

Palestine in global geopolitics

فلسطين في الجيوبوليتيك العالمي

Chetibi ali*

University of 8 May 1945 Guelma

E-mail: chetibi.ali@univ-guelma.dz

The date of Submission: 2026/04/15

The date of revision: 2026/07/03

date of publication: 15-07-2026

Abstract:

Western theorists attempt to present geopolitics through various approaches, sometimes focusing on naval power, other times on air power, and still other times on geographical location and its role in imposing global control. Mackinder's Heartland theory and Spykman's Marginal Zone theory are among the most important of these theories, which primarily focus on controlling Eurasia, the "heartland," as a path to global domination. However, what these thinkers overlook are the new shifts in power and its components, which no longer depend solely on military strength but extend to other components, especially economic ones, and the role of hydrocarbons, maritime transport, and sea lanes in this, as well as the methods of controlling them. Hence, this research aims to uncover these components and the position and importance of Palestine within the framework of controlling oil resources and maritime shipping routes for oil transport.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Palestine, Control, Power, Heartland

الملخص:

يحاول المنظرون الغربيون تقديم علم الجيوبوليتيك بمقاربات مختلفة، تتركز تارة على القوة البحرية وتارة أخرى على القوة الجوية، وأحيانا أخرى على الموقع الجغرافي ودوره في فرض السيطرة على العالم، وتعتبر نظريتي قلب العالم لـ "ماكيندر" والنطاق الهامشي لـ "سبيكمان"، من أهم هذه النظريات والتي تركز أساسا على السيطرة على أوراسيا "قلب الأرض" في الطريق للتحكم بالعالم، لكن ما يغفله هؤلاء المفكرون هو التحولات الجديدة في القوة ومقومات القوة، والتي لم تعد تعتمد على القوة العسكرية فحسب بل تتعداها لباقي المقومات وخصوصا منها الاقتصادية، ودور المحروقات والنقل البحري والممرات البحرية فيها وطرق السيطرة عليها، ومن هنا يأتي بحثنا هذا لكشف اللثام عن هذه المقومات وماهي مكانة وأهمية فلسطين في إطار السيطرة على منابع النفط وطرق الملاحة البحرية الخاصة بنقل النفط. الكلمات المفتاحية: الجيوبوليتيك، فلسطين، السيطرة، القوة، قلب الأرض

* ALI CHETIBI

Introduction:

Throughout history, Palestine has been recognized as a crossroads of Eastern and Western civilizations. It has served as a dividing line between competing powers seeking control over the Mediterranean basin—what was historically referred to as the "Old World." Situated at the meeting point of three continents, Palestine represents the only land corridor linking Africa to Asia, while also providing access to Europe. Despite the fact that no major ancient civilization was established on its soil, and although it lacked extensive agricultural foundations that typically sustained early civilizations, Palestine nevertheless emerged as one of the most significant regions in world history.

Palestine, an Arab land regarded as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions and a passageway for many prophets, has always held immense spiritual and religious importance. This sacred dimension explains the enduring attachment of peoples to the land, their desire to visit it, and their reverence for it. Yet, beyond its religious symbolism, what requires deeper investigation is the persistent drive of empires—ancient and modern alike—to establish a foothold and exert control over Palestine. From the Mesopotamian civilizations, the Hittites, Egyptians, Persians, and Romans, through the Islamic era, the British Empire, and later the Zionist entity established as a colonial outpost in the heart of the Arab world, up to the United States' current involvement, Palestine has consistently been the object of geopolitical competition. This raises fundamental questions about the motives behind such relentless struggles for dominance, often disregarding the existence of the indigenous population that has inhabited the land since antiquity.

1 Research Problem

Based on the above, the central research problem can be formulated as follows:

What does Palestine signify in global geopolitics?

2 Sub-questions

1. What are the major theories in global geopolitics, and how do they relate to Palestine?
2. What is the geopolitical significance of Palestine in the global perspective?

3 Hypotheses

To address this problem and its related sub-questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Although classical geopolitical theories emphasize Eurasia as the "Heartland," Palestine may represent the true heart of global geopolitics.
2. The Heartland theory and the Rimland theory are the most relevant frameworks for analyzing the Arab region.
3. Palestine constitutes the core and axis of the Arab world.

1. The most important geopolitical theories

There are many geopolitical theories that have addressed global geopolitics, but we will present only the theories that specifically concern the Arab region. Before that, we will attempt to understand the meaning and concept of geopolitics.

1.1- The concept of geopolitics

A The term *geopolitics* or *political geography* is relatively new compared to the term *geography* and its other branches such as physical geography and human geography. At first, this term faced strong opposition from geographers, but over time it managed to establish itself and became one of

the essential political sciences for understanding and analyzing many international events around the world. Here are some definitions of geopolitics:

- **Hartshorne's definition:** Political geography is concerned with studying the variation of political phenomena from one place to another and their interaction with changes occurring in other surface phenomena of the Earth, especially in the places where humans live.
- **Weigert's definition:** Political geography is a branch of human geography that studies the relationship between humans and the land, with a clear emphasis on explaining the connection between geographical factors and political variables (Al-Issawi, p.16).
- **Alexander's definition:** Political geography focuses on the study of political regions and their manifestations on the Earth's surface.
- **Pacione's definition:** Political geography studies the role of any geographical factor that influences political decisions and changes (Al-Issawi, p.17).

We notice that all definitions agree on linking Earth's factors with political variables. Accordingly, we can present the following definition: Political geography, or geopolitics, is the scientific field concerned with studying political phenomena from the perspective of geography, examining the impact of geographical factors in all their diversity on political variables and fluctuations.

In our topic, we find that the two closest theories to explaining the Palestinian situation are the **Heartland Theory** and the **Rimland Theory**

1.2- Mackinder's Heartland Theory

Halford Mackinder is considered one of the most renowned geographers. He was born in Scotland and later became a professor in Britain. Mackinder's ideas differ fundamentally from those of Alfred Mahan: while Mahan emphasizes naval power, Mackinder focuses on land power. Mahan argues that control of the seas leads to global dominance, whereas Mackinder contends that control of land—specifically the "Heartland"—is the key to ruling the world.

Through his research in political geography, Mackinder sought to link history with geography. He observed that the world consists of a continuous landmass represented by the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, which he termed the "World Island," the core of the Old World. In contrast, he identified a set of isolated islands—America, Australia, Japan, and Britain—that he referred to as the "periphery." Mackinder introduced his Heartland Theory in 1904 (Al-Issawi, p. 307), arguing that the interior of Eurasia constitutes the political center of the world. He warned that controlling the largest landmass on earth could provide the foundation for global domination. His theory was summarized as follows:

- Whoever rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland.
- Whoever rules the Heartland commands the World Island.
- Whoever rules the World Island commands the world (Al-Issawi, p. 310).

1.3- Spykman Rimland's Marginal Zone Theory

The theory of the margin or rimland came to reduce the impact of the Earth's heartland or landmass in controlling the world. Unlike the Heartland Theory, its framework was set as follows:

- Whoever controls the rimland controls Eurasia.
- Whoever controls Eurasia controls the destiny of the world (Al-Issawi, p. 317).

In reality, Spykman did not bring anything new. Ultimately, the fate of the world is determined by whoever controls Eurasia—the “Heartland.” But were these theories the product of a potential war between the Soviet Union and the West? Or were they based on the assumption that the Islamic world had been completely neutralized and subjected to Western will and dependency?

The Western world, which built its modern strategy on expansion, colonization, and imposing its will—especially in the Old World, where the Islamic world constitutes most of it—tried as much as possible to avoid war on its own soil, particularly after Europe’s suffering in World War II. Moreover, this world has long considered the Islamic world the eternal enemy of the West, and therefore it must always remain in a state of weakness and siege.

So, if their theories claim that Eurasia is the Heartland, without which the world cannot be controlled, reality suggests otherwise. After the Arab world gained independence from Western colonialism, the two strongest powers—Britain and France—tried to keep two countries under control at any cost: Algeria and Palestine. While Algeria wrested its independence by force, Palestine’s situation was no better under British colonialism, which firmly established the Zionists there before departing.

2. The importance of Palestine in global geopolitics

As we mentioned earlier, Palestine was not of such size and location that it would give it a great position on the world stage. It is a poor, barren, stony land. So what made it gain this great position and cause the East and West to compete over it throughout history? Here we try to uncover some important points that may give us a sufficient answer.

2.1- The geographical importance of Palestine

2.1.1- Astronomical location

Palestine occupies a unique geographical position, as it represents the very heart of the Arab world. It serves as a great land bridge linking the three major continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is located between the latitudes of 29°, 30°, and 33° north, and the longitudes of 34°, 35°, and 40° east of the Asian continent (Al-Katari, p. 23). This astronomical location has led to a clear climatic variation between the northern and southern parts of Palestine. The northern regions enjoy relatively moderate temperatures and are often referred to as the “summer resort of Palestine,” whereas the southern region is characterized by a dry desert climate, extremely hot in summer and very cold in winter (Daloul, p. 13).

This climate, within a country of limited geographical area, would generally be considered a negative factor. The predominance of a hot, dry desert climate for most of the year, with the remainder being cold and dry, in addition to the scarcity of natural resources, should act as a repelling rather than an attracting factor for settlement. Nevertheless, the opposite is observed in Palestine, where global powers compete for control over its territory.

2.1.2- Geographic location

Palestine covers an area of 27,024 km² and has a 224 km coastline on the Mediterranean Sea to the west and a 10 km coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba to the far south. It shares a 70 km land border with Syria to the northeast, a 79 km border with Lebanon to the north, a 360 km border with Jordan to the east, and a 240 km border with Egypt to the south (Al-Katri, p. 23). With this location, Palestine occupies a strategic position at the heart of the Arab world. It serves as a link between the Asian Levant and the African Maghreb, and is considered the heart of the Islamic world, which spans three continents. It connects Africa to Asia and is the

only land crossing between these continents. Furthermore, it is the link between the Mediterranean and Red Seas, which are connected to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. This excellent geopolitical location may be one of the main reasons why all ancient empires have tried to control it, and this continues to be the case today. However, Palestine's shape is a weakness for it as a state. While it is important and strategic within its Arab context, it is weak as an independent state and easily contained due to several factors. Its area is very small, and as John Herz stated, a small state is fragile, lacking the means to defend itself or survive, thus relying on protection and alliances for its survival. Its elongated shape is also a weakness, as it stretches 430 km from north to south, while its width varies between 50-70 km in the north and 70-90 km in the center. Palestine's width between Rafah and the Dead Sea is approximately 117 km (Dalloul, p. 17).

Thus, Palestine's shape resembles a rectangle, with its width representing 1/8 or, at best, 1/4 of its length. This means a lack of depth, which would otherwise provide the state with additional strength to defend itself in the event of an attack.

While Palestine's location is not strategically important for Palestine as a state, it is crucial for the Arab and Islamic world, serving as a link between East and West, and a geographical isthmus separating them. Furthermore, its occupation, as witnessed in the Crusades and the current Zionist occupation, weakens the Arab world, divides its ranks, separates its east from its west, and hinders its unity and communication between its African and Asian halves. What is considered a weakness for the Arab world is a source of strength for its enemies, who have identified the Arab world's primary vulnerability and worked to neutralize it from its historical role time and again.

2.2- The international conflict over Palestine throughout history

Palestine is considered the land of divine messages, as most of the prophets passed through it. It holds great significance for the followers of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Throughout history, ancient empires sought to control Palestine as a passage linking the three old continents—Asia, Europe, and Africa. The presence of the ancient Palestinians along the Canaanite coast, from Mount Carmel to Gaza, is a historical reality that has never been questioned. The Old Testament spoke extensively about the Palestinians, and various sources from the second millennium BCE confirmed their existence and civilization in the coastal cities in particular. Historical writings also recorded that Herodotus used the name “Palestine,” as he heard it from its people. The Romans later applied the name Palestine to the entire land, and this usage continued among Muslim Arabs. Even Great Britain did not dare to change it (Al-Hout, pp. 40–41).

Despite the succession of rule by most of the world's greatest empires over Palestine, none ever dared to abolish or change its name, nor to attempt replacing or expelling its people—except for the Zionist entity, which seized the land, displaced the people, exterminated those who remained, altered the name, and usurped history. Not even the olive tree was spared, for it reminds them of the land's origins and its people.

2.2.1- Palestine under Persian Rule

Palestine was first inhabited by the Canaanites, the earliest settlers of the land. Despite its barren and arid nature, they recognized its strategic location as a vital crossroads between east and west, north and south, and thus settled and developed it. However, they were not spared from the attacks of the Egyptians and the Hittites, who realized the importance of this passage

and believed it should not fall under the control of any single power. As a result, wars over Palestine were devastating, often amounting to wars of extermination in which no side spared any effort to annihilate the other, until the Persians eventually prevailed.

After the Persian kingdom was unified and gained control over Babylon—with the help of the Jews during the reign of King Cyrus, who employed some of them as spies in Palestine—the empire expanded northward and westward, reaching as far as Greece. Under Darius, Palestine became part of the fifth satrapy, known as “Beyond the River.” The capital of this satrapy was usually Damascus, and sometimes Sidon and it encompassed the Levant and Cyprus. The Persian era ended with the conquests of Alexander the Great, though the Persians returned twice for brief periods: first during the Roman Empire in 40 BCE, and later during the Byzantine Empire in 614 CE (Al-Hout, p. 58).

2.2.1- Palestine under Greek Rule

The struggle for Palestine never ceased. After the conflict between the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Hittites, followed by the Persians' control of the region and the neutralization of all others, it was the turn of the Greeks. They managed to defeat the Persians, but they were not content with merely defeating and repelling them. They pursued them into the lands they had occupied, most notably Palestine. Hellenistic Greek control over Palestine lasted from 332 BC to 63 BC (Dalloul, p. 73). The historian Josephus stated that Alexander went to conquer Jerusalem and was met by the high priest on Mount Scopus. Alexander welcomed him and asked him to surrender the city, but he refused, explaining that the land was Persian and that its inhabitants had sworn not to surrender it except by order of their king. Professor Porter, however, stated that Alexander ascended to Jerusalem and entered it with dignity and respect, and did not harm its inhabitants (Al-Barghouthi, p. 51).

Regardless of what historians say, whose writings are often filled with emotional language that doesn't align with scientific objectivity, the important point is that the struggle for Palestine has been a reality throughout history. From the conflict between the Egyptians and the Hittites, to the Babylonian conquest and the exile of the Jews, then the Persian return to Palestine and their reinstatement of the Jews, followed by their defeat at the hands of the Greeks, who would then cede the land to the Romans once again.

2.2.3- Palestine under Roman Rule

What I specifically want to point out here is that Palestine has been a focal point of global conflict throughout history. If only the peoples of the East had sought to control Palestine, we might say they were simply seeking access to the Mediterranean Sea, the lifeblood of the ancient world. But the fact that Mediterranean peoples like the Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, and Egyptians all sought to control Palestine raises the fundamental question of this land's importance in geopolitics and military science.

After the Romans conquered Carthage and North Africa, they turned eastward and conquered Greece, including parts of Syria and Palestine that were under its control. Since the Seleucids were weak, the Roman general Pompey conquered Syria. As for southern Palestine, sovereignty was divided between the Maccabees (Jews), the Nabataeans, and the Greeks. The Romans defeated the Maccabees and sought to rebuild the cities they had destroyed, including Sebastia (Samaria) and Beit She'an (Gaza). They also liberated the cities that had been under Greek control and annexed by the Maccabees. (Al-Hout, p. 61)

What concerns us in this research is not the historical facts themselves, but rather the control, succession, and rivalry of these empires over Palestine. Therefore, we present only the dates of control and the dividing line between the rule of one empire and another. This is indeed a reality, as no state can fully control or dominate the region without annexing Palestine. Furthermore, the criterion and indicator of a state's decline is its loss of control over Palestine. At the end of the fourth century AD, the Roman Empire split into two empires, Eastern and Western. Palestine and Syria were part of the Eastern Roman Empire (395-646 AD), and during the Byzantine era, the name Palestine became firmly established politically and administratively (Al-Hout, p. 162).

2.2.4- Palestine Under Islamic Rule and the Crusades

At the advent of Islam, the Arab region was dominated by the Byzantine Roman Empire in the west and the Persian Empire in the east. The Arabs were scattered, warring tribes with no significant presence or influence on human civilization. With the Arabs' embrace of Islam, they found a spiritual force that united them and brought them together. Thus began the emergence of a state capable of challenging the two most powerful empires that had dominated the ancient world. Just as the nascent Islamic state turned eastward toward Persia, it also turned westward to confront the Byzantine Empire, which had controlled the Arab region and occupied Palestine for centuries. Because Palestine is a holy land for all religions, the birthplace of revelation, the site of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey, and his first Qibla (direction of prayer), it acquired its sanctity early on for Muslims. Liberating it from Byzantine paganism was a sacred religious duty. The Arabs also recognized its strategic value early on, understanding that preserving the region's independence, freedom, and unity required the recapture and control of Palestine.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, turned his attention to Palestine and began preparing the way for the liberation of Jerusalem and securing the northern borders of the Islamic state. This led to the Battle of Mu'tah in the eighth year of the Hijra, the Battle of Tabuk in the ninth, and the expedition of Usama ibn Zayd in the eleventh year of the Hijra (Mehran, p. 519).

Thus, the concern for liberating Palestine from the Romans began during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. However, he passed away before this could be completed. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq continued the process after him, and Umar ibn al-Khattab completed it, as the second caliph did not live long enough to witness the liberation of Jerusalem. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq began directing armies to the Levant in the thirteenth year of the Hijra, ordering them to conquer and liberate the Levant from the Romans (Mehran, p. 520).

The conquest of Palestine was achieved by Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab in February 638 CE. He came from the Hijaz to Jerusalem and personally received the keys from Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem, after which he signed the Pact of Umar (Daloul, p. 75). With the conquest of Jerusalem and the surrender of its keys, a long era of Roman rule over the region in general, and Palestine in particular, came to an end, ushering in an era of Arab Islamic rule over Palestine and beyond. When the Greeks and Romans previously occupied Palestine, they were able to subjugate the entire East. When the Muslims ruled Jerusalem, they controlled much of the West. Nevertheless, Western campaigns against Palestine, known as the Crusades, did not cease. In the 12th century, the Crusaders managed to occupy Palestine, but

this ended with their defeat at the Battle of Hattin in 1187 at the hands of Saladin. Palestine then fell under Mamluk rule until the 13th century, and subsequently under Ottoman rule from the 16th century until World War I (Al-Kathiri, p. 297).

The West understood that it could not control the region and restore Roman glory without controlling Palestine. After numerous attempts, the British Empire succeeded in controlling Palestine and establishing a protectorate over it.

2.2.3- Palestine The Heart Land

All that has been outlined thus far serves merely as a prelude to understanding the true significance of Palestine within the global political order. Palestine is not simply a barren stretch of land, as geography might suggest, but rather a unique terrestrial isthmus that links three continents together. No other land corridor unites the continents of the Old World into a single landmass, enabling direct overland movement without reliance on maritime or aerial routes. Moreover, Palestine constitutes the dividing line between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Just as the Suez Canal was carved through Egyptian territory to connect these waters, Palestine itself could theoretically host a canal that would link the two seas.

Palestine is not only the land bridge between the three most vital regions of the world, but also a strategic base adjacent to the sources of Arab oil and gas. Energy is the lifeblood of modern civilization, and competition over it represents one of the fiercest struggles of our time. By virtue of its proximity to energy reserves and its nearness to the Suez Canal—the most critical passageway for oil tankers—Palestine functions as a vantage point for monitoring energy rights and trade routes. The Western world is acutely aware of this reality and studies it with great care. Support for the Zionist entity has never stemmed from genuine affection for the Jewish people; indeed, Western powers were historically the first to persecute, expel, and massacre them. Hatred of Jews in the West is deeply rooted, as evidenced by the expulsions in Spain following the fall of al-Andalus, the hostility expressed in Venetian literature, and ultimately the Nazi Holocaust. By contrast, Jews never experienced the degree of respect and protection afforded to them under Islamic rule, despite their frequent intrigues.

Yet the West abandoned its old colonial and settlement strategies, which had provoked Arab and Muslim resistance, and instead resorted to an ancient Persian stratagem: implanting the Jewish presence within the Arab body politic, thereby splitting it irreparably through the Zionist wedge in Palestine. Although Western geopolitical discourse often identifies Eurasia as the “Heartland,” drawing circles that encompass the Arab and Islamic world and asserting that whoever controls this heart controls the globe, what is concealed is the following:

1. Whoever controls Palestine controls the Middle East.
 2. Whoever controls the Middle East controls the Old World.
 3. Whoever controls the Old World controls the entire globe.
- **Palestine is the heart land**
 - **The Middle East:** the Arab world together with its neighbors Iran and Turkey, where energy resources abound.
 - **The Old World:** the three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe—particularly the regions surrounding the Mediterranean basin.

This is the strategic vision pursued by the West in general, and by the United States of America in particular.

Conclusion:

Palestine occupies a very important position in global geopolitics. It is not just an ordinary land that gained its significance from its ancient history and its status as a sacred land, the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, but also because its geopolitical location grants whoever controls it the ability to dominate the surrounding region. Throughout history, we see great competition among empires to control it, continuing into the modern era despite the advancement of means, weapons, and capabilities. Yet, the strategic location remains of utmost importance to geopoliticians, as well as political and military leaders alike. Palestine is the heart of the earth, over which all compete to gain control, so that they may control the world.

List of references:

1. Ahmed Fayege Dalloul, Palestine: Geography and History, Refugee Studies Academy, London, 2021
2. Bahri Ahmed Al-Kathri, Geography of Palestine, Tariq Al-Ilm Library, e-book, www.darsafa.net
3. Bayan Nuwayhid Al-Hout, Palestine (The Cause, the People, the Civilization), 1st ed., Dar Al-Istiqlal for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1991
4. Pierre Cellier, translated by Ahmed Abdel-Karim, Political Geography and Strategic Geography, 1st ed., Al-Ahali for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 1988
5. Rashad Mahmoud Al-Baghdadi, Relations between the Arabian Peninsula and Palestine, PhD dissertation, Umm Al-Qura University, Mecca, 1987
6. Zafar Al-Islam Khan, The History of Ancient Palestine (From the First Jewish Invasion to the Last Crusader Invasion), Dar Al-Nafais, 3rd ed., Beirut, 1981
7. Afif Al-Bahnasi, The History of Ancient Palestine Through Archaeology, Syrian Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 2009
8. Omar Al-Saleh Al-Barghouthi and Khalil Totah History of Palestine, Library of Religious Culture, Alexandria, 2001
9. Fayez Muhammad Al-Issawi, Contemporary Political Geography, University Knowledge House, Alexandria, 2000
10. Fayez Muhammad Al-Issawi, Contemporary Political Geography, University Knowledge House, Alexandria
11. Fouché of Chartres, translated by Qasim Abdo Qasim, Crusader Settlement in Palestine, 1st ed., Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2001
12. Muhammad Riyad, General Principles of Geography and Geopolitics, Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, Cairo, 2014
13. Muhammad Abdul Ghani Saudi, Contemporary Political Geography, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Egypt, 2010