

THE WORLD 'SHATTERING': PATTERNS OF RESTRUCTURING OF THE WORLD GEOPOLITICAL SYSTEM³

https://doi.org/10.18485/iipe_balkans_rssc.2020.ch4

Abstract: This paper aims to investigate patterns of the world geopolitical system restructuring at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. With the rise of great and regional powers in the world geopolitical system, a state of equilibrium established following the end of the Cold War is being undermined. In an epoch of the world system disequilibrium, there exists a preponderance for conflict throughout the system, especially in the regions lying between different geostrategic realms. By employing the theoretical approach developed by Saul Bernard Cohen, this paper strives to tackle the question of how the rise of the power of great and regional powers affects the structure of the world geopolitical system. The assumption is that the rise of the power of great and regional powers of the world geopolitical system will lead to `compressing` and `shattering` of geopolitical regions that lie between them. By analyzing the restructuring patterns, this paper demonstrates that the regions lying between different geostrategic realms will become increasingly more „compressed” and „shattered”. Through the analysis of the change in the order of power between states, this paper will provide an overview of the regions most affected by the relations between great and regional powers and their future prospects.

Keywords: world geopolitical system, shatterbelt, compression zone, great powers, regional powers, geopolitical regions.

¹ Research Assistant, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade. E-mail: mihajlo.kopanja@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

² Research Assistant, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade. E-mail: nenad.stekic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

³ This paper was created within the scientific project 'Serbia and challenges in international relations in 2020', financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and realized by the Institute of International Politics and Economics in 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War brought in the scientific community a vast number of books and articles in which scholars began their works by stating the fact that the Cold War is over. This is not without reason because a change in the way the international system was structured has impacted ways authors conceive their research and conduct their analysis. This induced the need for being highlighted from the very first sentences of their work. Simply put, the ways in which the international system is structured influences both states and their behavior. Thus, to explain such behavior of states, one needed to understand how the system is or was structured. But the focus on the end of the Cold War is slowly beginning to become somewhat outdated as well. The international system at the end of the Cold War and the one at the beginning of the third decade of this century are starting to diverge from one another in their core. The structure of the international system dominated by the United States gives way to the structure in which US dominance is weakening, with other states starting to catch it up. If changes in the international structure after the Cold War were so profound, the study of trends of the current international structure is not only a worthwhile endeavor but a necessary one.

Yet, such an endeavor is a challenging one. Suffice to say the Cold War has provided the scholarly community with somewhat relative ease in determining its end because Soviet withdrawal from the international competition has marked a relatively clear indicator of change. However, the scholarly community of today does not have such a luxury of ease. Whereas taking one state out of the equation meant the change in structure in which there are no other challengers to the US, the contemporary world is faced with more than one state stepping up to compete, not only on the global level but the regional one as well. Allegiances are changing, enemies emerging, and those defeated are reclaiming their former might. The complexity of the global structure to come is showing its full potential to challenge our ability to explain not only the structure but the ways it is impacting states within the system. Yet, highlighting how challenging the endeavor is, should not be equated with taking a defeatist stance with regards to the plausibility to identify the patterns of change, as well as the potential impact it might have on the states in the world geopolitical system. If the changing structure is not directly observable, the change in power relations produced by the rise in the power of many great and regional powers, as well as their behavior, to a certain point are allowing us to extrapolate the patterns of restructuring of the world geopolitical

system. From that, one can extrapolate ways in which the changing structure impacts states within the system by imposing limitations and providing opportunities for them to act.

It is for all the above-mentioned reasons that this paper aims to provide an analysis of the restructuring of the world geopolitical system by identifying the patterns of change occurring within the system and the impact it might produce on the states within the system. In doing so, this paper strives to provide not only a basis for understanding the directions towards the world geopolitical system is restructuring, but also how such restructuring can influence the states within the system. By deploying the geopolitical approach of Saul Bernard Cohen, this paper casts an assumption that the changes in the relative power distribution among great and regional powers are producing *disequilibrium* of the world geopolitical system (Cohen, 2015), leading to the restructuring of the existing and the competing geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions. Such circumstances of restructuring are impacting geopolitical regions positioned between the competing geostrategic regions by `compressing` and `shattering`. This eventually led to a greater preponderance of conflict among the states located within those regions.

GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH TO THE WORLD'S SYSTEM ANALYSIS

For a discipline studying the interconnections between geography and politics, geopolitical approaches have seldom focused on the analysis of the world system and its structure. Whether we focus on classical or critical geopolitics, their focus lies less in the analysis of the world system than on specific states. Discussing the works of Mackinder or Spykman, one is faced with an underlying notion of the existence of spatial areas more valuable than others, and whose control by one state allows for the control of the world (Mackinder, 1904; 1942; Spykman, 1944). Meinig summed up this notion by stating that the essence of these approaches lies in positional supremacy (1956, p. 554) characterized by a segment of space of exceptional value whose control allows one state to triumph over others. On the other hand, authors like Kjellen or Ratzel, as well as Haushofer and Maull, put less emphasis on specific spatial areas as it does on the limitations of spatial surface available to men and recommendations to statesmen on what to do (Maull, 1941; Kjellen, 1943; Haushofer, 1966, p. 40; Ratzel, 1969, pp. 17-28).

Likewise, critical geopolitics mostly avoids discussions on structural factors of world politics, focusing instead on discourses, namely by analyzing practitioners of geopolitics, those studying geopolitics, as well as discourses communicated through popular culture (O`Tuathail and Dalby, 1998, p. 4). Within the literature on critical geopolitics, there are only two references worth noting which are of interest to structural analyses. The first relates to the notion of geopolitical imaginations, but they are connected more to the analysis of societies within states and ways how such imaginations may hinder or enable specific foreign policy actions (Guney and Gokcan, 2010, p. 23). The second relates to a brief mention of the existence of structural geopolitics as a sub-discipline of critical geopolitics in one of the Geraiod O`Tuathail papers, but it has been virtually completely abandoned ever since (1999). With both classical and critical geopolitical approaches having their limitations in systemic analyses, the theoretical approach this paper deploys in the analysis of the world geopolitical system is the one developed by Saul Bernard Cohen.

Cohen`s geopolitical approach to the study of international affairs has a tradition spanning for more than half of the century. While considered by many as a clear representative of the classical geopolitical approach (Glassner and De Blij, 1980, p. 273; O`Tuathail, 1986, p. 73; Guzzini, 2012, pp. 36-37), Cohen`s work was built upon the critique and, for the most part, rejection of classical geopolitical postulates and reasoning (Parker, 1998, p. 114; Cohen, 1998, pp. 42-44; Parker, 2015, p. 141; Stepic, 2016, p. 330). Instead of the static and deterministic approach, which he contributes to classical geopolitics, Cohen proposes a dynamic and possibilistic one, where the geopolitical system primarily was shaped by *equilibrium*, conceptualized as being ‘the quality of [dynamic] balance between opposing influences and forces’ (Cohen, 1991, p. 557; 2015, p. 61). For Cohen, the geopolitical analysis is primarily systemic as it ‘does not predict the timing of events, crises, and flash points that force radical changes in the geopolitical map...What such analysis can do is focus the attention of policymakers on conditions likely to bring about geopolitical change’ (Cohen, 2015, p. 1). More importantly for this research, Cohen states that ‘changes in the balance within the international system can also be anticipated by the geopolitical analysis’ (Cohen, 2015, p. 1).

Conceived in such a way, Cohen`s approach is focused on analyses of the structures of the world geopolitical system and its effects on the political processes unfolding within the system. For Cohen, the

geopolitical structure is organized hierarchically into the three spatial levels: geostrategic realm, geostrategic region, and national states (including highly autonomous regions and *quasi-states*) (Cohen, 1975, pp. 63-66; 2015, p. 37). While there is no need to elaborate extensively on the concept of national states, geostrategic realms are 'parts of the world large enough to possess characteristics and functions that are globally influencing and that serve the strategic needs of the major powers, states and regions they comprise' (Cohen, 2015, p. 41). On the other hand, geopolitical regions are 'subdivisions of realms...[which]...are connected by geographical contiguity and political, cultural, military interactions and...by the historical migrations and intermixture of peoples and shared histories' (Cohen, 2015, p. 44).

Each regional whole has a set of geopolitical features (Cohen, 2015, pp. 39-40), a notion 'borrowed' from Derwent Whittlesey (Whittlesey, 1939; Cohen, 2002, p. 682), based upon which the characteristics of each regional whole is identified, allowing for determining the geopolitical structure of the world geopolitical system. Central to the analysis of geopolitical features are the core states which dominate geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions. A hierarchal order of power exists within the world geopolitical system. In this setting, a state could be in one of the five different orders of power (Cohen, 2015, p. 3) which are identified based upon a set of indicators, ranging from human and material resources, over nuclear technology to perception or self-image as to rank in the hierarchy (Cohen, 1982, p. 230). This discussion is relevant with regard to the focus of this paper that the relative strength of the core states of the regions and their changes lead to transformations of the structure of the world geopolitical system. According to Cohen, 'the relative strength of particular cores determines where and at what hierarchical scales geopolitical repartitioning takes place' (1998, p. 45).

But the hierarchical structure of the world geopolitical system does not end with geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions. While they are the most fundamental building blocks of how the world geopolitical system is structured, not all regions are necessarily a part of such a scheme. Crucially, geopolitical regions need not be a subdivision of geostrategic realms because some might exist between and independent of geostrategic realms (Cohen, 2015, p. 44). In such cases they can be: a) shatterbelts, a notion inspired by Fairgrieve and Hartshorne (Fairgrieve, 1927; Hartshorne, 1944), defined as '*strategically oriented regions that are both deeply divided internally and caught up in the competition between great powers of the*

geostrategic realms' (Cohen, 2015, p. 48)⁴, b) compression zones, which differ from shatterbelts mainly in sense that they include regional and not great power competition (Cohen, 2003), c) gateways, that 'serve as bridges between realms, regions or states' (Cohen, 1998, pp. 60-66; Cohen, 2015, p. 37), and finally d) convergence zones, which are also between geostrategic realms but without determinate status (Cohen, 2005). Knowing the spatial differentiation of different realms, regions, and the variations of geopolitical regions, one can understand how the world geopolitical system is structured and how it affects the states within the system.

TRENDS OF TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD GEOPOLITICAL SYSTEM

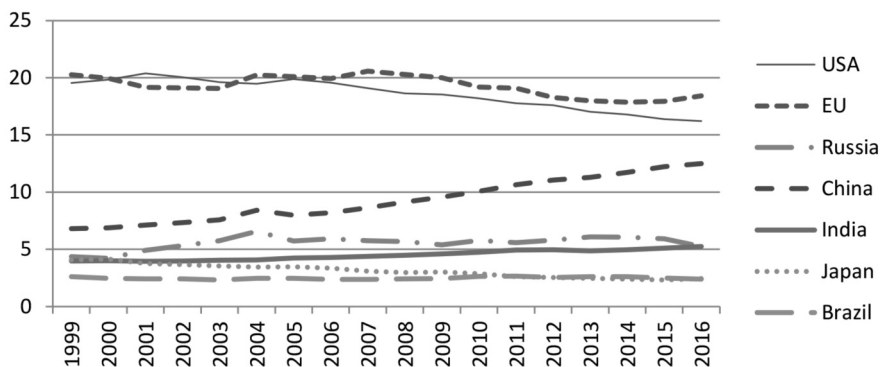
Arguing that the post-Cold War structure of the world geopolitical system characterized by the dominance of the US is beginning to give way to a new structure from an analytical point of view means several things: a) that other states are approaching the US in terms of relative power; b) that the borders of the existing spatial differentiation within the world geopolitical system are in flux; and, c) that two aforementioned changes can lead to changes in characteristics of certain geopolitical regions, thus impacting the states located within them. A deeper examination of these processes allows identification of the restructuring patterns of the global system and the trends towards which this system is leaning. While, to a certain point, it could be deduced that there exists a chronological order among these processes, this is not necessarily the case. Although, in general, changes in the distribution of power and the dynamics of great power relations dictate, for the most part, changes in global equilibrium, the process of restructuring of geostrategic realms can also lead to the increase in the power of one side. Whether Turkey is part of the Eurasian realm dominated by Russia or the Maritime realm dominated by the US alters the capabilities of those sides, as well as their ability to impact global events. Similarly, without 'compressing' the region of Southeast Asia, it is highly unlikely for China to expand its sovereignty into the South China Sea.

The previous two examples follow the line of reasoning this paper argues. But these examples are a product from more than a decade of change in the dynamics of great power relations. It can be argued that the

⁴ Taking into account the entirety of Saul Cohen's work, the concept of shatterbelt is perhaps his most well-renowned contribution to geopolitical literature.

process of transformation of the world geopolitical system began with the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict. Although Russian power has been steadily increasing since Putin came to power, it was this conflict that marked Russian return to world affairs. While Russia was relatively silent during the attempts of expansion of the Maritime realm dominated by the US during the 1990s, culminating in 1999 expansion of NATO to former Warsaw pact states, a similar event in Georgia in 2008 was met with Russian action (Kargiannis, 2013). In fact, the events of the 1990s, during the dominance of the US, directly led to the restructuring of the previous world geopolitical system, namely by such expansion (Cohen, 2010, p. 164). Compared to the 1990s, Russia was capable to enact its will in Georgia, but this cannot be considered more than just the beginning of the transformation of the world geopolitical system. Confined to the space bordering Russia, it did not represent a clear indication that Russia is capable and powerful enough to challenge US dominance. Less than a decade afterward, Russian involvement in Syria was significantly different in shedding light on Russian capability to influence events further away from its borders.

Graph 1: Changes in states' power 1999-2016⁵



Source: InEuropa, 2019

⁵ The Y axis demonstrates the composite index of the seven variables: economic capital, militarisation, land, human resources, culture, natural resources, and diplomacy (InEuropa, 2019).

Graph 1 demonstrates the rise in Cohen's first order powers. States Power Index shows that in the period 1999-2016, most of the states are stagnating, while only China has a significant rise, and the USA measures significant dropdown.

Parallel to the 'Russian revival', another important series of events are connected to the rise of China and their impact on the *disequilibrium* of the post-Cold War system. Although, since the Sino-Soviet split during the 1970s, China and Russia were not in friendly relations, it was not until the 21st century that China became powerful enough to 'establish' a geostrategic realm of their own⁶. Their economic rise during the 1990s provided a foundation for the rise in their power, culminating in the 2013 proclamation by Chinese President Xi Jinping of their desire to take the leadership role of the world system by 2050 (Kačiga, 2019, p. 19). But the authors of this paper believe that China today is not only capable of competing with the US but is, to a certain point, willing to do so. With the launch of their Belt and Road initiative, even the spatial focus of their endeavors is visible, with Chinese activities stretching from the North and South China Sea, all the way to Eastern Africa and Europe.

The 'Russian revival' and China's rise represent the most important changes in the dynamics of great power relations, which are leading to the transformation of the world geopolitical system. While most significant, they are far from being the only relevant. Cohen identifies both the EU and Japan as great powers while seeing Brazil and India as being between regional and great powers (Cohen, 2015, p. 51). Although if we observe the EU in general, it would be the most powerful entity in the world system, the fact that it is an amalgamation of states severely hinders its ability for swift, coherent and coordinated implementation of power. Furthermore, Brexit shook the EU, leaving uncertainties on future prospects of the Union. While France is attempting to step up as the leader of the Union, the lack of cohesiveness in the perceived directions the EU ought to take is questioning their ability to coordinate their efforts towards a shared objective. Although their power is somewhat decreasing, a more important point is connected to the future of their alliance with the US, which French President Macron brought into question (Emmanuel Macron, 2019). Similarly, Brazil was, at one point, hailed as the upcoming superpower but internal turmoil, which started during the reign of Dilma

⁶ Cohen's 1998 paper does not mention an independent East Asia realm led by China, while his 2003 book does (Cohen, 1998; 2003).

Rousseff and has continued until today brings into question such predictions (Cardenas, 2018). In the case of Japan, although indicators point towards a reduction in their power, Japan is becoming more willing to use what they have at their disposal, by taking steps towards remilitarization and abolishment of its pacifist constitution (Auslin, 2016). With the mixed signals on whether the US will remain in Northeast Asia or not, Japan is taking measures to ensure that it is capable of confronting China without US presence.

Table 1: States divided into First and Second order powers

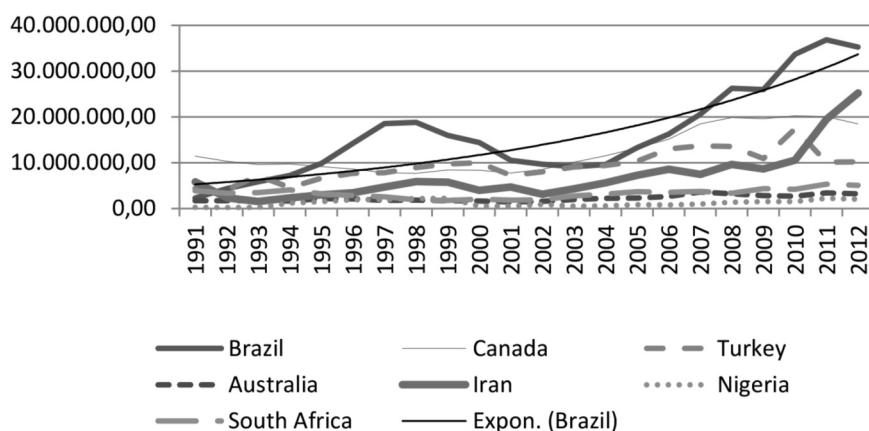
FIRST ORDER OF POWER		
United States, Russia, China, European Union, Japan, India		
SECOND ORDER OF POWER		
HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Brazil Canada Turkey Australia Iran South Africa Nigeria	Indonesia South Korea Vietnam Israel Mexico Pakistan Egypt Venezuela Saudi Arabia	Algeria Thailand Argentina Taiwan

Source: Cohen, 2015, pp. 51-53

While changes in the power dynamics of great powers are paramount to understand the patterns of the transformation of the world geopolitical system, the behavior of regional or second order powers is not without its impact on the process of restructuring the system. In the observed timeframe, many states, which Cohen dubs high second order powers, have not only increased their capabilities but also actively participated in the international events. Namely, these are Turkey and Iran, which actively participated in the Syrian civil war. While Cohen believes Australia and Canada are by no means irrelevant, their behavior has been somewhat ambiguous in mostly remaining on the sidelines. He further claimed that South Africa and Nigeria, torn by internal struggles, were not able to fulfill their potential in becoming leaders of Sub-Saharan

Africa. Thus, the authors' stance is that the behavior of Turkey is perhaps the most interesting of all states from this cohort since there are signs of it 'switching allegiance' by aligning with Russia after more than half a century of alliance with the US. In doing so, in the area where Europe and the Middle East are converging, we emphasize the process of restructuring of geostrategic realms is unfolding with the Eurasian realm expanding through Turkey aligning more and more with Russia.

Graph 2: Military Expenditure of the Cohen's 'high second order powers'



Source: Singer et al., 1972.

Graph 2 demonstrates that Cohen's group of high second order powers' military expenditure is all but stagnating. All the countries within his identified bloc have a gradual rise in their military budgets over the last decade. This could be a clear indicator for analyzing the regional powers' role within the international system. Although this represents a process of significant change in how the world geopolitical system is structured, it is not the only one. Across the borderlands of the Maritime realm, one finds signs of rupture between the US as the dominant power and dominant states in those geopolitical regions. Besides Turkey, France, Germany and Japan are all beginning to distance themselves from the US, thus impacting the US ability to act on Eurasian soil. With Turkey leaning towards aligning with Russia, France advocating for Europe more independent from the US (Macron's, 2019), German defiance of the US in

the case of the North Stream 2 project with Russia, and Japanese fending for themselves in the shroud of uncertainty regarding the US future in their region, the process of restructuring of geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions is currently unfolding within the world geopolitical system. Although it is highly doubtful either the EU or Japan can establish geostrategic realms of their own, the establishment of independent geopolitical regions could mark higher competition of the states from three geostrategic realms in those regions, especially on their peripheries. Similarly, this process is producing the inability of the US to successfully counter the policies of other great powers by which those states are attempting to expand their dominion.

The World 'Shattering'

In this chapter, we will discuss the world in the shattering process in accordance with Cohen's assumptions. Previously mentioned processes produce the most significant impacts, but not within the geopolitical regions which are parts of geostrategic realms. Rather, the *disequilibrium* process of the world geopolitical system is producing significant consequences towards the regions located in between geostrategic realms. Changes in the power dynamics of great and regional powers and the processes of geostrategic realms and geopolitical regions restructuring are leading to their 'compressing' and 'shattering'. By this, the authors consider that the characteristics of these regions are progressing towards more negative values, indicative of compression zones and shatterbelts. If a region was a convergence zone prior to the process of restructuring, these trends point towards its transformation into a compression zone.

Within existing literature, the idea behind the shatterbelt concept is based on the assumption that, due to their peculiarities, some regions are more conflict-prone. More specifically, these regions involve interstate and intrastate conflicts, along with the large powers located outside that region. Based on an extensive review of the theoretical literature on shatterbelt, Paul Hensel and Paul Diehl identify four characteristics of this region. First, it is a group of 'politically immature' states and represents an area for the competency of the great powers, not an area dominated exclusively by a single force (Hensel and Diehl, 1994, p. 39). The second feature is related to the first, and describes shatterbelt as a region abounding in the states 'beyond the reach of the great powers' but located in areas of overlapping of their spheres of interest (Hensel and Diehl, 1994,

p. 40). The direct foreign presence of a large force in the shatterbelt area or the strong paternalistic attitude of a large force towards one of the countries in the region is the third specificity of this concept. Finally, last but not least, the final feature of the states of shatterbelt is their internal fragmentation in ideological, ethnic or religious terms.

There exists an increase in competition within several regions of the world indubitably involved in the global 'shattering' process. Among many possible shattering regions, we identify ten of them with high scale potential to fit into theoretical schemes. Northeast Asia is perhaps a unique case because it is composed of quite formidable and powerful states. With trends pointing to a break among allies Japan and South Korea, and with the ambiguity on the US role in this region, there are conflicting reports on whether or not the US will leave its existing troops in the region. Instead of being a borderland between two realms and with rising tensions between Japan and South Korea, US withdrawal points towards the region becoming a convergence zone and not a gateway as Cohen predicted (Cohen, 2015, p. 315). Likewise, Southeast Asia is experiencing a similar fate. Although no longer a shatterbelt (Cohen, 1975, pp. 273-287), Southeast Asia has an internal 'fertile ground' for it to 'shatter' relatively easily. With current issues regarding sovereignty in the South China Sea and the interests of all three geostrategic realms, Southeast Asia is assumed to be a convergence zone or perhaps even a compression zone.

We argue that Central Asia represents an interesting case in which there are elements to characterize it as a shatterbelt because of the existence of internal frictions but also the active presence of both China and Russia. But because there is no evidence of great power rivalry, while still having the majority of elements to be a shatterbelt, this region could be identified as a compression zone. On the other hand, we list the Middle East as a region that might be called the only 'true' shatterbelt. It fits not only in the above-mentioned four indicators but within all definitions of shatterbelt. The Middle East is characterized not only with the presence of global powers but also regional powers, namely Turkey and Iran. That is why even without the great powers, this region's prospects will not improve because if they lose a shatterbelt title, they will remain a compression zone.

In accordance with identified indicators, we align Central Europe as a convergence zone. While it is being compressed through variable relations in the US-EU-Russian triangle, it does not show signs of conflict

between the V4 states. With existing historical animosities, there is enough material for it to become a compression zone in spite of current great relations. But this can only be achieved in the wake of greater US-EU frictions because of the animosity of Central European states towards Russia. The Western Balkans, on the other hand, could be characterized as a compression zone leading towards the shatterbelt, as all three great powers are present, including the UK, France, Germany, individually and through the EU, as well as Turkey. This determination is in line with what Cohen concluded for this region (2015, p. 45). Cohen assigns the Horn of Africa to be a compression zone as China's entry might mark the future in which there is a higher chance for great powers' competition. This is why we would identify it as a 'shatterbelt with a new face'. The main argument for this claim is that even though there is a major presence of great powers, it is not in the interest of any of them for peace to erode into a full-fledged conflict. Therefore, the fate of the region will depend on the global occurrences among the major players.

Unlike Cohen's claims (2015, p. 417), we argue that Central Africa presents a compression zone, as it is not in the major focus for great powers to make it a shatterbelt by their actions, as does Western Africa, due to interethnic conflicts in some parts and with French involvement in the majority of them. Being the high second order power, Nigeria is not able to effectively 'organize' this region due to internal ethnic and religious conflicts (Cohen, 2015, p. 39). Central America is still a politically uncertain region with no clear developments within some specific 'bridging' countries such as Venezuela, which classify it as a convergence zone (Cohen, 2015, p. 148). Furthermore, it is questionable whether other great powers will be able to 'break' US dominance over the Western hemisphere. Based on these arguments above, we summarize the regions' geopolitical characteristics in the table below.

Table 2. Shattering regions⁷

Assigned character	Region	Military paternalism*	Political immaturity**
Shatterbelt	Middle East	Full	Full
Compression zone	Western Balkans	Partial	Partial
	Horn of Africa	Full	Full
	Central Asia	None	Partial
	Central Africa	Partial	Partial
	Western Africa	Full	Partial
Convergence zone	Southeast Asia	None	Partial
	Northeast Asia	Full	Partial
	Central Europe	None	None
	Central America	None	Partial

* This variable is operationalized as military troops or missions deployed within the region by one of the three great powers.

CONCLUSION

Being dynamic in nature, the world geopolitical system is in the process of constant modification and change. Whether those changes are major or minuscule, the process of change itself is inevitable, regardless of the efforts of certain states which, out of their own interest, are keen on preserving the specific way the world geopolitical system is organized. Those states which were once the most powerful need not have the same position in the future. The ones aligned today need not be tomorrow. Regions that were relatively turbulent before need not be so in the future. To successfully navigate the constantly changing nature of the world geopolitical system, one needs to understand not only how it is composed currently, but also the directions towards it is leaning. This paper strived to provide a concise overview of the trends of transformation currently unfolding within the world geopolitical system. By observing changes in

⁷ Data taken from the Fragile State Index whose methodology distinct these indicators into three respective groups: full, partial, and none.

the relative power distribution of the great and regional powers, as well as how the spatial distribution of different geostrategic realms is changing, patterns of the transformation emerged.

Within the Maritime Realm dominated by the US, there exists turbulence in the sense that other major actors of the realm are starting to diverge from the US, indicating the gradual loss of cohesiveness. On the other hand, both the Eurasian and the East Asian realms are attempting to expand their borders by attracting new allies into their ranks. But with such events unfolding in the struggle for supremacy of the world geopolitical system, the geopolitical regions caught in between geostrategic realms are going to bear the largest burden. With the competition among the superpowers likely to increase, the regions in between their geostrategic realms are to experience increasing 'compressing' and 'shattering'. By this, we mean the characteristics which induce the regions in between geostrategic realms to change towards increasingly more negative values from the perspective of states within those regions. What were once gateways are now becoming convergence zones, convergence zones are becoming compression zones, and compression zones are becoming shatterbelts.

With this being an unfolding process, the world geopolitical system is still faced with only one shatterbelt (Middle East). But the trends of transformation and the patterns of restructuring of the world geopolitical system point towards the world in which there are greater possibilities of more than one shatterbelt. Even more importantly, these trends point to regions progressing towards more negative values, thus regardless of the number of shatterbelts, an increase in conflicts in such regions is more likely to happen. It is questionable to what degree the majority of states can influence these changes to prevent their full manifestation out of fear of impacting them negatively. States and statesmen must take into account these changes unfolding to provide security for their states and their citizens. This is why the relevance of shatterbelt and similar geopolitical concepts should be further researched to provide a deeper understanding of how global affairs are being facilitated.

REFERENCES

- Auslin, M. (2016, March/April). Japan's New Realism: Abe Gets tough. *Foreign Affairs*, retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2016-02-16/japans-new-realism>. Accessed 25 December 2019.

- Cardenas, J. (2018, October 19). The Sad Decline of Brazil's Political Establishment. *Foreign Policy*, retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/19/brazil-bolsonaro/>. Accessed 25 December 2019.
- Cohen, S. B. (1963). *Geography and Politics in a World Divided*. New York, Random House.
- Cohen, S. B. (1975). *Geography and Politics in a World Divided* (2nd Edition). New York, Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, S. B. (1982). A new map of global geopolitical equilibrium: a developmental approach. *Political Geography Quarterly*, 1(3), pp. 223-241.
- Cohen, S. B. (1991). Global Geopolitical Change in the Post-Cold War Era. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81(4), pp. 551-580.
- Cohen, S. B. (1998). Geopolitics in the New World Era: A New Perspective on an Old Discipline, in: G. Demko & W. Wood (Eds.), *Reordering the World: Geopolitical Perspectives on the 21st Century* (pp. 40-68). Boulder, Westview Press.
- Cohen, S. B. (2002). The earth and the state: a study of political geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 26(5), pp. 679-682.
- Cohen, S. B. (2003). *Geopolitics of the World System*. New York, Rowman and Littlefield.
- Cohen, S. B. (2005). The Eurasian Convergence Zone: Gateway or Shatterbelt?. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 46(1), pp. 1-22.
- Cohen, S. B. (2010). Evaluating Systemic Geopolitics – A Twenty-First Century View. *Geopolitics*, 15(1), pp. 157-164.
- Cohen, S. B. (2015). *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*. New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Emmanuel Macron in his own words. (2019, November 7), retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>. Accessed 25 December 2019.
- Fairgrieve, J. (1927). *Geography and World Power*. London, University of London Press.
- Glassner, M. & De Blij, H. (1980). *Systematic Political Geography*. New York, John Wiley & Sons.
- Guney A. & Gokcan, F. (2010). The 'Greater Middle East' as a 'Modern' Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy, *Geopolitics* 15(1), pp. 22-38.

- Guzzini, S. (2012). Which geopolitics?. in: S. Guzzini (Ed.), *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe* (pp. 18-44). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hartshorne, R. (1944). The United States and the 'Shatter zone' of Europe, in: H. Weigert & V. Stefansson (Eds.), *Compass of the World: A Symposium on Political Geography* (pp. 203-214). New York, Macmillan Co.
- Haushofer, K. (1966). How Germany Can Regain Her Living Space, in: A. Dorpalen (Ed.), *The World of General Haushofer: Geopolitics in Action* (pp. 38-44). Port Washington, Kennikat Press.
- Hensel, P. & Diehl, P. (1994). Testing empirical propositions about shatterbelts, 1945-76. *Political Geography*, 13(1), pp. 33-51.
- InEuropa. (2019). State Power Index, retrieved from: <http://index.in.europa.pl/en/state-power-index/state-power-index>. Accessed 24 December 2019.
- Kačiga, Ž. (2019). Velika strategija Kine [China's Big Strategy], in: V. N. Cvetković (Ed.), *Pojas i put: realnost i očekivanja [The Belt and the Road: Reality and Expectations]* (pp. 11-32). Belgrade, Faculty of Security Studies.
- Karagiannis, E. (2013). The 2008 Russian-Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism. *European Security*, 22(1), pp. 74-93.
- Kjellen, R. (1943). *Država kao oblik života [The State as Life Form]*. Zagreb, Matica Hrvatska.
- Mackinder, H. (1904). The Geographical Pivot of History. *The Geographical Journal*, 23(4), pp. 421-437.
- Mackinder, H. (1942). *Democratic Ideas and Reality*. Washington, National Defense University Press.
- Macron's Brain Dead NATO remarks. (2019, December 3), retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/03/trump-macron-brain-dead-nato-remarks>. Accessed 25 December 2019.
- Maull, O. (1941). *Što je geopolitika? [What is Geopolitics?]*. Zagreb, Naklada.
- Meinig, D. (1956). Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 9(2), pp. 553-569.
- O'Tuathail, G. (1999). Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22(2), pp. 107-124.
- Parker, G. (1998). Not glass but diamond: An evaluation of the geopolitical world view of Saul B. Cohen. *Geopolitics*, 3(2), pp. 113-124.

- Parker, G. (2015). *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Ratzel, F. (1969). The Laws of the Spatial Growth of States, in: R. Kasperson & J. Minghi (Eds.), *The Structure of Political Geography* (pp.17-28). Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company.
- Singer, J. D., Stuart, B. & John, S. (1972). Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965, in: B. Russett (Ed.), *Peace, War, and Numbers* (pp. 19-48). Beverly Hills, Sage.
- Spykman, N. (1944). *Geography of Peace*. Boston, Harcourt.
- Stepić, M. (2016). *Geopolitika: ideje, teorije, koncepcije [Geopolitics: Ideas, Theories, and Concepts]*. Belgrade, Institute for Political Studies.
- Tuathail, G. (1986). Political Geography of contemporary events VIII the language and nature of the 'new geopolitics' - the case of US-El Salvador relations. *Political Geography Quarterly*, 5(1), pp. 73-85.
- Tuathail, G. & Dalby, S. (1998). [Introduction]. In: G. O Tuathail & S. Dalby (Eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics* (pp. 1-15). London & New York, Routledge.
- Whittlesey, D. (1939). *The Earth and the State: a Study of Political Geography*. New York, Henry Holt and Company.