorial containers but also, potentially, the map of places linked to those bounded spaces and the spatial structure which provides the coherence for economic operations. Changing the geography is part of economic development and change, and is inextricably linked to social, cultural and political changes too.

Some changes to the geography are, in the long-term at least, counter-productive. Contest over space between nation-states has frequently been stimulated by the ‘desire’ to expand one state’s environmental resource base – for example, to sustain the economic autarchies sought by German and Japanese governments in the 1930s and 1940s which were a major cause of the Second World War. Increasingly the wars generated by those conflicts have involved substantial alterations to the environment – unlike earlier conflicts after which the land fought over could be returned to its former uses. The development of weapons of mass destruction from the Second World War onwards resulted in not only the devastation of many townscapes – epitomized by the bombing of Dresden in February 1945 followed by the fire-bombing of many Japanese cities and then the dropping of the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of that year. Non-urban areas have also been targeted, as with the bombing of dykes and use of Agent Orange by US forces as a defoliant in Vietnam in the 1960s (Lacoste, 1973) – which had major impacts on human health too – and the destruction of the Tigris-Euphrates wetlands occupied by
the Marsh Arabs after 1991. Denying access to environmental resources – even if this means their destruction – is an increasingly common form of contemporary warfare: environmental change is a consequence of environmental conflict.

The World of States, Imperialism and the World of Conflict

Although territorially-bounded state apparatus have a long history in some parts of the world, the industrial and national revolutions which led to their predominance over the entire earth’s surface are relatively recent. Bringing most of that area into the territorial state system was very much a nineteenth-century project – exemplified by the ‘Scramble for Africa’ (Pakenham, 1991).

That ‘scramble’ represented the apogee of imperialism, whereby individual states competed – often involving violence between and within nations – to control areas of the earth’s surface which previously were either outwith the capitalist state system or occupied and controlled by relatively weak states. Just as there was competition for more land within states, with successful capitalists able to remove weaker owners through the market system, so states competed to expand their territories in order that they – or, more precisely, individual capitalists domiciled within their ‘home’ territory (such as the Dutch East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company, which were ‘licensed’ to deploy territoriality strategies) – could gain control over larger areas, their resources (actual, potential or believed to be potential), and their markets (again, often potential). Whereas some territories were appropriated (in many cases in the name of the sovereign ruler of the ‘colonial power’) almost irrespective of their resource potential, many were not. Indeed, some formal incorporations into an imperial sphere of influence did not occur until their resource potential was apparent. A few areas are still largely outwith any such influence for that reason, notably Antarctica. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty designated the continent as a reserve where scientists had freedom to conduct research and all military activity was banned (despite much of it having been claimed by individual countries); later amendments protected wildlife there and precluded any exploration for or exploitation of mineral reserves (Triggs, 1987).

This territorial imperialism characterized a number of European powers – notably the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and later France and Germany – which sought dominion over large segments of America, Africa and Asia; others – such as Belgium and Italy – were largely excluded from this contest, but managed to claim smaller areas as falling within their domain. (The Belgian Congo was for a long time the personal possession of the king – Leopold I – rather than a national colony.) These colonies were ruled from afar with segments of the home country’s elite seconded there for a period, and with many incorporating local elite elements to facilitate their rule. The sought-for hegemony was frequently challenged and resistance had to be subdued. The challenges became increasing difficult to contain, however, and the imperial powers suffered from over-stretch (Kennedy, 1988). Their resources were insufficient to allow a successful response and they were forced to yield territorial control to residents, some of whom were descendants of populations whose lands had been appropriated but others were settlers who had permanently moved there, and/or their descendants. Some colonies – notably in the Americas – were yielded up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the imperial project continued elsewhere.
The culmination of territorial imperialism occurred in the first half of the twentieth century when Germany and Japan captured, and then lost, very substantial separate areas of territory within which to promote their economic, cultural and political goals. The Germans had sought lebensraum for their cultural group, within which they intended to establish economic autarchy (Dickinson, 1943), and the Japanese aimed to establish a co-prosperity sphere in eastern Asia which would also be relatively self-sufficient economically. They were opposed by the two main remaining colonial powers – France and the United Kingdom – and the two largest but non-colonial powers – the USSR and the USA. Victory exacerbated over-stretch for the British and French, and the rapid dismemberment of their empires rapidly ensued.

Meanwhile, the other two main victorious powers established new forms of hegemony. The USSR followed in some ways a typical territorial imperialism strategy, incorporating other countries within its sphere of influence where for several decades a non-capitalist mode of production held sway, along with a unique set of social, political and cultural arrangements sustained by Soviet political and military power enacted through local cadres. The USA, for its part, sought economic, political and cultural hegemony over as many of the world’s countries as possible, while simultaneously resisting the USSR’s expansion, by a new form of capitalist imperialism (Smith, 2003; Harvey, 2003). After some small experiments with territorial imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American governments rejected this strategy, and, as far as they could, sought to limit its use by all other countries too. After the Second World War reconstruction of the British and French empires was thus not just opposed; rather their dismantling was positively encouraged. (This was exemplified in 1956, when the British and French colluded with the Israelis in an invasion of Egypt aimed at capturing the Suez Canal which had recently been nationalized by the Egyptian government; they were forced to withdraw when the United States threatened to cut off all economic aid to the UK; Kyle, 2003.) Formal territorial aggrandizement was off the agenda, and much effort and resources were spent resisting Russian expansionism, largely through an extremely expensive (and potentially disastrous) arms race in which the potential for overstretch (insufficient resources to meet all of the demands made) was large, along with military assistance to (sometimes involving partial occupation of and conflict within) states, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, where the perceived threat of Russian expansion was great. The USSR and the states in its sphere of influence succumbed first in the unsustainable arms race, and a large portion of the earth’s surface and population was reincorporated into the capitalist domain.

American-led late-twentieth century capitalist imperialism involved neither territorial aggrandizement nor wars for territory, therefore. Instead, during its rapid climb to global hegemony through the twentieth century, the USA’s strategy involved bringing countries within the orbit of (American- dominated) capitalism through integrating an ever-growing proportion of the world’s states into a single economic system established at Bretton Woods, NH, in 1944. As that capitalist imperative became ever more dominant, social and cultural differences were to some extent eroded – as too were political variations. Successive US governments argued that democracy was a necessary foundation to free-market operations, wealth accumulation and widespread prosperity and they imposed democratic structures on
other types of regime — although occasionally being prepared to tolerate non-democratic state apparatus, for example to keep the Soviet competitor at bay (as in Chile) or to sustain access to a major resource (as in Saudi Arabia).

Recent decades have seen capitalist imperialism reconfigured with new strategies designed to advance American hegemony. Neo-liberal globalization has been promoted as the means to ensure continued wealth accumulation (Harvey, 2005). It is associated with claims for the primacy of the market plus a much reduced role for the state compared to earlier decades (the so-called ‘Washington consensus’: Santiso, 2004); the state’s basic roles are reduced (in the rhetoric at least) to ensuring sound money, defending private property, making sure that contractual obligations are met, and ensuring border security (a ‘free economy and a strong state’: Gamble, 1988; Harvey, 2007). International institutions – such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – have been co-opted into this project to ensure that an increasing number of countries accept the imperatives, with their economies and public sectors restructured accordingly, often during and after major financial and/or economic shocks generating working (and often middle) class distress (Klein, 2007).

This use of financial and political instruments to promote capitalist imperialism, linked to the disappearance of territorial imperialism, has not meant abandoning the use of physical violence to promote continued wealth accumulation. There have been armed incursions into, and occasionally ‘temporary’ occupations of, sovereign state territories in order to ensure that the right path is chosen (Perkins and Neumayer, 2009), as with Iraq in the first decade of the twenty-first century which was occupied and regime-change imposed in order to secure access to a vital resource for continued capitalist prosperity – oil (Harvey, 2003, 2005). Such occupations and other military interventions have attracted the term ‘resource wars’ – armed conflicts focused on the pursuit and/or possession of critical materials (le Billon, 2004, 2007).

Contemporary geopolitical practice therefore comprises a relatively new form of imperialism involving a revised role in promoting wealth-generation for the state apparatus. The state was previously a major player in the economic system, not least through state-owned industries and other enterprises. It is now more of a facilitator, providing a necessary legal foundation for the operation of global markets and ensuring social and cultural superstructures that enable markets to operate as unfettered as possible in some ways while still constrained in others.

The geopolitics of capitalist and territorial imperialism differ somewhat. By the time that the former emerged there was a well-established matrix of states, a world of territorial political containers. Many were relatively new, having recently won independence from the former colonial powers. Most did so within the bounded spaces created by those powers, even though in many cases – as in Africa – their boundaries paid little regard to the preceding cultural map of places, the separate tribal groups with their own (usually not clearly demarcated) territories onto which an alien spatial structure of nodes, hierarchies and networks had been superimposed. This stimulated intra-state, intra-tribal tensions (as in Rwanda and Zimbabwe) but few attempts to rewrite the territorial map: indeed, the Organization of African States championed preservation of the colonial containers. This position may not have been challenged from outwith Africa because many parts of the continent have been marginal to the rapidly evolving capitalist imperial world, reflecting their relative
paucity of realizable resources (given their political fragility) needed to sustain prosperity elsewhere. In particular circumstances non-African geopolitical interest in the continent has been accompanied by attempted rewritings of the map, however, exemplified by two major failed attempts linked to external interests in important resources – oil in Biafra/Nigeria and copper in Katanga/Congo/Zaire. (On continued conflicts in the former, see Watts, 2004.)

Stability of the earth’s territorial division is not characteristic of other continents, however, notably Europe where the map has been redrawn in two ways over recent decades. The first involves a partial dissolution of the existing containers to promote twenty-first century neo-liberal market mechanisms through economies of scale and scope. A 60-year-plus project to create a European Union incorporating not only freedom of movement for goods, labor and capital throughout the member states, protected by common tariff and other external barriers, but also a political, economic and social infrastructure designed to promote market success and social equality has seen 27 states voluntarily yield a considerable portion of their sovereign power to a supra-state apparatus, with others applying to join the project. Achievement of the Union has involved considerable intra-state tension and resistance but the result has been a very significant redrawing of the economic-political map; within the EU’s external boundaries, internal frontiers have become much fuzzier and more permeable – especially those between the 22 states that are party to the Schengen Agreement which removes all regulation of inter-state migrations and also between the 15 (soon to be more) members of the common currency euro-zone whose monetary policy is determined by a single European Central Bank.

At the same time, however, cultural differences between the various places on which the separate states were founded have remained strong and the aggrandizement of the large economic container has been accompanied by some shattering of its internal socio-cultural containers (with the relevant political associations). Thus some states have been subdivided (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for example, with only parts of the latter as yet within the EU), and there are strong pressures elsewhere (such as the UK, France and Spain) for greater sub-state regional autonomy (if not independence) within the larger economic organization. These units have been deployed to promote cultural separatism within the economic structure: one set of (economic and political) forces is generating geopolitical responses at the large scale whereas another (socio-cultural and political) is stimulating a contrary set at the smaller scales.

This complex restructuring and layering of the political map is much more advanced in Europe (and to a lesser extent the southern fringes of the former USSR) than elsewhere. Moves towards larger economic units have been promoted in other places, with mixed success – as with growing opposition to NAFTA in the United States – but they have not proceeded as far as the European.

Both types of imperialism have been associated with particular spatial structures that incorporate nodes and networks as well as territories. The 19th-20th century British Empire, for example, was spatially structured through a network of shipping routes focused on particular pinch-points – notably the Suez and Panama Canals – and staging points – such as Cape Town; many of the latter – as with Valetta and Singapore – were major military bases from which the Empire was overseen and
controlled. And as the Empire declined during the nemesis years of territorial imperialism a similar structure based on air power, with major military bases such as Diego Garcia, was constructed.

Its rationale soon disappeared, but many of the bases were nevertheless retained for use in the era of capitalist imperialism, being deployed in strategies to sustain, particularly United States’, military oversight of globalization’s emerging spatial structure and as bases from which to launch campaigns of pacification where the commercial interests were threatened – as with the USA’s use of Diego Garcia as a forward post in the assaults on Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, despite its lack of any territorial ambitions the USA has a complex system of bases. In 1938 it had only 14 bases outwith its own borders. By the end of 1945 it had 30,000 separate military installations in 100 countries. This was rapidly reduced to only 2,000 three years later, but later expansion to sustain American hegemony within global capitalism meant that by 2004 it had over 900 separate overseas bases, employing 190,000 military personnel and 115,000 supporting civilian staff – although to some extent the value of these bases was being eroded by the development of technologies which enabled bombing raids by unmanned aircraft to be controlled from bases deep in the continental heart of the US mainland (Coker, 2004). Nor was this the sole spatial structure underpinning US capitalist imperialism; conduct of its post-9/11 ‘war on terror’ involved the creation of a network of airports and routes through which it could process its flights of extraordinary rendition whereby prisoners were transferred between jurisdictions to facilities where their human rights could be violated. (This was also the case with the camp at Guantánamo Bay, which the Bush administration paradoxically deemed was both outside United States’ territory, so that prisoners could be detained indefinitely – although Federal courts later ruled that habeas corpus applied to them – and yet at the same time placed it within the country’s territorial limits so as to allow ‘coercive interrogation’: Gregory, 2006.)

Places, States and International Relations

Many (most?) states are often termed nation-states because their populations have a separate national identity (an ‘imagined community’) linked to the state’s territory – they are geographical places as defined above. Such an identity is seen as necessary to the state apparatus successfully implementing its basic roles, which in a capitalist world are encapsulated within three major functions (as defined by O’Connor, 1972):

1. Securing a consensus from all groups within society around the mode of production and its particular local formation. This involves general acceptance of both the underlying principles on which the society operates and the state apparatus’ pursuit of order and stability within the territory it governs.
2. Sustaining and enhancing the conditions for successful reproduction, ensuring continued profit-making and wealth-accumulation by the economic elite, thereby generating support for the state and its actions among the society’s ‘capitalist fraction’ and its allies.
3. Guaranteeing social integration and the welfare of all by, for example, ensuring that all fractions of society enjoy the fruits of capitalist wealth-production and are protected from its vicissitudes.

All three are necessary and complementary, although the second and third are often in conflict. Capital requires the third role to be pursued, for example, so as to provide it with a healthy, educated workforce necessary for the second role; this, in its turn,
requires successful capitalist operations, otherwise there will be neither jobs nor wealth production to enable state support for those unable to provide for themselves. There has to be a balance between the second and the third roles without which the first goal is probably unattainable: the state has to sustain sufficient support from both of the main class fractions within capitalism – capital and labor – in order to remain viable (Cox, 2004), although Harvey (2007) argues that the neo-liberal project of the last two decades has had as its main goal the restoration of capitalist class power (see also Krugman, 2007). Failure to achieve success in the second role can stimulate what Habermas (1976: see also O’Connor, 1987) termed a rationality crisis, whereby a lack of confidence in the state’s actions results in a reduction of capital investment, with consequences for employment and individual well-being, putting increased pressure on the state apparatus fulfilling the third role. Relative failure in the latter can stimulate legitimacy crises, whereby disadvantaged groups withdraw support from the state apparatus and challenge its legitimacy. Failure at both the second and third simultaneously can generate an overall crisis of accumulation, whereby the state retains support from neither fraction of society; the likely outcome is then, at worst, collapse of the state apparatus and an anarchic condition until a new order is installed.

Although the three roles are necessary and complementary, the first is the most important. Unless the state apparatus has the support of the population resident within its territory, its ability to sustain law and order will be compromised and its ability to deliver on the other two roles in doubt. Capital – neither local nor international – is unlikely to be invested within the state’s territory if the probability of civil disturbance is high, which could hamper production and distribution and hence threaten profitability and fixed assets. Internal order within the state’s territory is a sine qua non for successful economic policies, which is why the underpinning of the state apparatus, in particular its democratic foundations, was subject to attack in several parts of the world – notably Latin America and some African and Asian countries – until relatively recently, and more recently in the newly-democratized states of the former Soviet Union and its ‘empire’ too. As Taylor argued (Taylor, 1986; see Taylor and Flint, 2000; Osei-Kwame and Taylor, 1984), failure of elected governments to fulfill expectations generated when mobilizing electoral support has stimulated a cyclical pattern of shifts in and out of democracy in some countries. A government may be elected on promises of prosperity for all, which means that it emphasizes the third state role above the second. If it succeeds, it may maintain popular support, but possibly at an increasing cost: its policies are seen as ‘too expensive’ by the capitalist fraction and threatening to wealth-creation. A nascent rationality crisis is stimulated, as support and income-generation (via taxation) from the capitalist fraction decreases so that the state is unable to fulfill its promises to working class electoral supporters. A legitimation crisis follows, and the scene is set for an accumulation crisis, as the government loses support across the class spectrum. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, a common response to this situation – especially in Latin America – was a military coup, forming a government without (explicit) popular support which followed policies designed to create a favorable environment for capitalist investment. Its rhetoric was that a non-democratic resolution of conflict was necessary for the national good, but that as prosperity was regained it would be possible to reinitiate a larger welfare state and, eventually, return to popular government via democratic procedures. In some cases, the latter was yielded without extensive popular demands: elsewhere, popular pressure on the
Military, non-democratic, intervention was a far from universal response to situations created by governments which tilted the balance too far towards one of the two roles. In India, for example, this resulted instead in the dominant political party (Congress for most of the first four post-independence decades) failing to meet the aspirations of its supporters at one election and so, at the next, mobilizing a new support base elsewhere (Taylor, 1986; Johnston and Glasmeier, 2007). In many of the countries of the former Soviet bloc since the fall of communism in 1989-1990, it has involved major changes in the party system from one election to the next. A party may win power after an election (or at least a dominant position in a coalition, given that most of their electoral systems are at least quasi-proportional) but then so fail to meet voters’ aspirations that its support disintegrates. New parties then emerge to fill the gap – and they in turn fail. Democracy is maintained – perhaps because the armed forces are too weak to intervene (as in the Ukraine in 2004-2005) – but it is unable to stimulate major improvements in economic performance and general well-being. Finally, in a number of states – most of them poor (though not exclusively, as Russia illustrates) – democracy has been sustained in a weak form only through the predominance of a single party, with contests between parties allied to the second and third of the state’s main tasks (neo-liberal and social democrat respectively) proving irrelevant to the country’s needs; at best the contest is a Schumpeterian one between contenders to manage the economy (Schumpeter, 1943).

Winning democratic support for the state apparatus is perhaps the most important means of consolidating its power and allowing it to exercise the various roles within its territory necessary to sustain and promote economic prosperity. But building a national identity and feeling of ‘belongingness’ – a national sense of place – usually involves a range of other mechanisms based around symbols such as flags, anthems, heads of state, sports teams etc. (Fahrmeir and Jones, 2008). This may be relatively superficial, because the state’s territory is largely populated by a homogeneous group on key indices such as ethnicity, language and religion. In others, however, there may be little basis for such claims of national identity because of internal fragmentation, in which case the state apparatus’ first goal must be nation-building, creating a sense of identity and acceptance of the state – its territorial definition, its apparatus, and its means of integrating its diverse parts into a coherent whole with all sections accepting their position within the larger unit. Such a process has its own geography; many countries – especially in western Europe, much of America, and Oceania – have long-settled identities and their coherence is largely unthreatened by breakaway movements; implicit if not explicit multi-cultural policies have sustained increased ethnic diversity in such countries. Elsewhere, nation-building is more recent and has far from succeeded, leading to substantial internal stress (often exacerbated by inter-ethnic tensions resulting from migration, mainly into cities) which, until either reconciled or tackled – by subdivision into several newer, internally more homogeneous states, for example – will constrain the state apparatus from having sufficient legitimacy to pursue the first two roles successfully.

*Inter-State Interactions*
A relatively settled geography of nation-states, each with an accepted territorial identity within which it exercised sovereignty largely recognized by all other states, has been the foundation of the international system over the last century. The territorial limits may have been contested in some places, but only rarely were sovereign territories violated by invasions from other states – and then often with substantial negative consequences (as with Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait).

The threat of such invasions is a major stimulus to activity within states, however. Very few state apparatus have felt so secure within their own borders that they did nothing to protect them. Boundaries were not only delimited cartographically but also demarcated on the ground and movements across them were controlled; in many cases a major rationale for a standing army was defending the frontiers, even by states – such as Switzerland – which pursued policies of geopolitical neutrality. Furthermore, this spatial separation was often used to create a separateness of identity, feelings of both belonging and difference, of in-groups and out-groups. Cross-border differences were often accentuated by state-building policies, creating ‘them and us’ oppositions which not only enhanced feelings of national identity but could also be used to stimulate animosity towards others. This could be sustained in many cases because relatively few people visited other state territories and gained first-hand knowledge of the people there. Their opinions of foreign ‘others’ were thus largely based on indirect sources, many of which could be manipulated by political interest groups. In the United States, for example, popular magazines like National Geographic and Reader’s Digest presented negative impressions of some states – notably those with Communist governments – for much of the twentieth century (see, for example, Poole, 2004; Schulten, 2001; Sharp 2001; on the successor ‘tabloid imperialism’, see Debrix, 2007). They not only enhanced such views of ‘others’ but also generated feelings of insecurity and threat which could be used to sustain state foreign and military policies – such as the US-led view for several decades (the so-called domino theory: O’ Sullivan, 1982) that the spread of communism must be contained by military and economic strategies. The former were exemplified by the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s-1970s, as well as the arms race which included heavy investment in nuclear and space technologies (while seeking to limit others developing similar technologies – as with Iran’s, North Korea’s, South Africa’s and Syria’s nuclear programs); the economic strategies are illustrated by the post-Second World War Marshall Aid program designed to rebuild western European economies and forestall both the growing popularity of Communist parties in several countries there and the threat of Soviet influence spreading further westwards. The contemporary resonance of such responses is shown by the American-led categorization of certain states as part of an ‘axis of evil’ and its representation of ‘threatening others’ in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine (Gregory, 2004)

The categorization of states into separate blocs – in many cases incorporating a substantial number of, at least superficially, independent countries – has been part of the rhetoric of international relations for many decades. Such representations of ‘others’ – most notably that of the countries behind the ‘Iron Curtain’ first proclaimed by Churchill in 1946 – has been a common form of cartographic shorthand deployed in geopolitical discourse: it focuses attention of major differences between ‘them’ – ostensibly the ‘enemy’ – and ‘us’, as an example of the labeling identified given wider appreciation in Said’s (1978) work on Orientalism and that of his many followers. Such cartographic divisions of the world change with the flux in
international relations; new maps are drawn not only to reflect changed situations in ‘official’ geopolitical representations (as in Barnett’s – 2004 – discussion of The Pentagon’s new map) but also as frameworks within which to set discussions of the contemporary scene (as in de Blij, 2008).

The mid- and late-twentieth century system of states thus comprised a matrix of separate territorially-defined containers, each with an independent civil society having its particular characteristics and sense of national identity based in part on a feeling of separateness from neighboring others. That identity was promoted by generating a sense of insecurity, a belief (fostered by interested parties) that each state’s territory and hence identity was challenged by others who might invade and threaten their way of life. A relatively stable map was partly sustained by fear of instability, that ‘they’ might take ‘us’ over.

That cartographic stability has been threatened in places by dissident groups, however. Some wish to break away from their prescribed territory and join another, as when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan and Slovenia from Yugoslavia; others – such as the Basques and the Kurds – want to create new nation-states, based on parts only of two or more existing states. Thus on occasion new, or newly-enlarged, states have been formed, perhaps after armed conflict either within or between states, sometimes with external aid.

*Cartographic Threats*

Two recent sets of changes have not replaced this map of threatened territorial states but have added considerably to its complexity. The first is linked to *globalization*, itself in considerable part a function of increased mobility not only for goods and people but also for non-material things, such as money. Over recent decades the earth’s surface has become increasingly integrated into a single functioning economic system, coordinated by multi-national corporations in the productive and service sectors which have much weaker links to individual nation-states than was previously the case with smaller companies; multi-nationals locate their activities and organize their interactions to maximize profits irrespective of such territorial considerations. (Dalby, 2007, argues that as much of globalization is coordinated through a few world-cities, the trend might better be geographically represented as ‘glurbanization’; those major cities are a major focus of the so-called ‘war on terror’.) Nation-state boundaries have become increasingly permeable, indeed in some cases substantially dismantled by the state apparatus to promote this global mode of operations, even though aspects of it may threaten some of their residents’ interests (Johnston and Glasmeier, 2007). Such dismantling may be unilateral, but is more often multi-lateral, with a number of states agreeing to reduce if not remove economic border controls through bilateral and multi-lateral trade treaties, even yielding some of their sovereign powers to regulate economic activity within their borders. The paradigm exemplar is the European Union, which has attached political and social – if not cultural – causes to economic integration, because, some contend, without them the economic goals cannot be achieved.

Although the vast majority of state apparatus have accepted the changes to economic territorial separateness associated with globalization, (albeit with a complex geography reflecting local challenges to that trend: Johnston and Glasmeier, 2007),
including responses to the rapid global recession in late 2008, they have not to the same extent with regard to other aspects of territorially-defined societies. There is general, if sometimes grudging, acceptance of the need to open borders to promote economic prosperity through the movement of goods and services, but considerable resistance to a similar opening to developments that might challenge national senses of identity based on cultural factors – such as ethnicity, language and religion. This is illustrated by immigration policies, even in countries whose origins and evolved sense of national identity were based on immigration and the multi-cultural, hybrid societies this generated – most notably in the United States. Immigration (or at least ‘uncontrolled immigration’) is now widely viewed as a threat, stimulating greater surveillance and restriction of population movements – as with the building of a fence along parts of the US-Mexico border and, even more so, the wall being built by Israel to separate it from Palestinian territories (as defined by Israel).

To a considerable extent, such resistance indicates that while many people (especially those in the economic and related political elites) are willing to participate in an open world-economy to enhance their wealth-accumulation activities, they are less prepared to share the fruits of this which are domiciled in their home territories – as in welfare state benefits. Similar processes are operating within states at a variety of smaller scales. There has been a massive growth across the world in the creation of gated communities within cities, for example, separate territories to which access is limited (Johnston, 1984b; Le Goix and Webster, 2008). Some walls may be tumbling down – others are being strengthened, even erected.

Taylor (1994) has addressed these new territorialities by identifying four dimensions of the world of state containers: power (warring and defensive states); wealth (mercantile and developmental states); culture (imagined communities and nation-states); and social (democratic and welfare states). These containers are now leaking, however. The threat to state borders from military invasion is much weaker than earlier in many places, and state security much greater as a consequence; globalization is reducing the role of the state in wealth-creation and states are becoming internally more fragmented. Nevertheless, the state remains the most important power container and politicians are not entirely yielding their economic authority to globalization. Instead, a more complex system is being created (Taylor, 1995) comprising: interstateness – effective internal sovereignty is increasingly dependent on recognition by others; internationality – people’s (often multiple) identities are increasingly divorced from the world of territorial states (this is also termed transnationalism; Mitchell, 2004; Sparke, 2005); and interterritoriality – a new global imperative in which there are neither insiders nor outsiders. The state system is adapting to these imperatives. In Taylor’s (1995, 14) view:

… interstateness and interterritoriality are sure to be abolished in any viable sustainable world. Then competition engendered by states in their territories is ultimately a route to doomsday. But internationality is different. In the past cultural differences have been maintained without political and economic growth imperatives so that internationality need not be incompatible with a sustainable world. The real challenge … is … to achieve a balance between a requirement for global management of the environment while maintaining the diversity of humanity. Internationality, freed from association with states and need for exclusive access to territories, may operate in a co-operative world without any absolute spaces to worry about.
But if that cooperation is not forthcoming, the world may fragment into a larger number of cultural containers, presenting a challenge to economic globalization and the ecological imperative of global environmental action.

The second trend involves non-state threats. In recent decades much of the increased tension within the world has not been inter-state but rather between rival ideologies. The most obvious has been the growing challenge to the American-led capitalist hegemony from radical groups, many loosely aligned with Islam, which contest not only its economic orientation but also many of the cultural characteristics associated with that hegemony and its treatment of dissident groups and societies. Although directed against individual states, or institutions within states, those threats do not involve the traditional state borders, in part because the challenger groups are not identified with particular states, even though they might find havens within some (which was the rationale for the war launched by the United States and its allies on Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 and the later invasion of Iraq – fighting what some see as new forms of warfare: Münkler, 2005; Kaldor, 2006). Furthermore, while those threats might occasionally be realized within the states whose hegemony is being challenged – such as the 9/11 attacks and those of 7/7 in the UK (the latter launched by individuals domiciled within the country) – they may also be directed at individuals associated with those states but (temporarily at least) resident elsewhere, as with the 2002 Bali bombing.

The nature of these new threats, generated within as well as outwith the territories of the subjected states and reflecting growing cultural fragmentation, has stimulated a new set of responses. In part, the reaction has been to continue the traditional method of invading another state because of threats posed from there, even if not directly by the local state apparatus itself – as with Afghanistan in 2001. But in large part it has stimulated the development of what are widely know as homeland security policies which, in a variety of ways, have involved increased surveillance of populations and control over movements. The territorial state system remains in place, but it is adapting its modus operandi to this new geography of threats which is to a considerable extent stateless and spatially fluid.

**States, Global Environmental Issues and the Wider World**

One concomitant of globalization having a major contemporary impact on the system of territorially-defined states is growing concern about environmental change which is global in its scope. In this, individual states are frequently the actors, similar to individual people in the tragedy of the commons (Vogler, 2000) and prisoner’s dilemma metaphors.

Although by the twentieth century virtually all of the earth’s land surface had been occupied by human societies and divided among them into demarcated sovereign territories, the marine portions of the surface, and the atmosphere above it, remained largely outwith that sphere of regulation. For centuries, the earth’s surface had been treated legally as divided into three major resource realms (Johnston, 2008):

1. *res nullius (RN)* – areas containing resources not currently claimed by any state but susceptible to such appropriation in principle;
2. *res extra commercium (REM)* – areas containing resources that cannot be claimed by any state as its own, over which its laws and regulations would
apply, but which rather are treated as a commons on which any state (or citizen of any state) can 'graze'; and

3. *res communis humanitatis* (*RCH*) – areas containing resources which are not only beyond national state claims but also recognised as common property which therefore cannot be grazed for individual benefit.

For the oceans, application of *RN* slowly expanded. Whereas for many centuries defense of land territory was relatively straightforward, that of marine areas claimed as part of a state was not. This became increasingly feasible, however, as the range of cannon expanded, and states began to claim the marine fringes beyond their coastlines – up to about six miles in many cases – as integral parts of their sovereign territory. Such claims became recognized in international law and stimulated the designation of maritime boundaries – even if they could not be formally delimited and were only identified on maps (on which see the work of the International Boundaries Research Unit: http://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/). As the wealth of resources in littoral areas became appreciated, and technology to realize their potential developed – the extraction of oil as well as fish, for example – wider areas were claimed; international law now recognizes claims of up to 200 miles from a country’s coast (see Steinberg, 2001; Johnston, 1996).

Beyond those exclusive economic zones, the remaining marine areas were treated as *REM*, largely because it was either not technically feasible to exploit their resources or extraction costs were currently prohibitive. Increasingly, the potential for exploitation has increased, mainly by wealthier states and their capitalist enterprises, stimulating fears that a major source of untapped wealth was going to be appropriated by a small number of states, exacerbating international inequalities. To counter this, a political movement – stimulated from Malta – emerged to designate the deep oceans as *RCH* whose exploitation would be regulated by an international body linked to the United Nations. Negotiating a Law of the Sea was a long, complex procedure, and agreements on shipping, for example, were achieved long before others relating to the deep oceans (Carron and Scheiber, 2004).

The reason for this delay can be appreciated by recasting the earlier tragedy of the commons example with states as the actors involved; the commons are fisheries in international waters. In the earlier case an intra-state tragedy of the commons could be resolved, as suggested by the prisoner’s dilemma, through creation/existence of a body with powers to regulate use of the commons and require conformity to agreements through punitive sanctions. With international tragedies/dilemmas, however, no such super-state has those powers and there is little prospect of one being created. The United Nations has some powers but few ‘real’ sanctions; it could not readily discipline a ‘rogue state’, especially one of the world’s largest and economically most powerful, which was determined not to comply. This was exemplified by the Moon Treaty, which treats it as *RCH* rather than *REM*; the states that refused to be signatories included the only two with the ability to reach and exploit the moon – the USA and the USSR (Laver, 1986).

Many international agreements regarding environmental management have been achieved, however: Barrett (2003) listed 225 currently in force and a further 72 that would join them if ratified by sufficient parties. States will clearly sign agreements and treaties and accept the consequent regulation in some circumstances. Analyzing the game-theoretic underpinnings of such behavior, Barrett argues this
occurs with *self-enforcing* agreements designed so that all parties gain. They have three core conditions:

1. They must be *individually rational* – no signatory can gain from withdrawing; no non-signatory can gain from later accession (i.e. all parties should sign-up at the outset); and no signatory can gain from failing to comply with the agreed regulations;
2. They must be *collectively rational* – the promises and threatened sanctions must be credible so that states want to co-operate and gain the expected benefits; and
3. They must be *fair*, with all parties believing they are reasonably treated.

Creating such agreements is difficult for large numbers of participants and many successful ones involve only a few parties; the *North Pacific Fur Seal Treaty*, a 1911 agreement to ban pelagic seal-hunting involving Canada, Japan, Russia and the USA, illustrates accords from which none would gain by withdrawing and are is seen as fair.

Successful treaties with many signatories also meet Barrett’s three conditions, such as the *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer* and various follow-up agreements, established within the framework of the earlier *Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer*. These emerged from discussions in the wake of theoretical data which predicted the likely consequences of continued production and consumption of CFCs (no hole in the ozone layer had by then been discovered). The negotiations (see Benedick, 1998; Litkin, 1994; Susskind, 1994) took place in a context which apparently ‘sounded the death knell for an important part of the international chemical industry, with implications for billions of dollars in investments and hundreds of thousands of jobs in related sectors’ (Benedick, 1991, 1). Because of this, vested interests – such as the UK chemical giant ICI – were initially strongly opposed to any curbs and governments were prepared to defend their interests. But the USA supported the moves, with its giant chemical firm du Pont phasing out CFC production because alternative, apparently non-toxic, chemicals were already available. (CFCs were believed to be non-toxic when first deployed in the 1930s, of course.) The negotiators developed a protocol which eventually proved acceptable to all parties, convincing many producer countries that the costs of replacing CFCs could be met by equitably distributed savings in health care and other costs. Developing countries – CFC consumers rather than producers – were provided with aid to assist transfer to alternative technologies, notably for refrigerators, although the USA insisted on a virtual veto over the financing rules (Johnston, 1996, 228).

The *Montreal Protocol* illustrates how international environmental agreements can be reached and implemented. The incentives must be immediately attractive to all countries and the nascent treaty must deter non-participation; all states should want to be involved in its construction. A treaty addressing a major regional or global issue that comes into force with a relatively small number of participants offers great incentives for others to stay out and free-ride. The strategies deployed in establishing incentives must induce behavioral changes, for example by setting realistic and credible targets which are readily measured and monitored so that compliance can be verified. Some countries may need encouragement to participate by, for example, offering side-payments if they find compliance difficult, perhaps by linking them to other treaties so that acceptance of one brings benefits from another. Incentives work
better than threats: full participation and cooperation is most likely if all parties feel they will benefit.

The difficulties are exemplified by the Kyoto Protocol, which required ratification from 55 countries before coming into force, including 38 listed as together contributing at least 55 per cent of 1990 global carbon dioxide emissions. The USA and Australia, among others, declined to ratify, so that although 94 countries had done so by 2002, insufficient of the larger CO₂ producing-countries had for it to come into force until Russia’s ratification in 2004. (Australia eventually ratified it after a change of government in 2007.) The Protocol’s biggest problem as originally drafted was its failure to address enforcement; when this was tackled later the agreed mechanism was defective. Barrett argued that the Protocol’s architecture should have been built around an agreed practicable enforcement procedure to gain widespread support internationally; an economic study for the Clinton administration suggested that overall benefits would match costs, if the ‘emission limits are met in a globally-effective manner’ (Barrett 2003, 380). The proposed trading mechanism for emissions would not facilitate this, however, and the compliance targets agreed in Bonn in 2001 had major flaws, not least that they were not legally binding – and to make them so would undoubtedly induce some countries to decline to ratify it. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 2005 the European Union implemented a mandatory greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme linked to member countries’ Kyoto obligations.

The problems over Kyoto illustrate a key difference between international and intra-national action to tackle environmental problems: as Barrett (2003, 398) puts it … the US government can enforce a domestic law implementing Kyoto. But it cannot make other countries comply let alone participate. State power remains bounded by territorial limits, with sovereignty precluding one state requiring another to act in a particular way. That goal can usually only be achieved in a sustainable way when states freely agree to participate, which they are most likely to do when they perceive that benefits will flow so that the action can be justified to their electorate (Johnston, 2008).

This last point is crucial because of the recent spread of democracy – Fukuyama’s (1992) ‘end of history’ (see, however, Kagan, 2008). Tackling environmental problems involves states winning popular support for (or at least failing to generate substantial popular opposition to) their actions. Many such problems are not apprehendable by the majority of citizens, and the nature of their production and consequences may not be readily appreciated because of the complex science underpinning them. Hajer (1995) argued that contemporary ecological crises are discursive constructions – assembled by scientists and others as challenges to existing institutions and life-styles.

Trudgill (1990) identified a number of barriers to tackling environmental problems:
1. Identification of an issue;
2. Recognition that an associated problem exists;
3. Acceptance of the postulated cause;
4. Acceptance that it can be tackled and remedied;
5. Identification of resources necessary for tackling the problem;
6. Winning acceptance for the proposed solution;
7. Gaining political commitment to the solution;
8. Implementation of the solution; and

The first involves an issue being raised as of potential significance; unless a problem’s existence is recognized, probably no action will be taken. Furthermore, governments have not only to be convinced there is a (perhaps latent) problem but also that its causes are understood and can be tackled satisfactorily. Such knowledge should come from disinterested, usually scientific, sources. Even so, it may be insufficient: problems will only be tackled if a viable solution is available, again probably requiring scientific inputs. Surmounting the first four barriers thus involves debate over scientific arguments: is there a problem; what causes it; can it be remedied? The next four are political. Tackling a problem involves committing resources, invariably competition across a range of state policies. Resources have to be obtained from citizens through taxation and for a solution to be implemented there has to be both political and public support. Governments may decide that neither can be obtained and so do not address a problem – as illustrated by debates over global warming.

Conclusions

All competition, conflict and cooperation involves people, but in many cases the people involved are represented by collectives, among the most important of which are states – a particular form of bounded place with an environmental foundation. States emerged to regulate behavior, both within and outwith their territories, much of it at relatively small spatial scales. With economic, social, cultural and political change, however, the scale of many of the challenges has increased and states have had to respond. The complex mosaic of places on which the map of bounded state spaces has been superimposed remains, but is not constant. Geographical foundations are themselves fluid as new geographies – new places and spaces – emerge to exploit and protect environmental resources and local cultural, social and political sensitivities; continually changing geographies is the result.

Notes

1 With many thanks to Colin Flint for valuable comments on successive drafts of this essay.

References


