PRAISE FOR THE FIRST EDITION

'John Agnew has long been recognized as one of geography’s most creative theorists of the interaction between place, politics, and the economy. ... In this book, Agnew is concerned with why the modern geopolitical imagination has had such a long-lasting hold on how the international political order is conceptualized. In other words, how and why did what eventually evolved into the standard principles of contemporary geopolitics, develop? ... The book is well written, thoughtful, creative, and persuasive. It should prove to be an important milestone in the development of geographic thought in years to come.'


'. . . [I]t is an indication of the wealth of ideas introduced in Agnew’s study that each chapter leads on to a detailed discussion of key elements of today’s debates around politics, power and spatiality. The text is clearly written, coherently structured and attractively produced. *Geopolitics* deserves to be widely read by students of geography, politics and international relations.'

David Slater in *Progress in Human Geography* (2000)

PRAISE FOR THE SECOND EDITION

'At a time when “geopolitics” is so often at the center of the news and academic debate, this book provides a lucid historical and geographical study of the evolution of the modern geopolitical imagination. The book’s intellectual breadth spans from post-colonial critique of Western-centric global mappings to international political-economy analysis of global finance. Through it all, the diverse ways in which visions of the “world-as-a-whole” have been deployed by powerful elites are carefully charted. The result is an exemplary geo-history of geopolitics and, as such, an important caution against arrogant uses of the term in popular commentary.'

Matthew Sparke, Associate Professor in Geography and the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle

'Concise and clear, historical and critical, this magisterial overview clearly shows how modern spatial conceptions of the world underwrite politics, economics, states, identities and violence.'

Simon Dalby, Ph.D. Professor and Chair, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies Carleton University, Ottawa Ontario

'In a world of proliferating references to geopolitics, the “re-visionings” in this accessible book explore how and why there is so much more to geopolitics than first meets the eye.'

James D. Sidaway, National University of Singapore
A new age of ‘global’ geopolitics?

The demise of the Soviet Union as an ideological Other undermined the entire basis of Cold War ideological geopolitics. Particularly in the United States, the protective cocoon and organizing framework that the Cold War provided to political and intellectual life has shrivelled. In its place has come an extreme ontological insecurity, a widespread sense of uncertainty about how to organize world politics in its absence. In some quarters there is even a nostalgia for the ‘good old days’ when East was East and West was West and never the twain should meet. The US perception of increased insecurity was significantly heightened by the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC – the first major military assaults on the US mainland since the British army burned the White House during the war of 1812. Though the long-term effects as yet remain unclear, a number of plausible geopolitical scenarios are under construction. This chapter is devoted to describing these.

One point does seem clear: the ideological geopolitics of the Cold War worked because two states pretending to the mantle of modernity confronted one another globally. Neither a militant Islam nor, for example, ‘evil drug barons’ provide an equally well-defined, competitive and potent substitute, although some commentators and politicians in the United States and Europe do offer demonized portraits of Japan, China and/or the Islamic world that would give this impression. In the absence of either a widely accepted alternative world-view or a convincing replacement for the former Soviet Union the geopolitical imagination must once more be reconstituted. But there are confusing and contradictory signs as to how this will be done. It is difficult to portray a single scenario as to what is in the process of replacing the Cold War as an organizing template for global geopolitics. Three scenarios offer rather distinctive perspectives on what is in course. After briefly describing each of these, I offer a short conclusion about ‘global geopolitics’.

Three scenarios

The three most obvious candidates as the basis for a new geopolitics are one that identifies those new practices and representations of a deterritorializing and transnational global economy (often referred to by the term ‘globalization’), another that sees the prospect of culture wars between different ‘civilizations’, and a third that sees the United States as exercising an imperial dominance with little or no military competition. In each case the given scenario can be either welcomed or regretted, seen as either progressive or regressive, but the existence of three such divergent scenarios suggests that as yet no
single vision and associated practices has won out over the others. There is evidence for all three. If I tilt towards the first scenario it is because I think that the outcome of the long US-Soviet competition is a world in which transnational networks have become increasingly important in the lives of people just about everywhere. The other two scenarios seem habituated to a world of fixed spaces, in the one case territorial civilizations and in the other state-based imperialism. In neither case is this the world that I see emerging on a daily basis.

The market-access regime and opposition to it

Moreover, in the first scenario there is the possibility of using the plurality of spaces emerging under the influence of the transnational liberalism described in earlier chapters (particularly Chapters 4 and 5) for a kind of anti-geopolitics built upon a commitment to treating places and people as if they counted independently of their global economic and military "status". Many elements in the "anti-globalization" movements that mobilize around the meetings of international organizations and the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, take this approach: creating international coalitions to challenge the depredations of capital mobility but also to welcome a world less compartmentalized territorially and more open to social change. Without such subversion, however, there is likely to be a deepening of the market-access regime of world capitalism and its commitment to a world economy in which capital will be increasingly unconstrained in moving around the globe to exploit differences in rates of return on investment. A world of rich and poor zones, better accounted for in terms of the system of world cities and their hinterlands than by the world political map, will progressively challenge the contemporary hierarchy of states (see Figure 7.1). Whichever trend becomes dominant – the anti-geopolitics of protest or the increased scope of the market-access regime – there is a limited long-term likelihood of returning to the contours of world politics as they were defined during the previous three ages of geopolitics.

From this point of view, therefore, whatever happens will be something new in which the old principles will be of diminished relevance. In the interim, however, they will not readily disappear. Ideas about relative decline, state-territorial competition, plotting state strategy on a global basis, and thinking of development in terms of backwardness and modernity are so deep-seated as to defy easy supersession. The vocabulary of state-centred geopolitics is still written over material pressures by social groups reacting to increased economic globalization by reviving ethnic and local identities or attempting to resurrect state powers. Strong national identities die hard. States still provide the main opportunity structures for most forms of political activity, even as contra-governmental forces increase in number and scope. Governmentality (territorialized regimes of governmental authority) and movements/trends counter to this now exist in an unstable tension. Even if transnational businesses have increased their powers, states still provide the regulatory environments in which these businesses must operate. Opponents of market-access policies are still largely constrained to work through existing institutional channels, most of which are still state organized. The US government remains the single most important sponsor and source of support for globalization of trade, finance and production.

The events of 11 September 2001 and subsequent economic recession in the United States and around the world have put something of a damper on the rather more far-fetched globalization scenarios. The US government has acted to reinstate more effec-

tive border controls after allowing for a loosening up in previous years to encourage the cross-border movement of goods, capital and, more problematically, of people. As part of the "war on terrorism", the US government has also targeted states held to support terrorism or pose a likely military threat to the United States or its allies. Rather than seeing global terrorism as a qualitatively new phenomenon, therefore, there has been a tendency to squeeze it back into a state-centred mould. The US government has also become increasingly protectionist in relation to agriculture and steel imports, using the attacks as a pretext to bolster the territorial economy of the United States in the face of foreign competition.
Whether this reinstatement of boundaries signifies a wholesale return to a heavily bordered world of states, however, is open to considerable doubt. The growth of the world economy has become based upon a wide range of inter-state exchanges. The US economy, for example, depends crucially on the import of capital to make up for the lack of domestic saving. The recent explosive growth of China’s economy is premised on ready access for its manufactured goods to US and other foreign markets. Capital markets are increasingly integrated across national boundaries. Small states now have the ability to leverage themselves into the world economy on advantageous terms. This has resulted in the top ten of the international league table of highest income per capita countries being dominated by small and intermediate-size countries. As the population size/economic growth equation has been rewritten, the likelihood of military conflict and territorial expansion resulting in hefty economic returns has been much reduced. The world of the market-access regime is radically different from the worlds that preceded it. Indeed, this is likely to be different from the politics of the past. Capturing the state’, for example, as Leninists and social democrats have long advocated as the best strategy for embarking on schemes of radical social change, looks like a strategy whose time has passed. Whether or not this requires the substitution of placeless global networks of a ‘multitude’ of opponents (as in Hardt and Negri’s (2000) Empire) is another thing entirely. Indeed, this is likely to be an exercise in frustration as long as the world remains territorially divided and political identities are rooted in place. What seems more fruitful in fact is to represent the worst excesses of the market-access regime, particularly the fiscal programmes championed by the IMF and World Bank, as destructive of people’s loyalty to place and thereby to ground political opposition not in the nebulous ether of ‘being against’ but in relation to the realities of people’s everyday lives.

The era of globalization since the 1970s has had undeniable effects, not entirely negative. For one thing, states such as China and India have seen remarkable rates of economic growth that perhaps augur the beginning of a long-term shift in the distribution of global income. For another, the historical record suggests that the world has become a relatively less violent place, in the sense of major inter-state wars at least, than it was in the twentieth century. Finally, women and many other groups ‘naturally’ excluded from politics in times past have forced themselves into the picture. The story of globalization, therefore, has very positive aspects that many of its critics fail to note, often retreating into nostalgia for a state-dominated past or waxing utopian about tribal or feudal modes of production as plausible alternatives to global capitalism.

The changes associated with globalization have been enabled by a host of technological, economic and cultural changes — from just-in-time warehousing, shipping containerization, the fax machine, the Internet, and easy round-the-world air travel through offshore production and integrated world commodity, currency and stock markets to worldwide consumer tastes, the massive spread of diasporic communities, and the mass availability of ‘exotic’ vacations. But perhaps these changes augur a more profound shift than simply the redistribution of global incomes, diminished inter-state war and the redistribution of power. Such would be the view of those for whom a ‘post-modern geopolitics’ is in the offing. From this perspective, globalization ‘is the key trope in tying together neo-liberal capitalist rationality, informational technics, mass consumption culture, and the integrated world markets of a postmodern geopolitics’ (Luke 2005, 228). The consequence is that ‘What were once discrete “solid state” circuitries for geopolitical power in closed hierarchical systems must face open-sourced architectures of power in which capital and authority work at nodes in networks’ (ibid., 229–30). How can the modern geopolitical imagination possibly survive these pressures over the long term?

The clash of civilizations

The ‘culture wars’ scenario has become particularly popular with those looking to reconstitute the ideological geopolitics of the Cold War on a multipolar basis. Cold War geopolitics rested on an essential opposition drawn between what were supposed to be two completely different types of society/culture. In reality, of course, cultural differences are always relative ones and there is much in common between cultures that when isolated one from the other appear more particularistic than they really are. Both ‘Islamic’ and Confucian–Asian cultures, for example, combine influences from other parts of the world (above all Europe) and have changed profoundly over the years. The image of fixed, isolated cultures should be rejected for the ideological imposition that it is. Yet an increasing number of writers and intellectuals of statecraft are placing stress on the importance of cultural values and institutions in the geopolitical confusion left in the wake of the Cold War.

To the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1993), for example, the most influential exponent of the ‘clash of civilizations’, future wars will occur between the nations and groups of ‘different civilizations’ — Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Orthodox Christian and Latin American, perhaps also African and Buddhist (see Figure 7.2). The fault lines between these cultures will define the geopolitical battle-lines

$$\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{WESTERN} & \text{ORTHODOX} & \text{CONFUCIAN} & \text{ISLAMIC} & \text{HINDU} & \text{BUDDHIST} \\
\text{LATIN AMERICAN} & \text{AFRICAN} & \text{JAPANESE} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{}
\end{array}$$

Figure 7.2 Huntington’s civilizations (1993). Each civilization is identified as entirely discrete to convey visually the relative size and range of the civilizations as a set.

Source: Redrawn from Huntington (1993)
of the future. 'Culture and cultural identities . . . are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-cold war world. . . Global politics is being recon-
figured along cultural lines' (ibid., 23).

Huntington's maps seem to serve a technical, heuristic purpose. They simply describe
the 'reality' of a world divided along cultural fault lines and signal where in the world
conflicts will erupt. This is how the modern geopolitical imagination has always imag-
inated maps to be. What is new with Huntington is simply that territorially discrete 'civili-
zations' substitute for territorial states that now become the 'agents' of the civilizations
of which they are part. Maps, however, as Chapters 2 and 3 suggest, reflect their makers
as much as or more than the world they purport to describe. In this case, to produce the
discrete civilizations Huntington must 'freeze-frame culture' into fixed and timeless
mentalities that reflect his own vision more than the ambiguous and shifting spatialities
of the world that many of us know (Shapiro 1999, 6).

The problem with Huntington's scenario is twofold. First, who identifies with such
broad-scale 'cultures'? Certainly the 'Western' category is problematic, as contempo-
rary attempts at creating a common sense of 'Europeaness' (in the European Union)
founder on the shools of revived and invented national and ethnic identities. Increasing
divergence between Europe and the United States across a range of policy issues also
suggests that the 'Western' category is no longer as self-evidently homogeneous as it
once seemed. Second, globalization undermines cultural closure. The increasing flows
of information, goods, people and capital around certain parts of the world (particularly
between Europe, North America and East Asia) not only cause potential friction between
cultures, but also tie cultures together, and increase tensions within culture areas as
different social groups and individuals make different judgements about this or that
external influence. Except on a super-organic view that sees them as external to popu-
lations, cultures are never set in stone; they adapt over time in response to external
pressures and internal shifts. 'Culture' cannot, therefore, readily substitute for the al-
embracing role of ideology in the Cold War. The increased scope for independent action
by more states with the end of the Cold War and the pressures imposed on all of them
by globalization work against it.

This said, the 'clash of civilizations' scenario has received something of a vindica-
tion in the aftermath of the terror attacks of 11 September 2001. The apparent agent
of the attacks, the Islamic fundamentalist network al-Qaeda, is led by the Saudi million-
naire Bin Laden. Bin Laden accepts the logic of the 'clash'. He is a prophet and
organizer of inter-civilizational conflict. He is the modern Arab geopoliticist par
excellence. Actively pursued by US forces but not found (as of late 2002), he is not an
operative as much as a theoretician of what divides the Islamic and Western "civiliza-
tions" (Plate 7.1). Mesmerizing and charismatic in his effect on those who come into
his company, he has a clear world-view based on a specific, if peculiar and heretical,
reading of Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. His agents recruit adherents in a manner akin
to that used by the Reverend Moon and his Unification Church (and other cults):
approaching lonely, vulnerable young men affiliated with mosques and Islamic centres
throughout the Arab diaspora, particularly in Germany, England and North America,
and university students in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, using their alienation from
the Western world to turn them into his zealots. Exploiting the open borders, rapid trans-
portation and telecommunications of a globalizing world, he is bent on establishing an
alternative geopolitical world to the US-dominated one now in the offing. A product of
globalization, he is anything but a 'traditional' figure, however ancient he might claim

Plate 7.1 'You really think this will work?' This cartoon identifies one of the primary difficulties of
the US 'war on terrorism': finding Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist network
allegedly responsible for the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Source: © The New Yorker Collection 2002, Mick Stevens from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved

the tradition is that he has been inventing. He offers a mirror-image security mapping of
the world to that offered by Huntington and other prophets of the 'clash of civiliza-
tions'. Like the Western pundits, bin Laden collapses ontology into geography—the key
move of the modern geopolitical imagination. Vice and virtue have geographical
addresses. Like the pundits, he fails to see the arbitrariness of the 'civilizational codes'
that mark the world. Unlike them, he sees the Islamic world as the superior one to
be protected from the contamination of the West. Like them, he despises multicult-
urism, gender equality and tolerance, associating these social ideals with degradation
and weakness. Like them, and in departure from orthodox geopolitical thinking,
he rejects the world of states as the future model of world politics. His priority lies
in securing the home-space for an Islamic civilization defined against a West that has

Bin Laden's problems will be threefold, whatever the initial and continuing success
of his terrorist activities. The first is that the version of Islam he represents is a pecu-
liarily puritanical and violent one. As commentators on Huntington have noted, 'contempo-
rary Islam harbors a complex and pluralistic set of relationships between religious
and political institutions' (Shapiro 1999, 4). The particularly anomic conditions of
Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion of 1979–89, subsequent civil war, and drought
may have proved favourable to the spread of bin Laden's view of the world among the
largely Pashtun supporters of the Taliban regime. Alienated young men from the Arab
world in the cheap hotels and student hostels of Western Europe may well continue to
prove ready recruits to his ranks. But the nationalist aspirations of the Palestinians, the divergent interpretations of Islam between Sunni and Shia branches, the divisions between Arabs and other Muslims, the tolerant Islam characteristic of most American Muslims, and the deep-seated attractions of consumerism and/or democracy all over the Arab world will work against him. Opinion polls show that most Muslim and Arab respondents claim to share many of the same values as Americans and other ‘Westerners’, approve of democratic ideals, and, though disapproving of US foreign policy in the Middle East, would like ‘better relations’ for their countries with the United States (The Economist, 19 October 2002, 43).

The second problem for bin Laden and al-Qaeda is that the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 have helped to reassure US and, more broadly, Western identities that had begun to erode in the aftermath of the Cold War. During the Cold War the Soviet Union represented the Other against which American identity was defined. In this light, American identity was underwritten by US foreign policy. In the 1990s there was considerable nostalgia in the United States, particularly among intellectuals of statecraft and in the military-industrial complex, for the world that had provided them with a sense of purpose and with fat paychecks. In the absence of an overwhelming threat or danger, such as the former Soviet Union and its missile forces, US foreign policy had lost both purpose and coherence. This removed one of the main props upon which a distinctive American political identity had rested for fifty years. Bin Laden has undoubtedly helped to re-establish a strong sense of an external danger that cannot be ignored and that can reorient US foreign policy. An open-ended ‘war on terrorism’ is the result, in which the might of the United States is directed towards trying to secure the US ‘homeland’ from both domestic enemies and foreign foes. Osama bin Laden is the new enemy number one around which US foreign policy can be reorganized and a reinvigorated national identity can be redefined.

The third problem is one that can and must be created for bin Laden and his supporters. It is to challenge the plausibility of the story of a singular ‘West’, the moral geography, if you will, that bin Laden thrives on: the secular, consumerist, spiritually bankrupt, amoral and exclusionary world that values nothing other than the ‘bottom line’ and continued economic growth at any price. In the shadow cast by the worst terrorist attack visited on US soil, Americans can begin to ask what they have wrought in the world and how they should change to make the whole world a better place. Of course, Americans could just continue to be themselves, imposing military and economic hegemony to keep the world in line. But they, and others, could start to challenge the geopolitical abstractions that turn places into geopolitical commodities, people into pawns of superpowers and terror networks that aspire to similar power, whether it be to produce the rubble of Kabul or the now-downed towers of the World Trade Center.

From state-centrism to US unipolarity

A third scenario is sceptical that anything much has changed about the role of states in particular and the nature of geopolitics in general. From this viewpoint, all that has changed is that one state, the United States, has become predominant globally. Prepared to adopt a hands-off attitude before 11 September 2001, proposing a national missile shield, opposing international agreements, and generally adopting a hostile attitude towards the idea of an ‘international community’, the US government then decided to go on the offensive. Shifting from a defensive to an offensive ‘realism’ means making a bid for empire even if posed in terms of a perpetual ‘war on terrorism’ and the states that are held to support terrorism (such as Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein). In this scenario the twenty-first century bores well to become the real ‘American Century’.

The basic premise of this scenario is that there are no significant alternatives to the exercise of US power. This power has three main aspects to it, weighted in different degrees by different commentators and practitioners. The dilemma is that these three are not necessarily compatible and, indeed, show signs of being inherently contradictory. The first is military. In this category the United States simply has no peer (Figure 7.3). Contrary to predictions in the 1990s of US decline, with the demise of the Soviet Union the United States has established itself as a global military hyperpower. The United States has a seemingly unassailable technological edge in war-fighting capabilities. At one and the same time this tempts US governments into adventurous interventions around the world yet also makes the US ‘homeland’ vulnerable to asymmetric warfare: the use of terrorism either with or without weapons of mass destruction. If the 2002 declaration of war in Iraq fits the first category, then the terrorist assaults of 2001 fit the second one. The military prowess and the plans to use it reflect two fears: the growth of global terrorism directed at US targets at home and abroad and the rise of potential global challengers, particularly China. These have become the major priorities since the advent of the G. W. Bush administration in 2001. If the Clinton administrations of the 1990s had undertaken the task of integrating the other major states of the world into a rule-based transnational–liberal order, the Bush administration has become largely committed to an ambitious reinstatement of offensive realism: preventing by every possible means the emergence of any serious rival or combination of rivals to the US, anywhere in the world, and to opposing not just any rival would-be world hegemon, but even the ability of other states to play the role of great power within their own regions.

(Lieven, 2002, 9)

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Figure 7.3 Defence spending by country, absolute (A) and relative (B), 2000.

Source: Author from various sources.
Whether these sorts of actions will invariably produce a sustainable benefit for the United States is still an open question. The very success of US opening up of the world economy now makes the United States itself vulnerable to external shocks. What is less doubtful is that an aggressive US imperialism will impose economic costs that the US economy is increasingly ill-equipped to cover. Overthrowing regimes and reconstructing countries, as proposed for Iraq in 2002, is an expensive business for a country such as the United States, which, although the world’s biggest national economy, also has the world’s largest balance of payments deficit and a massive and increasing government debt (Nordhaus 2002).

Finally, US governmental leaders are the only actors free to choose the balance of force and consent in the hegemonic calculus at the heart of world politics. But the military and the economic-cultural dimensions of the US presence in world politics are potentially very much at cross-purposes. During the Cold War they tended to work together because they were directed at different places. Military power was mainly directed towards curbing the power and influence of the Soviet Union. Political-economic clout was focused, rather, upon rebuilding the war-shattered economies of Europe and Japan and tying them into a Pax Americana. With the end of the Cold War, US governments are faced with the challenge of how to balance between coercion and consent. In the absence of a ‘common threat’ this has proven very difficult to do, hence the flip-flop between the Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations. Temporarily at least, following 11 September 2001, the military theme is in the ascendant, fuelled by popular American nationalism, the new electronic weapons that on the one hand US military has available to it, fears about access to oil supplies, and the appeal of the open-ended ‘war on terrorism’. But this recipe has gone down particularly poorly in Europe because the European political classes and their populations have become habituated to a different relationship with the United States. The hegemony that the United States has previously exercised had a mix of coercion and consent implicit in it, especially in relation to Europe. Tilting too much away from this may undermine the US global political position precisely at the time when its military power is at its zenith. Unlike previous global hegemons, if the United States chooses empire it may succeed only in eroding the very world it has long claimed to be creating.

Conclusion

What to make of these different scenarios? It seems to me that there is an inherent tension between the globalizing world that the United States has sponsored (and that now has also spawned global terror networks and international drug traffickers) and the US role as a neo-imperial force in world politics. If there is as yet no obvious challenger to the United States as a global hegemon, there is the increasing possibility of a world in which US hegemony is increasingly challenged if it takes a unilateral and coercive basis. This may well be an auspicious moment, therefore, to ask whether the modern geopolitical imagination, which lies at the root of all of these scenarios to one degree or another, is not itself overdue for retirement from the global scene. The attraction of globalization lies partly in the possibilities it offers for a world in which the cry ‘Hannibal ad portas’ (‘Hannibal is at the door’, the Roman version of the later ‘the Russians are coming’) will no longer be heard. As yet, however, we can have little confidence that this will indeed be the case. The world is still all too much in the hold
A new age of ‘global’ geopolitics?

of another adage that has prevailed for centuries but that has never yet worked to produce what it promises: *si vis pacem, para bellum* (‘If you want peace, prepare for war’).

**Recommended reading**


Tolnay, S. 2002 *Beyond regime change*. The administration doesn’t simply want to oust Saddam Hussein. It wants to redraw the map of the Middle East. *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December: M1–6.


**8** Conclusion

The purpose of this book is to trace analytically the beginnings and development of the modern geopolitical imagination by exposing its component parts and showing how these came together under different material conditions and as a result of contestation to produce a succession of different geopolitical epochs. In this Conclusion I restate the premises underlying the book, address a number of possible criticisms that might be directed at it, and then lay out some ideas for an alternative way of considering world political geography.

**Revisiting theoretical premises**

Two theoretical premises inform the perspective of the book. The first is that in the realm of geopolitics the intellectual and the political are not separable. Geopolitics has served statecraft, usually that of particular states. Yet it has claimed to do so under the sign of objectivity – most typically in the form of the view from nowhere. This contradiction is more than a little problematic. I take the position that it undermines the entire approach. Rather like the explorers of Australia discussed in Chapter 3, students and practitioners of world politics have found what they wanted to find because they knew all along. What was known kept the geopolitical treadmill turning indefinitely. They could never be surprised. They could never see that there was a native point of view that might be worth taking seriously. There was no possibility of searching for communalities and common understandings between us and them. Just as Caesar said and did when he arrived in Britain: We came, we knew, we conquered.

The second premise is that the making of the modern geopolitical imagination has not been a once-only thing. Though the basic building-blocks or principles have remained more or less the same, the end product has gone through a number of important transformations as the political world it has purported both to reveal and to reflect has changed. An imagination or ideas do not exist 'out there' or simply in texts and documents; they are implicit in practices or social action. To survive and prosper they must be passed on from generation to generation as a form of common sense or guide to action and must adapt successfully to challenges and changed historical contexts.

**Engaging with criticisms**

These premises and the arguments I develop from them are somewhat different from those of other recent commentaries on political geography, world politics and geopolitics. Of