



THE WORLD EXPLAINED IN MAPS

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GPF | GEOPOLITICAL
FUTURES

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THE WORLD EXPLAINED IN MAPS

INTRODUCTION

Readers have often inquired how our analysts can know so much about so many diverse places scattered across the globe. One essential component to this answer is maps—geopolitical cheat sheets for analysts. A single map can convey enormous amounts of information. This report contains a wide range of maps, each revealing a unique piece of information about its region or country. By constructing such a varied collection, we build a visual arsenal that provides countless insights to a location such as inhabitable and arable terrain, viable transportation routes, population composition, and so on.

Maps also aid in reducing the noise and seeing the obvious. Seeing the obvious may seem easy, but it entails learning to ignore the common knowledge of what “must be” and seeing what “is.” This plays a vital role in any geopolitical analysis and requires discipline and time to develop as a skill. When studying geopolitical events and conflicts, it is very easy to get caught up in political rhetoric, media hype, and other issues that distract from what really matters.

Maps concisely present information that reflects the basic components of the places represented. For example, it can show the most viable routes for military invasion, despite what any information campaigns may try to lead the public to believe. Maps are

teeming with information. The key to unlocking that information is to note the obvious and then walk through what that reality means.

When taken together, a series of maps becomes even more valuable as they can show history passing, illustrate patterns, and highlight geopolitical constants. Comparing territorial maps over time can illustrate the rise and fall of regional powers as well as the areas more vulnerable to conquest. Maps help explain why incidents repeat themselves—such as why the North European Plain is a regular battleground in European-Russian conflicts—and the impact of geopolitical trends—such as migration patterns and the mixing of populations in borderlands. Maps also help explain how countries respond to constraints, like India’s isolation due to the Himalayas or Japan’s interest in protecting trade flowing through the Strait of Malacca.

Now, let us share with you some of the valuable insights that we have gained from what we consider to be maps essential for understanding the world.

CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia is slowly destabilizing, and the speed and extent of this destabilization depend in large part on political and economic shifts in Russia, China, Afghanistan, and beyond. Geography is the primary reason outside forces are the main factors shaping the trajectory of Central Asia. Historically trapped between several major powers—such as Russia and China—Central Asia is highly vulnerable to invasion.

The region stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Tien Shan Mountains in the south and the Altay Mountains in the east. The mountain ranges separate the region from Afghanistan in the south and China in the east. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and

Turkmenistan are mostly flat, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are mountainous.

CENTRAL ASIA TOPOGRAPHY

Click on map to enlarge



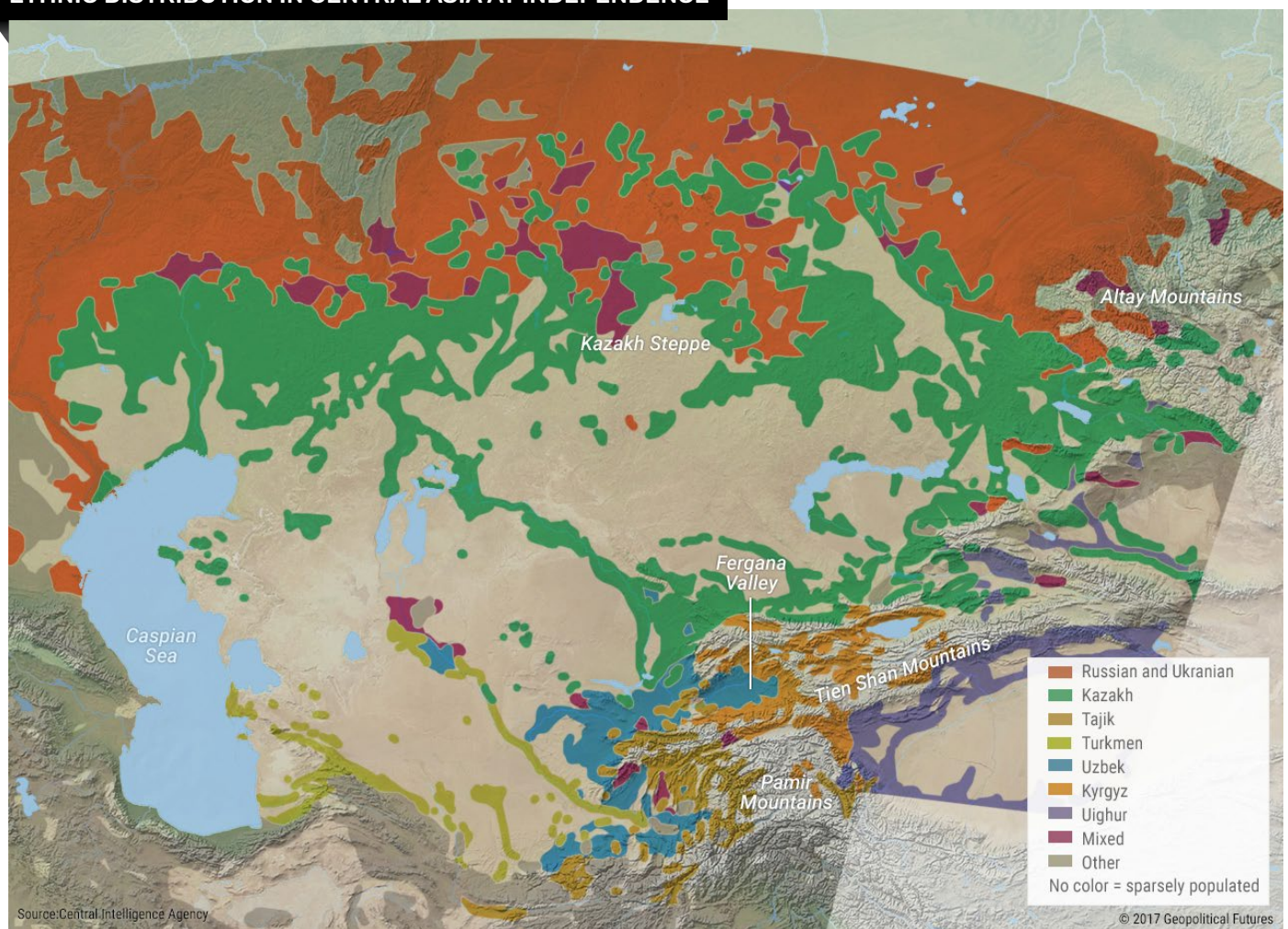
In the region's north lies the vast Kazakh Steppe. Kazakhstan shares a flat, 3,000-mile border with Russia—a border the country cannot defend. Nevertheless, even Central Asian countries further removed from Russia, and separated from China by mountains, are vulnerable. Since the late 600s, indigenous Turkic forces, various powers that controlled Persia (including Arabs and Turks), and the Chinese have all at some point controlled parts of the region.

Centuries of invasions and foreign rule contributed to the emergence of weak states with deep internal vulnerabilities in

Central Asia. The region's modern-day borders are the result of Soviet planners drawing borders in the 1920s and 1930s and are therefore not organic and do not strictly reflect ethnic or national divisions. About 23 percent of Kazakhstan's population, for example, is made up of ethnic Russians. Ethnic Uzbeks make up about 14 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population and over 13 percent of Tajikistan's. Central Asia is thus a region where ethnic and regional tensions abound and threaten the unity of modern states.

ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION IN CENTRAL ASIA AT INDEPENDENCE

[Click on map to enlarge](#)

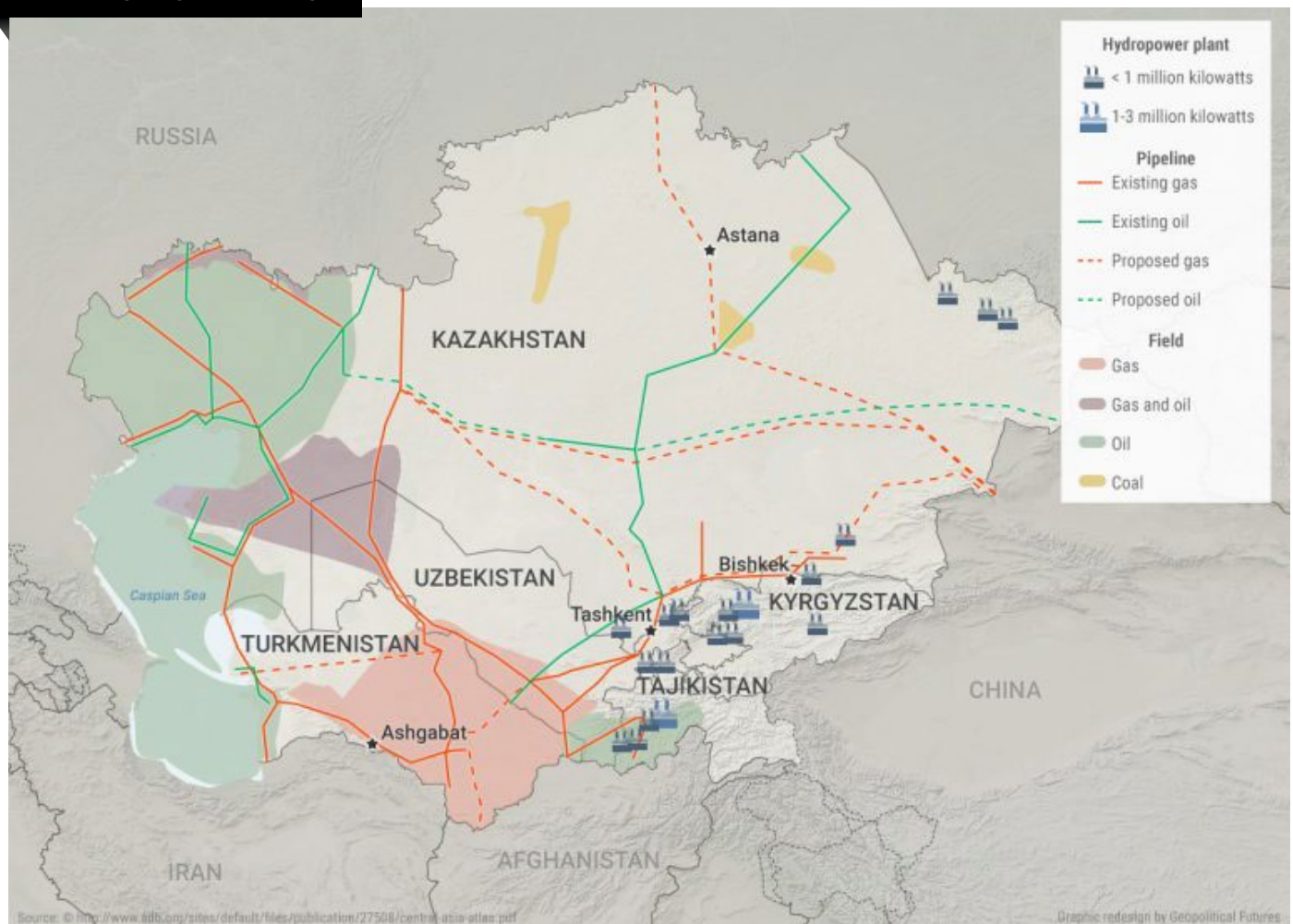


Geography and Soviet-era infrastructure planning contribute to ongoing tensions among the five Central Asian states. At the core of the tension is intense competition over scarce resources,

especially water. The region depends on two major rivers, the Syr Darya and Amu Darya. Under Soviet rule, the upstream countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) provided water for the rest of the region through a centrally regulated plan that managed the use of a reservoir and water distribution levels in the region based on Soviet economic priorities. The other countries, in turn, provided energy to resource-poor Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, worries grew—especially in Uzbekistan—over upstream countries diverting water for power generation.

PIPELINES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Click on map to enlarge



Scarce resources, population growth, and the use of energy and water as negotiating tools all threaten to heighten ethnic and cross-border tensions—especially in the fertile and heavily

populated Fergana Valley, which is divided among Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.



The region's proximity to Afghanistan adds another layer of instability. The US drawdown coupled with an incoherent state has allowed for armed non-state actors to once again dominate Afghanistan—a situation that threatens Central Asia. Afghanistan borders three Central Asian states: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The country is now in the process of returning to its factional roots, and with the US withdrawing most of its troops,

the government in Kabul is struggling against a rapidly expanding Taliban insurgency. In fact, the government has become just another faction among many. The region's governments worry about militants and violence spilling over and Central Asian aspiring militants crossing into Afghanistan to connect with groups—ranging from the Taliban to the Islamic State—operating in the country. These militants could receive training and access to arms that could later be put to use inside Central Asia. Central Asian militants are already fighting alongside IS and other groups in Syria and Iraq and threaten to ultimately impact security within their home states.

Geography is thus at the root of Central Asia's growing challenges. It is a region fraught with internal tensions over ethnicity, Soviet-delineated borders, and intense competition over resources. More important, this complex and divided area is highly vulnerable to outside forces, and crises in surrounding regions contribute to instability in the region.

EAST ASIA

East Asia can be divided into four distinct parts: the Pacific archipelago, the Chinese mainland, the Korean Peninsula, and “Indochina” (the countries between India and China). East Asia is home to the second and third largest economies in the world in terms of GDP—China and Japan. The relationship between these two countries, and their relationship with the United States, define the geopolitics of East Asia today.

EAST ASIA AT NIGHT

Click on image to enlarge



The above map shows the countries of East Asia lit up at night and reveals much about the power dynamics in this region. China is a vast country—the third largest in the world—but most of China on the map above is in darkness. The centers of Chinese wealth and

power—including Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong—all hug China’s long coastline. Geographic features in the interior divide the country and make it appear more like an island: development and population are concentrated along the coast while the rest of the country is in darkness.

Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are all major industrial powers that also border these waters along China’s coast. Much of the rest of East Asia is in darkness. North Korea’s darkness is particularly striking, but relative to the bright lights of China’s coastal region and Japan, much of Indochina and inner China are also undeveloped.

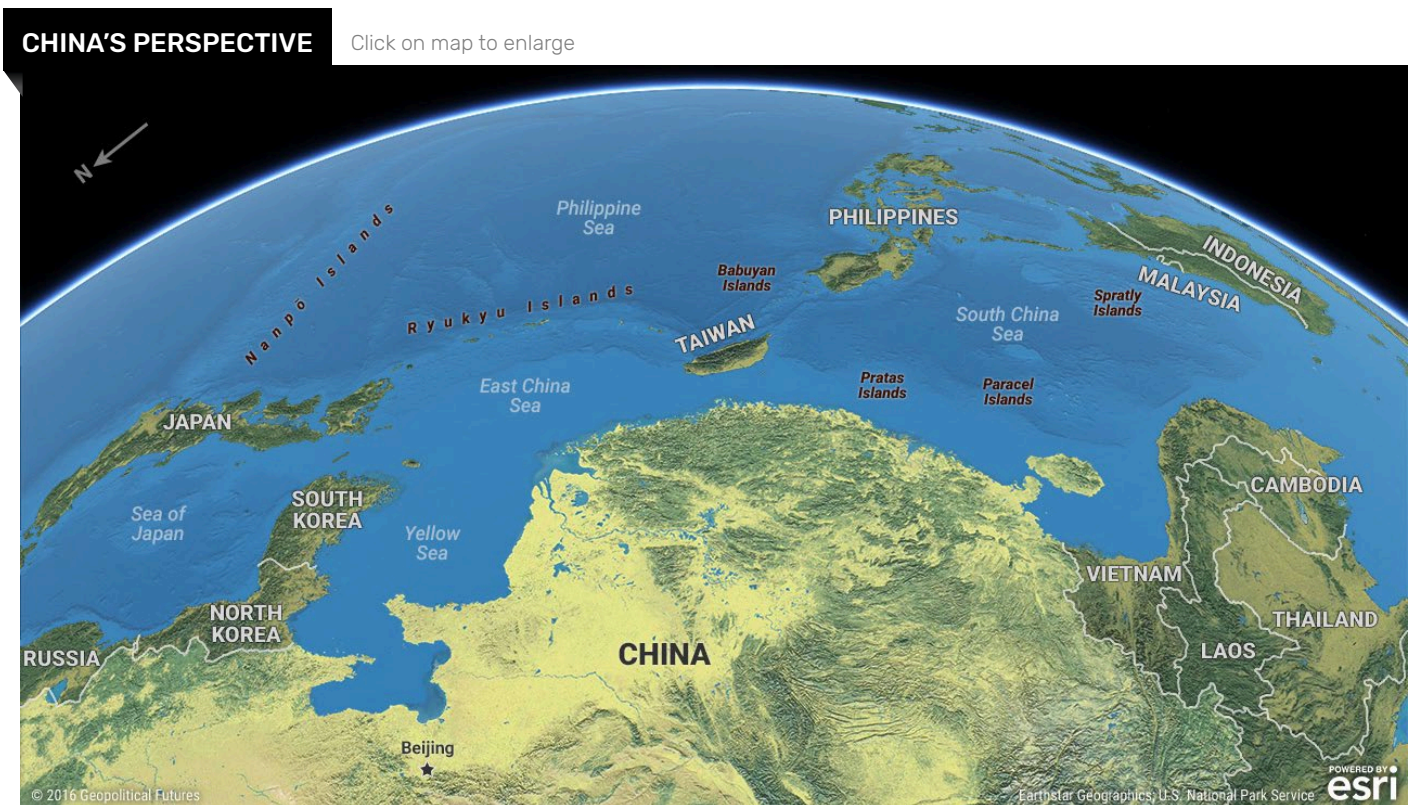
15-INCH ISOHYET AND CHINA POPULATION DENSITY

Click on map to enlarge



The above map shows population density in China with the 15-inch isohyet overlaid on top. The area of China from this line to the coast gets enough rain to support a large population. North

and west of the 15-inch isohyet, China is relatively sparsely populated and undeveloped. The distance from Beijing to neighboring Kazakhstan is almost 2,500 miles through desert and mountains. The Himalayas box China in on the southwest and also prevent any major conflict between India and China. Vast jungles on the border with Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand have always limited Chinese expansion south.



It is difficult for China to expand westward. It has a hard enough time controlling the vast and dense population centers east of the 15-inch isohyet. When China's power is ascendant, it can grow north, south, or east toward the Pacific. This is easier said than done, however. Japan has been and continues to be the major regional power in East Asia. China is rising, and its ability to defend itself from aggression has increased dramatically, but it would still face certain defeat against Japan—especially with US support of the Japanese.

As a result, China is mainly focused on two things right now: controlling its domestic political and economic situation, which has become increasingly chaotic as growth rates have slowed, and building its military capabilities, first for resistance and then for offensive action in the region. The Chinese navy, in particular, has made great strides, but realistically is still at least a decade away from being able to think about exerting power over the myriad islands, rocks, and shoals that limit China's freedom to navigate in the various seas along its coast.



Many of the countries around China have claims over these islands. The region's other major players—Japan and South Korea—are both key US allies that host substantial and permanent US military deployments. The Philippines, despite President Rodrigo Duterte's penchant for colorful language, recently welcomed back US forces to Philippine bases.

This situation has created a stalemate in the Pacific. The US has no desire for an antagonistic relationship with China—but also doesn't want China, or any power, to dominate the region. China is not capable of challenging US hegemony in the seas and beats its chest about nationalism in the South China Sea more for domestic consumption than any other reason. Japan and the other East Asian countries view China with increasing suspicion and remain staunch US allies as a result.

KOREAN PENINSULA AND SURROUNDING AREA

[Click on map to enlarge](#)



Then, there is North Korea. North Korea appears as a fearsome, crazy cripple (as George Friedman has put it) to most of the world, with its nuclear weapons tests and its secretive, xenophobic authoritarian regime built around a supreme leader. Kim Jong Un is that leader today; he has been consolidating his power and continues to play this strategy. North Korea happens to also be one of the few areas China is vulnerable—the Chinese intervened in the Korean War when US forces got close to the Yalu River, which runs along the border between North Korea and China. North Korea's unpredictable behavior gives China a considerable bargaining chip in its relations with the US and the rest of the region. Therefore, China favors maintaining the status quo.

East Asia is the world's most dynamic economic region. Its most powerful countries all surround various bodies of water over which there is increasing competition. These are some of the world's most important sea lanes—roughly two-thirds of the world's oil and a third of the world's bulk cargo go through the Strait of Malacca, for example. Japan and China (in that order) are the region's two most significant powers, but the most powerful country in the Pacific—the United States—is actually located far away. Its Navy patrols and guarantees freedom of movement across the Pacific. At the center of this power struggle, though, is China and more than any other single factor, China's struggle against its domestic and geographic constraints is the key to understanding the future of this region.



EUROPE

The European Peninsula extends from Portugal and Britain in the west to the Russian city of St. Petersburg on the eastern tip of the Baltic Sea, and the city of Rostov-on-Don in the southeast. It stretches between the Mediterranean and Black seas in the south to the North Sea and Baltic Sea. Access to rivers, the Mediterranean, and the North Atlantic has allowed the European Peninsula to build trade routes and become one of the wealthiest and most developed places on earth.

The European Peninsula is highly diverse and fragmented, its borders the result of centuries of wars, treaties, and sometimes imposed settlements. The Continent can be divided into five areas: Germanic Europe, Southern Europe, Northern Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe.

NORTH EUROPEAN PLAIN

[Click on map to enlarge](#)

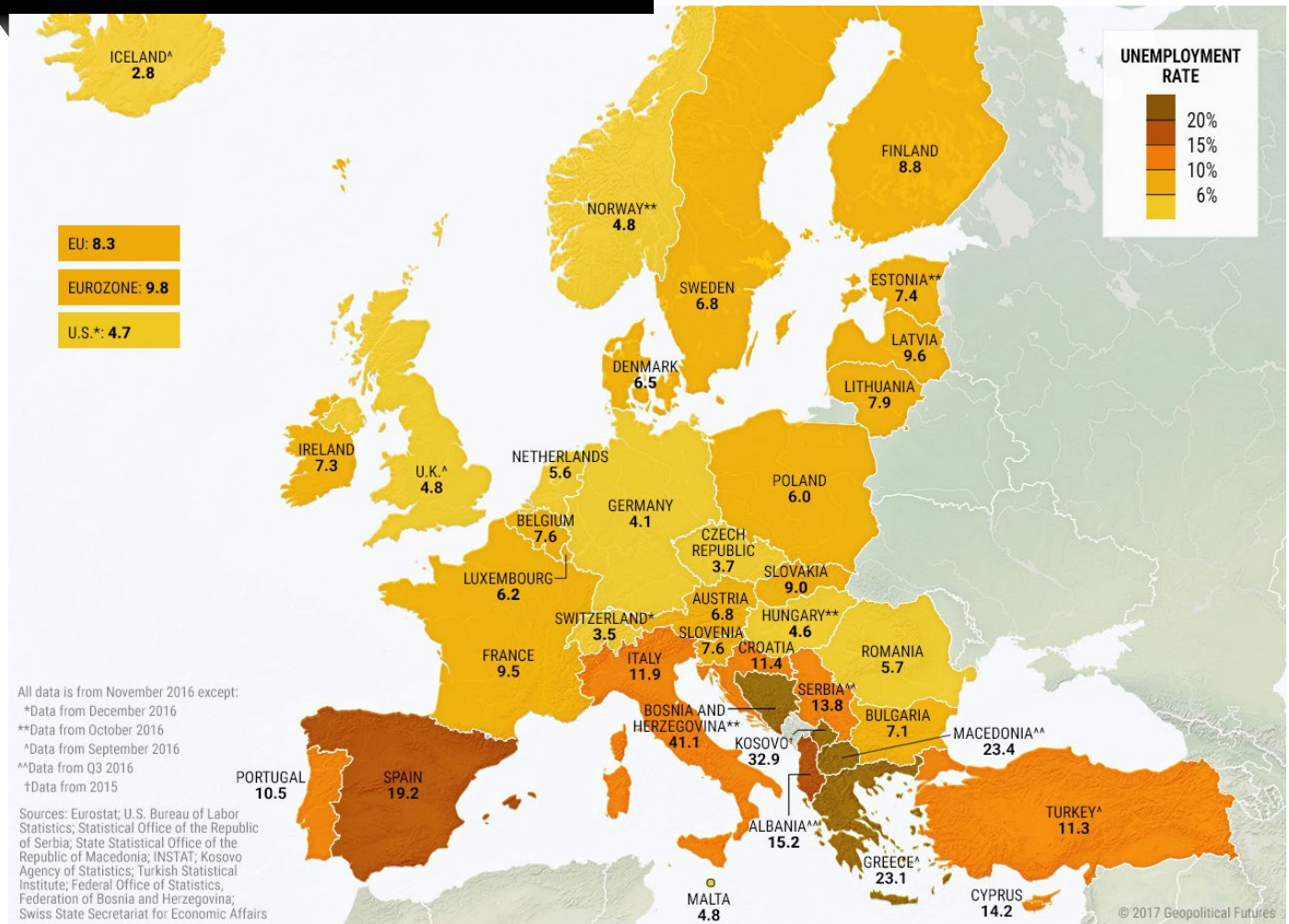


Germany lies south of the Baltic and North seas and north of the Alps. The country is situated at the center of the Continent, on the flat North European Plain, a low-lying area that also includes parts of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, southern Scandinavia, Poland, and western Russia. Thus, Germany has no significant natural boundaries, either to the west or to the east. The country's location on the North European Plain, its network of rivers, and access to seaports have allowed Germany to gain access to both European and world markets. Nevertheless, Germany's flat geography and lack of natural barriers also mean that it is permanently vulnerable to invasion, especially from France in the west and Russia in the east. As a result, Germany has repeatedly attempted to dominate the North European Plain through war and alliances.

Southern Europe, on the other hand, is more mountainous and less accessible. It has fewer navigable rivers conducive for the development of trade networks. The Alps separate the Italian peninsula from the rest of Europe, while mountains also form a physical barrier between Spain and France. Nevertheless, these mountains do not make the region immune to invasion. From Hannibal to Napoleon, armies marched through numerous Alpine passes into Italy. The Italian peninsula's thousands of miles of coastline also make it vulnerable to invaders. At the height of its power, the Roman Empire overcame this vulnerability by turning the Mediterranean into a Roman lake—practically all coastlines in North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and southern Europe were under Roman control. Later, the Spaniards and the Portuguese developed naval forces and, as a result, global empires. Modern-day Italy, Spain, and Portugal are far from global naval powers, while their geography limits their ability to expand northward. Southern Europe today is highly reliant on Northern Europe.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN EUROPE, NOVEMBER 2016

Click on map to enlarge



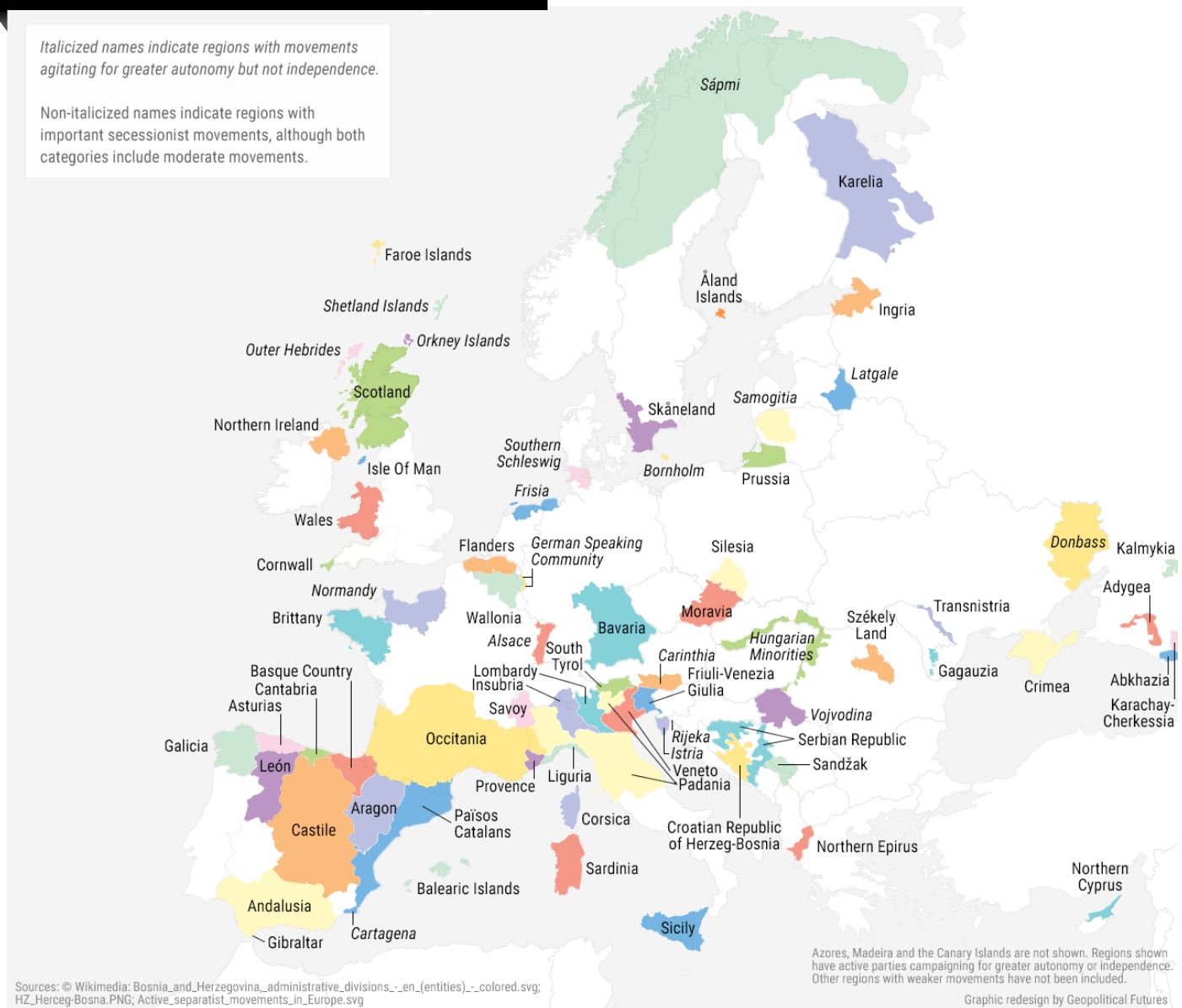
Southern European economies have benefited less from membership in the common market than their northern neighbors and do not benefit from the European Union's control of monetary policy. Trapped in a monetary union with export giant Germany, it is impossible for these countries to devalue their currencies to protect their economies and promote social stability in times of economic difficulties. The region's economies have suffered greatly over the years—with unemployment in some countries exceeding 20 percent. Southern Europe is currently experiencing significant banking woes that threaten to destabilize Europe's financial system. The European Union, therefore, has become less popular in the region since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, with anti-establishment and Euroskeptic parties gaining ground.

AREAS WITH STRONG NATIONALIST TENDENCIES

Click on map to enlarge

Italicized names indicate regions with movements agitating for greater autonomy but not independence.

Non-italicized names indicate regions with important secessionist movements, although both categories include moderate movements.



Northern Europe—which includes France, the United Kingdom, and the Nordic states—differs from its southern neighbors in terms of both economic realities and geopolitical priorities. France is a unique European power because it is wedged between the North Sea and the Mediterranean and between Atlantic powers, European land powers, and southern European states. As a result, French strategy must be designed with an eye on the European continent, the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean. France aims to be Germany’s counterpart in leading the European Union, but currently lacks economic

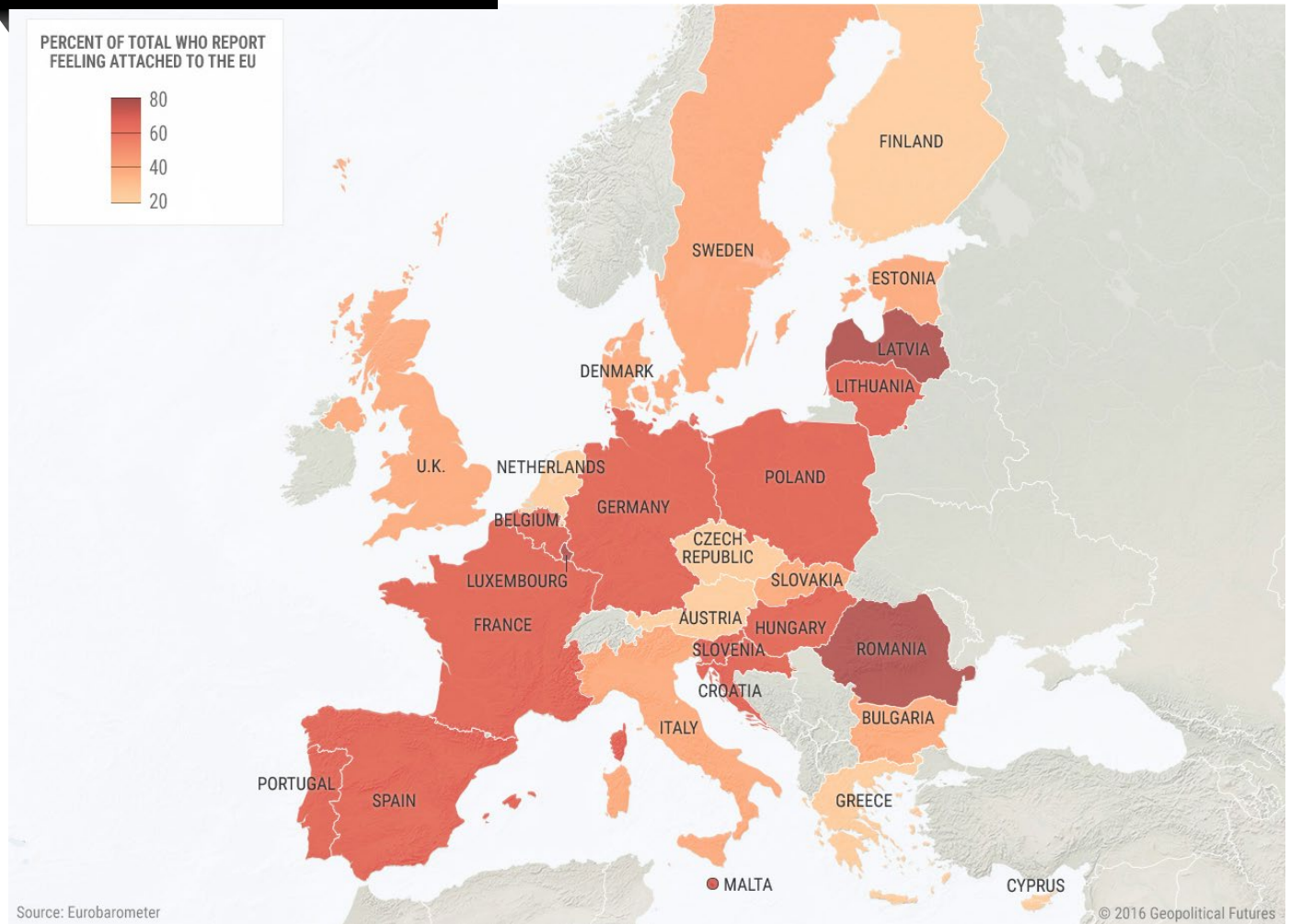
clout and differs from its eastern neighbor on core economic and military issues.

British voters have opted to leave the European Union, but geography and economics means that the UK will likely maintain a close relationship with the Continent. As an island nation, Britain has a natural defensive barrier that other European countries lack, but decision-makers over the centuries were highly aware that invading armies could cross the English Channel. As a result, Britain's chief strategic priority has been to minimize any potential security threats emanating from the other side of the channel and to prevent the rise of a hegemon able to dominate the Continent. Britain, a former global empire, also needs to maintain wide-ranging trade networks because it is an island. Today, Britain employs a dual strategy. It works to maintain a strong bilateral relationship with the US while also remaining a player on the European continent in an attempt to retain some influence and balance any potential hegemons.

In the east are Europe's borderlands, a region that has historically been contested by regional powers and lies from the Baltic countries in the north to Bulgaria in the south. The borderlands are split into two groups: Central and Eastern European countries that have joined NATO and the EU, and former Soviet states (Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova) as well as most of the Balkan states (some of which are NATO and EU members). Throughout the region, states are primarily occupied with defining their respective relationships with the peninsula. The European Union's fragmentation has intensified divisions within the EU and NATO, with western and eastern members of the blocs espousing different priorities.

ATTACHMENT TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Europe's geography has contributed to the emergence of a highly diverse Continent. As the European Union weakens, regional and local interests are coming to the fore and divisions are deepening.

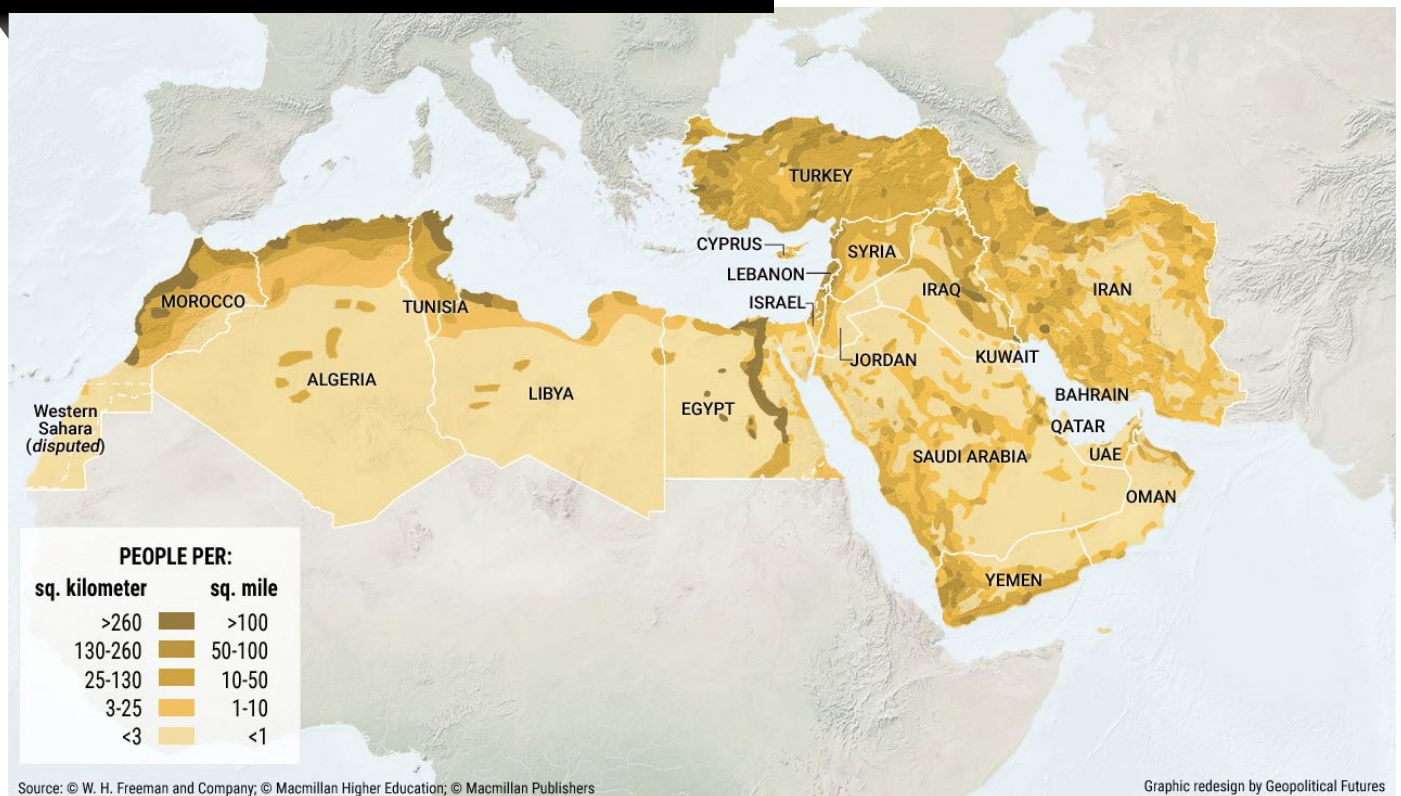


MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Geographically, the Middle East and North Africa region extends from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east and from Turkey in north to Yemen in the south. The bulk of the region is situated along five waterways: the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Black Sea, and Caspian Sea.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA'S POPULATION DENSITY

[Click on map to enlarge](#)



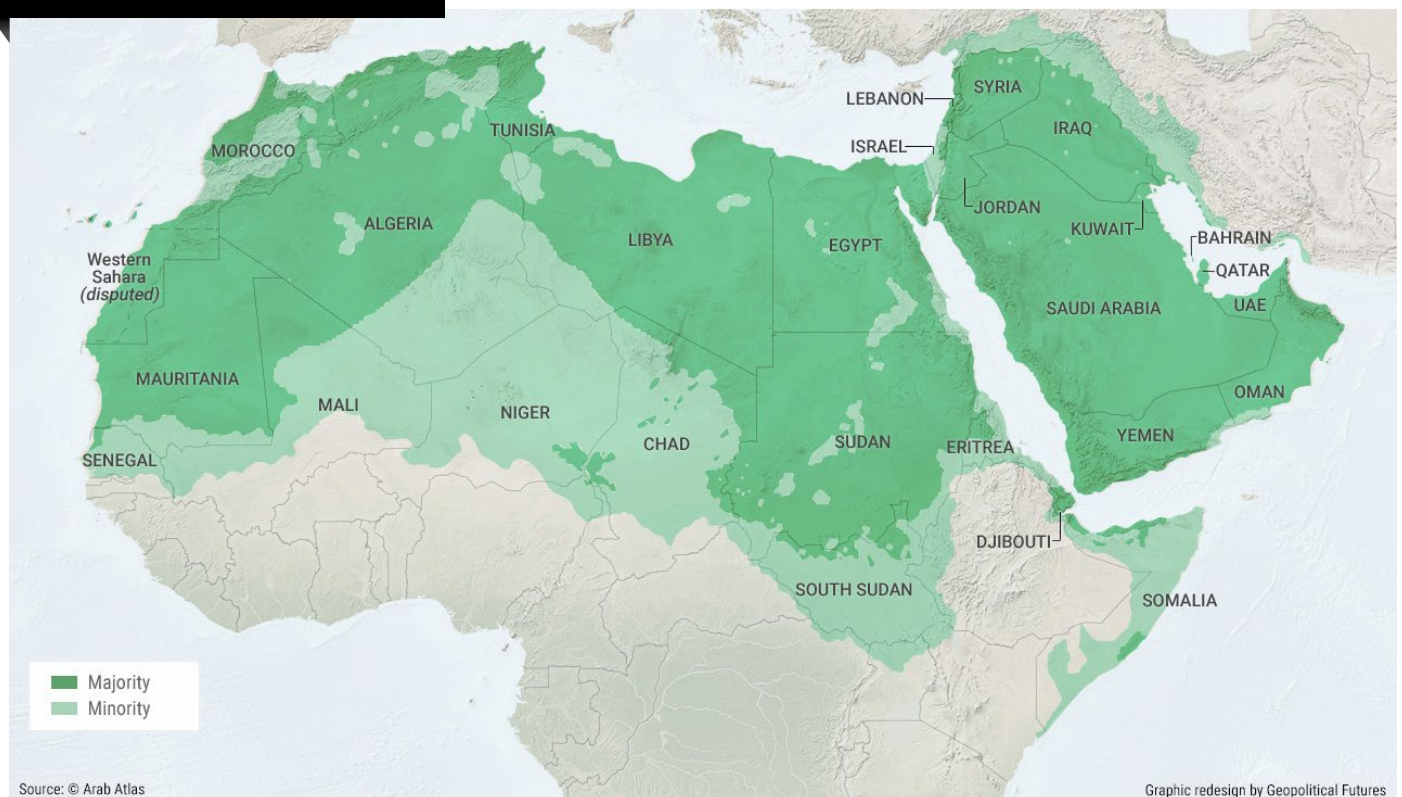
A key feature of the Middle East is that much of it is sparsely populated. This is largely due to the desert conditions. People in the North African sub-region largely reside just south of the Mediterranean coast. The bulk of Egypt's nearly 90 million people inhabit the areas around the Nile River. Most of the people in the Middle East live in the region's northern rim that runs from Iran through Iraq to Syria and into Turkey.

The Arab-majority Middle East represents the core of the Muslim world. The map below shows the extent of the spread of

Arabic-speaking populations in the region, which also reflects the spread of Islam. Founded in 610 in the city of Mecca on the west coast of modern-day Saudi Arabia, Islam covered the entire Arabian Peninsula along with the Levant and crossed the Persian Gulf into Mesopotamia and Persia. At the same time, it advanced east into Egypt and from there across the North African coast up to modern-day Morocco, which served as a launch pad to cross into the Iberian Peninsula.

ARABIC-SPEAKING POPULATION

Click on map to enlarge



Arabs dominated many of these lands—save for Persia and Anatolia, which accepted Islam but retained their unique ethno-linguistic traits. Anatolia only became part of the Middle East due to the Ottoman conquest of the region in the early 16th century. Otherwise, the Arabs under both the Umayyad (661–749) and Abbasid (749–1258) dominions were unsuccessful in seizing lands from the Byzantines north of the Levant. While the Arabs were able to push into the Caucasus and Central and South Asia, Persian resurgence in

the form of the Safavid Empire in the early 1500s limited Arab control beyond modern-day Iran. Turkic peoples of various sorts who converted to Islam controlled the areas north and northeast of the Middle East.

It should be noted that the term “Middle East” was coined in the early 20th century. Prior to that, the region was referred to as the “Near East.” Despite the fact that the term Middle East has become ubiquitous, the United States government and academia still refer to the Near East. The State Department’s division responsible for the Middle East is called the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. Likewise, many prominent universities in the United States—such as Princeton, Berkeley, Cornell, and Johns Hopkins—call their academic units dealing with the Middle East departments of Near Eastern Studies.

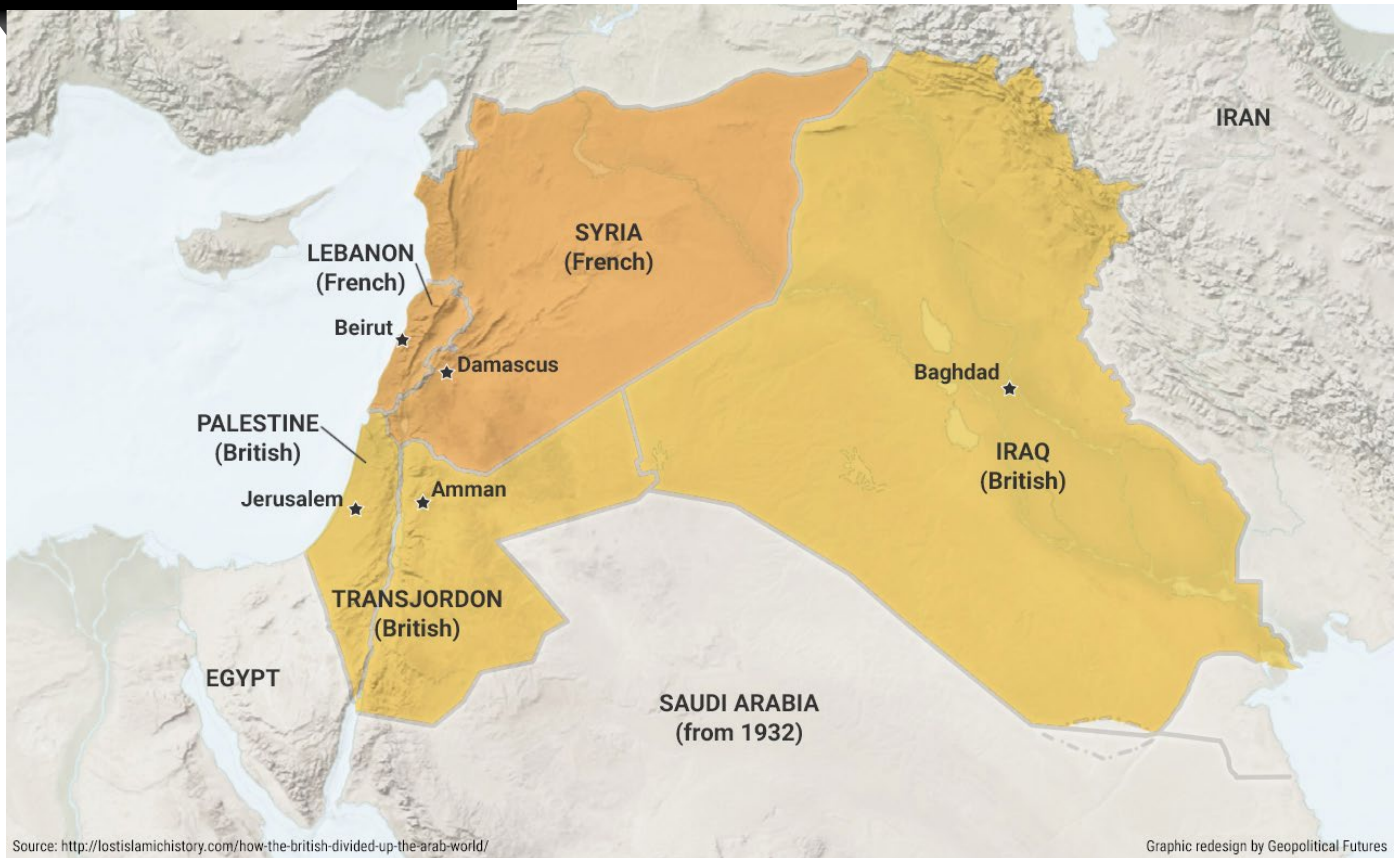
OTTOMAN EMPIRE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

[Click on map to enlarge](#)



LEAGUE OF NATIONS MANDATES, 1920

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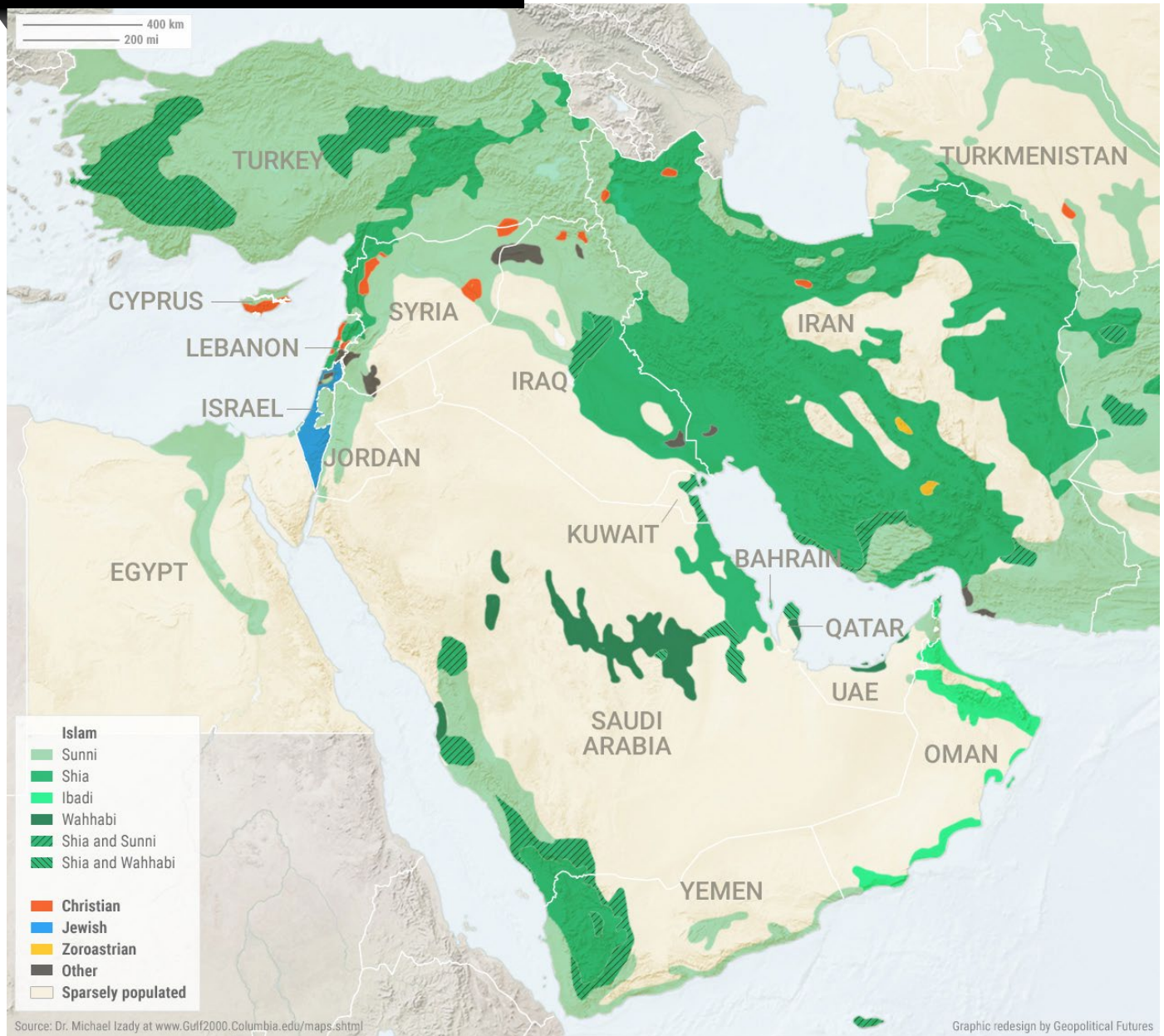


The current borders of the region were largely drawn up by the British and French in the aftermath of World War I and in the wake of the implosion of the Ottoman Empire. However, the region was extremely divided prior to the Ottoman conquest in the first quarter of the 16th century going all the way back to the late ninth century, when the Abbasid dynasty began declining. Many competing caliphates, sultanates, and emirates ruled different parts of this region. Therefore, the many ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and ideological fault lines today are not simply the outcome of the present nation-state era.



RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Click on map to enlarge



As it stands today, the Arab core of the Middle East has hollowed out, with non-Arab polities dominating the region. The four major powers in the region are (in order of decreasing power) Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi kingdom is the only Arab power remaining after the so-called Arab Spring, and it too isn't doing well given its inherent weakness and the fact that it shoulders the responsibility of (Sunni) Arab regional security. For the most part, the region's Arab states are devolving into non-state actors.

This situation allows the proliferation of jihadist groups, of which the Islamic State is the most prominent. Iran and its Arab Shiite allies are also trying to take advantage of the growing chaos in the region to expand their geopolitical sectarian interests. Meanwhile, Turkey is trying to reassert itself in the areas previously occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Elsewhere, the only non-Muslim power in the region, Israel, is trying to manage the emerging anarchy on all of its borders.

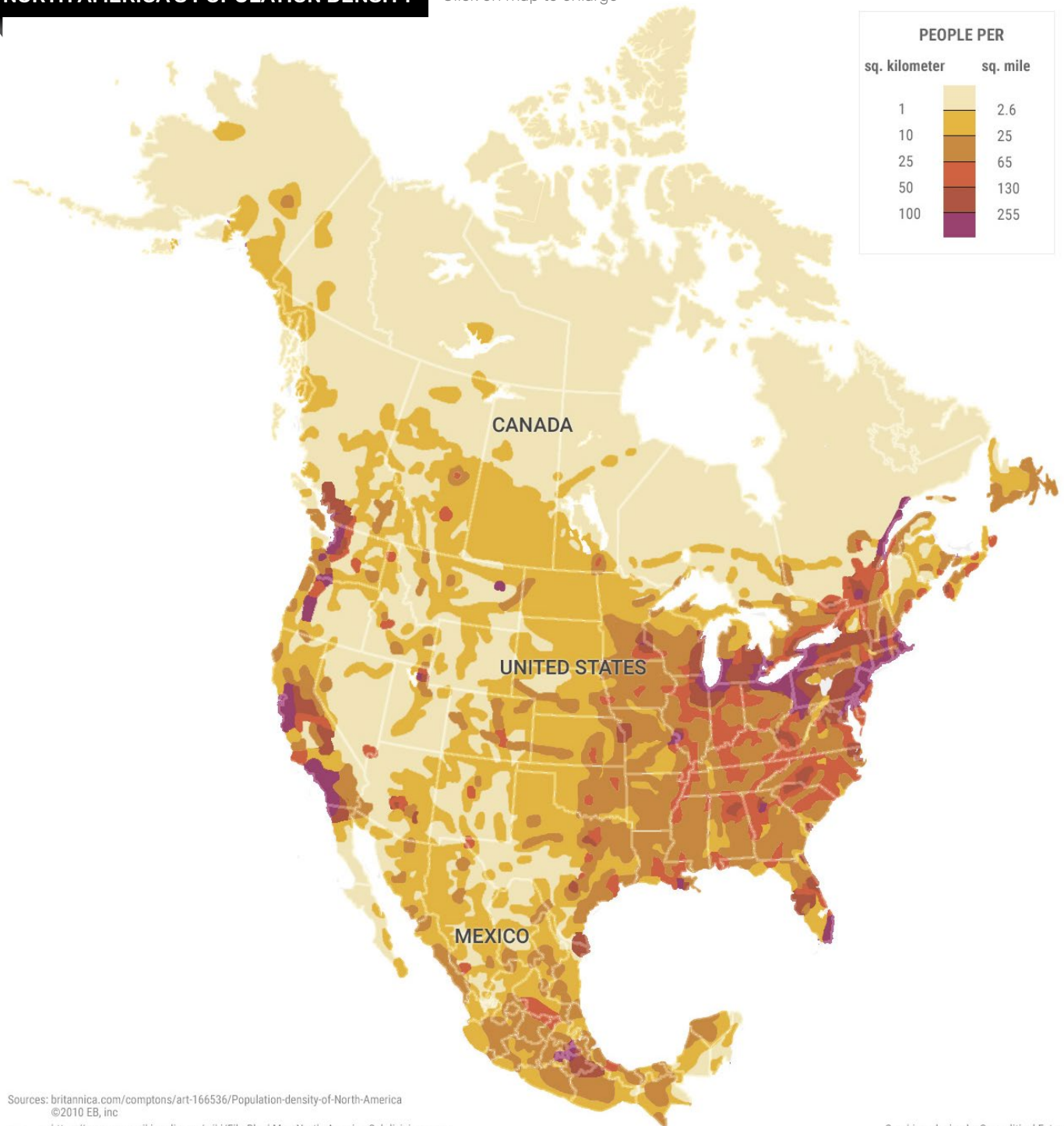
NORTH AMERICA

The world has seen a tremendous transformation since the end of the Cold War. For much of the past two millennia, political, military, and economic power has been centered in Eurasia and, since the 1500s, specifically in Europe. This is no longer true. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the world's one dominant power has resided in North America. North America is now the center of gravity of the international political system, mainly because of the power of the United States. The United States has the world's largest economy—producing nearly a quarter of the world's GDP—and the most powerful military, which patrols the world's oceans. Mexico is a rising power in its own right and will soon break into the top 10 largest economies in the world. Canada is already the world's 10th largest economy.

North America is surrounded on both sides by water. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans act as practically impenetrable obstacles to any outside power that would seek to invade. Save for Pearl Harbor, North America experienced none of the damage that World Wars I and II inflicted on the rest of the world, leaving the continent well-positioned to take advantage of the aftermath of Eurasia's great wars.

NORTH AMERICA'S POPULATION DENSITY

Click on map to enlarge



Despite the size of North America, its population centers are fairly well defined. Much of Canada is inhospitable due to the harsh climate and the Canadian shield—its major population centers are all 100 miles from the US border. Mexico's major population centers

are in the south of the country around the seat of power—Mexico City. Mexico’s north is more rugged and has lent itself to the development over time of ungovernable stretches of land, today occupied by Mexico’s various drug cartels. This region extends into the United States. It is a borderland, an area where people, languages, and cultures mix together. If not for the defeat of Santa Anna’s disastrous and partly unlucky expedition in 1836, it might have been Mexico, and not the United States, that dominated the continent.

UNITED STATES AND MEXICO, 1830

Click on map to enlarge



The combination of the Louisiana Purchase and Santa Anna’s loss at the Battle of San Jacinto empowered the US to make Manifest Destiny a reality. The US has major population centers on the east

and west coasts, but there is a vast area between the two that is more sparsely populated because it receives less rainfall. However, none of the major cities—including New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—are the beating heart of the United States. That is the Mississippi River complex. The control of that river system via the Port of New Orleans was acquired through the Louisiana Purchase and subsequently threatened by Santa Anna in 1836. The most extraordinary thing about this river complex is that it is navigable. Almost all of the land between the Rockies and Appalachians could produce agricultural products and minerals, but the Mississippi made it possible to ship these products inexpensively throughout the United States and to Europe.

NORTH AMERICAN RIVER SYSTEM

Click on map to enlarge



Neither Mexico nor Canada have a geographic feature that compares to the Mississippi River system. Canada's rivers lie outside the US river transport system, as do Mexico's. Neither of these countries have the kind of large, inter-navigable waterway system that led to the relatively easy creation of vast wealth in the United States in a short period of time in the 19th century. One of the most important moments in North American history was when Thomas Jefferson leapt at the chance to conclude the Louisiana Purchase with Napoleon. That deal transformed the US from a collection of motley colonies all clinging to the coast, to a potential global power with immense economic wealth and strategic depth.

UNITED STATES AFTER LOUISIANA PURCHASE, 1803

Click on map to enlarge



One of the other remarkable facts about North America is the relative rarity of war between nations on the continent. Since the Mexican American War in 1846–1848, no major wars have been fought between nations in North America. The only major conflicts have been civil wars, such as the American Civil War in 1861–1865 and the Mexican Revolution in 1910–1920. No other region of the world has been as peaceful and stable as North America in recent decades, and because there are no potential challengers in the world capable of attacking North America, this will remain the case. As Eurasia descends deeper into crisis, the Western Hemisphere will remain more stable than other regions.

SOUTH AMERICA

From a purely geographic viewpoint, what makes South America stand out as a distinct region is that the continent resembles a large island. Massive oceans physically separate the continent from other regions in the world by great distances. Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean create a physical separation between South America and the world's largest global power, the United States. Furthermore, the continent is split by the Amazon rainforest and Andes Mountains to form two distinct "islands." This partition has influenced the development of warfare, trade, and regional leadership in South America.



SOUTH AMERICA AS ISLANDS

Click on map to enlarge



This island feature is one of three unique geographic characteristics that has lowered the risk of modern warfare between nation-states in the region. The second unique characteristic is South America's location in both the Western and Southern hemispheres, which reduces its exposure to major global conflicts. The continent

is physically isolated from Eurasia, where many of the world’s deadliest wars have been waged, and has largely managed to avoid being drawn into these conflicts. The third unique characteristic is that geographic barriers—including the Amazon rainforest, the Andes Mountains, the Atacama Desert, the Pantanal wetland, and the Gran Chaco—coincide with national borders, thereby significantly reducing the possibility of conflict.

The region’s geography has also contributed to its reliance on extra-regional exports. Challenging terrain made maritime trade and the development of ports essential for South American nations. Also, due to European colonization, these ports played an important role in the region’s national economies. Colonial powers wanted raw material exports promptly shipped to Europe. To this day, many countries in South America depend heavily on the export of raw materials via ports for revenue.

TOP 10 PORTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Click on map to enlarge



The combination of colonization and geography also explains why the continent has no clear regional leader. Brazil is often regarded as the emerging leader for South America—mostly due to its massive size in terms of land, population, natural resources, and economy. Argentina, also rich in natural resources and land, is the historic geopolitical rival of Brazil and serves as a counterweight to Brazilian influence in the region. This has its roots in the fact that Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese and Argentina by the Spanish.

SPANISH-CLAIMED TERRITORY IN 1780 AND MODERN BORDERS

[Click on map to enlarge](#)



The Amazon and Pantanal buffered most of Brazil from the Spanish viceroys, allowing Brazil to build its statehood under different terms than the rest of the region. During the initial period of colonization, control of the borderlands between Brazil and Argentina changed hands multiple times. Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay are often referred to as buffer states between Brazil and Argentina. However, both countries lack access to the Pacific Coast—Brazil because of the Amazon and Argentina because of the Andes.

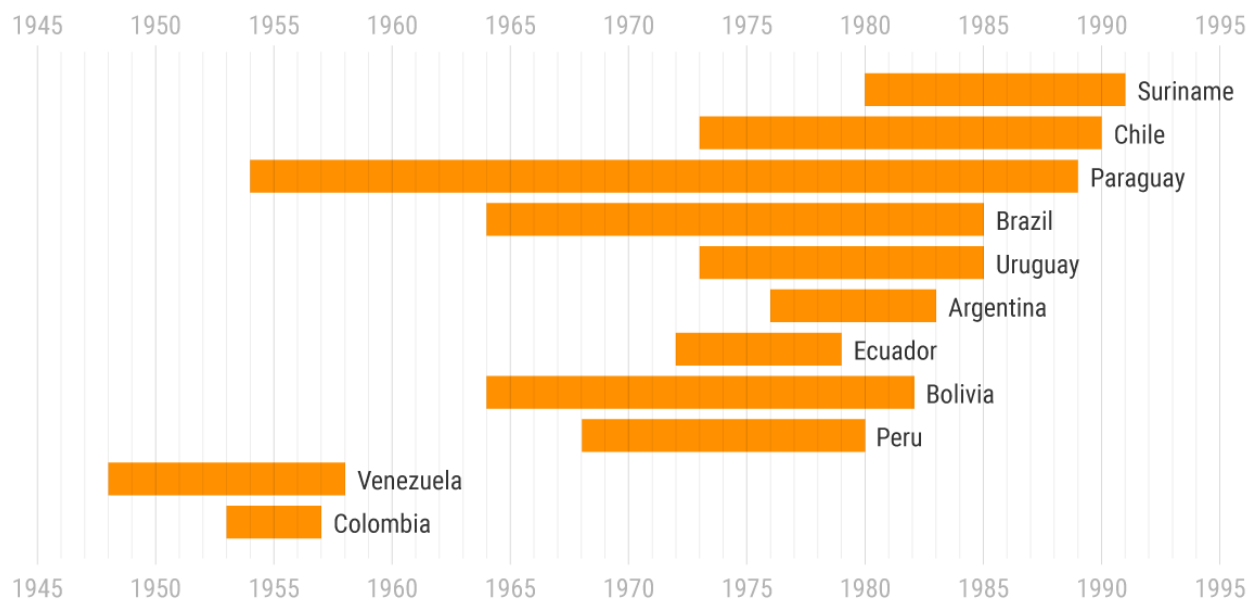
South America has struggled to produce a regional leader, in part because no single country has all the characteristics necessary to assume such a role, even though some countries have large populations, land, and natural resource deposits. The Andes and Amazon physically divide the continent, making it nearly impossible to have access to both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. With the exception of Colombia, no South American country has access to both. Colombia's mountainous topography runs straight across the country, making internal logistics and transportation very difficult. This undermines the economic and security advantages of having dual ocean access. For these reasons, no South American country has fully been able to assume the role of regional leader for an extended period in modern times.

The region's development has also been heavily influenced by the strong presence of military dictatorships and social revolutions in the 20th century. Almost every South American country had a military dictatorship in the 20th century. Many of these did not end until the late 20th century, making the current governments very young and relatively inexperienced democracies.



SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES' MOST RECENT DICTATORSHIPS

Click on map to enlarge



Sources: BBC, Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, Glasgow University Law Society, Taringa, GlobalSecurity.org

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As such, governments and people in the region are “drawing up” their respective social contracts, for which there is no one-size-fits-all template. Societies are also struggling to find a balance between personal and civic responsibilities, which has led to high expectations for state services, many of which have become a burden on public budgets. Even today, many countries in the region find themselves needing to cut back on public spending as public revenue falls along with commodity prices and must deal with resulting social tensions.

In terms of relations with countries outside of South America, geographic separation from the world once again plays a strong role. South America is physically far removed from major trade routes in the Northern Hemisphere and isolated from Europe and Asia. In an attempt to gain more influence, South American countries have consciously sought ways to insert themselves more in the international system.

This strategy is a constant in the foreign policies of the countries in this region. Regional integration groups—of which there are many—serve as instruments for these governments to gain more

clout that they can use in international affairs. Larger countries also try to develop an area of expertise through which they can insert themselves into international issues: for example, Argentina with nuclear energy, Peru with climate change, Chile with mining, and Brazil with deep-water oil drilling. Such expertise obviously has useful domestic applications, but also provides an outlet for these countries to further integrate into the international system.

SOUTH ASIA

This region begins on the Iran-Afghanistan border and runs east to the Bangladesh-Myanmar boundary. Its northern periphery is the arc of contiguous mountain ranges running from northern Afghanistan to western Myanmar, which include the Hindu Kush, Pamir, Karakoram, Himalayas, and Rakhine. The large maritime space composed of the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal forms the southern edge of South Asia. The landmass contained in between is also referred to as the Indian subcontinent, which from a geopolitical perspective, can be considered an island because it is separated from the rest of the world by mountainous terrain to its north and a large body of water on its south. India and Pakistan, and their historic rivalry, dominate the fate of this region.



SOUTH ASIA AS AN ISLAND

Click on map to enlarge

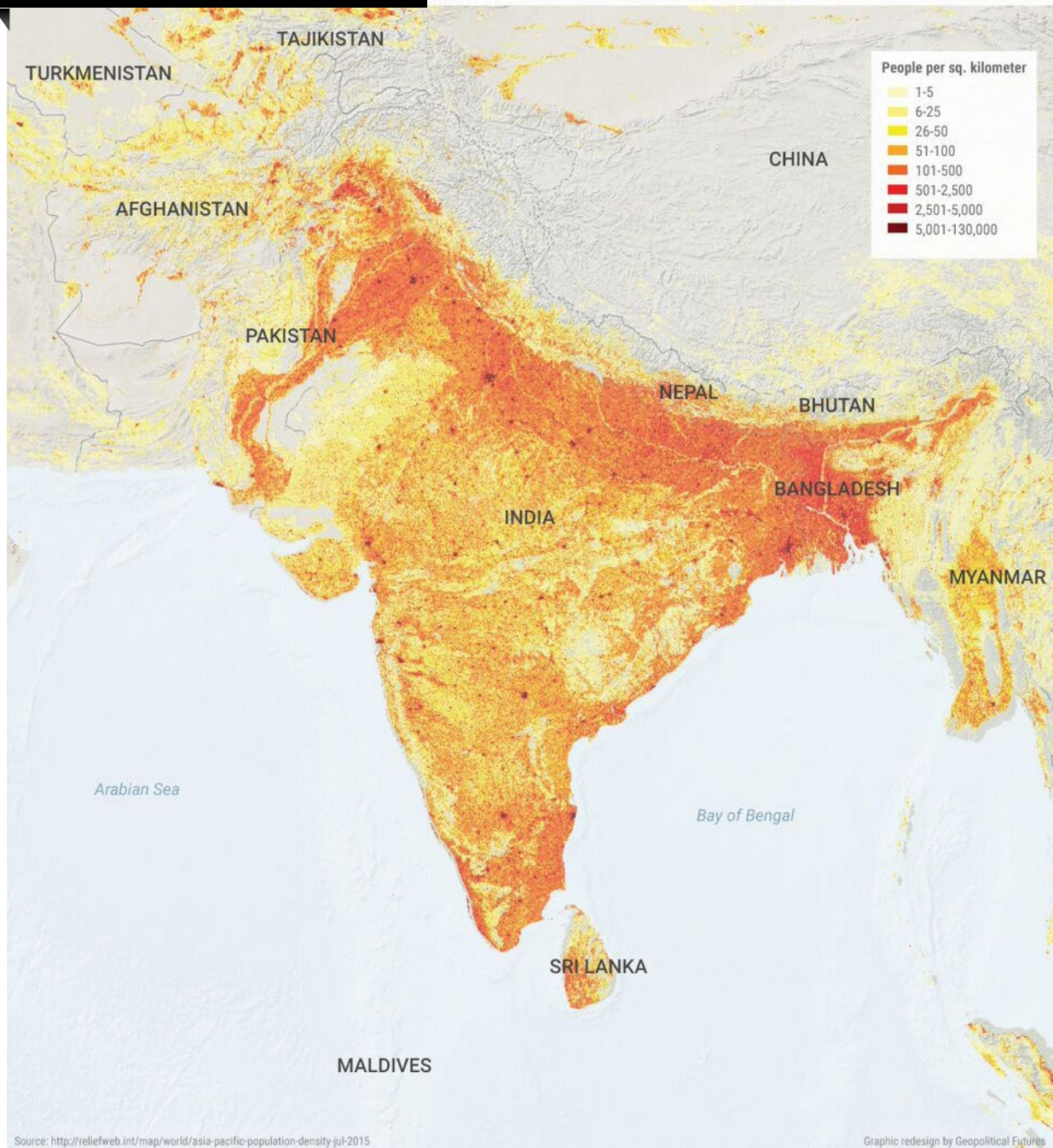


It is also one the most heavily populated areas of the world. Nearly a quarter of the world's population of 7.4 billion lives in this region. With 1.32 billion people, regional powerhouse India has

the second highest population in the world—just slightly behind China’s 1.38 billion. Pakistan (194 million) and Bangladesh (163 million) stand at number six and eight, respectively. The remaining five smaller countries—Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives—together account for another 82 million people. Such a large concentration of population accounts for the chronic poverty and the abundance of labor.

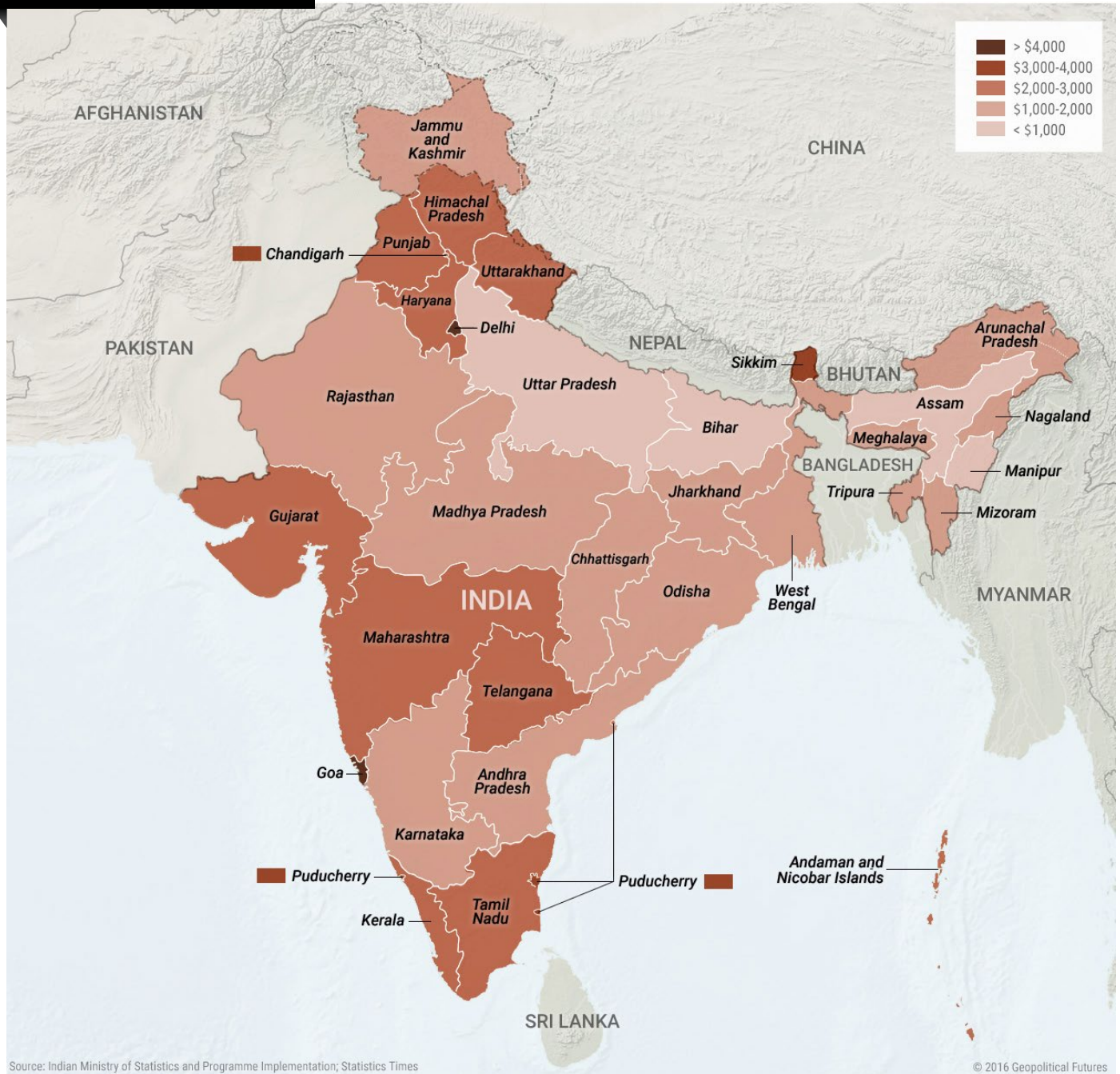
SOUTH ASIA'S POPULATION DENSITY

Click on map to enlarge



INDIA PER CAPITA GDP, 2014

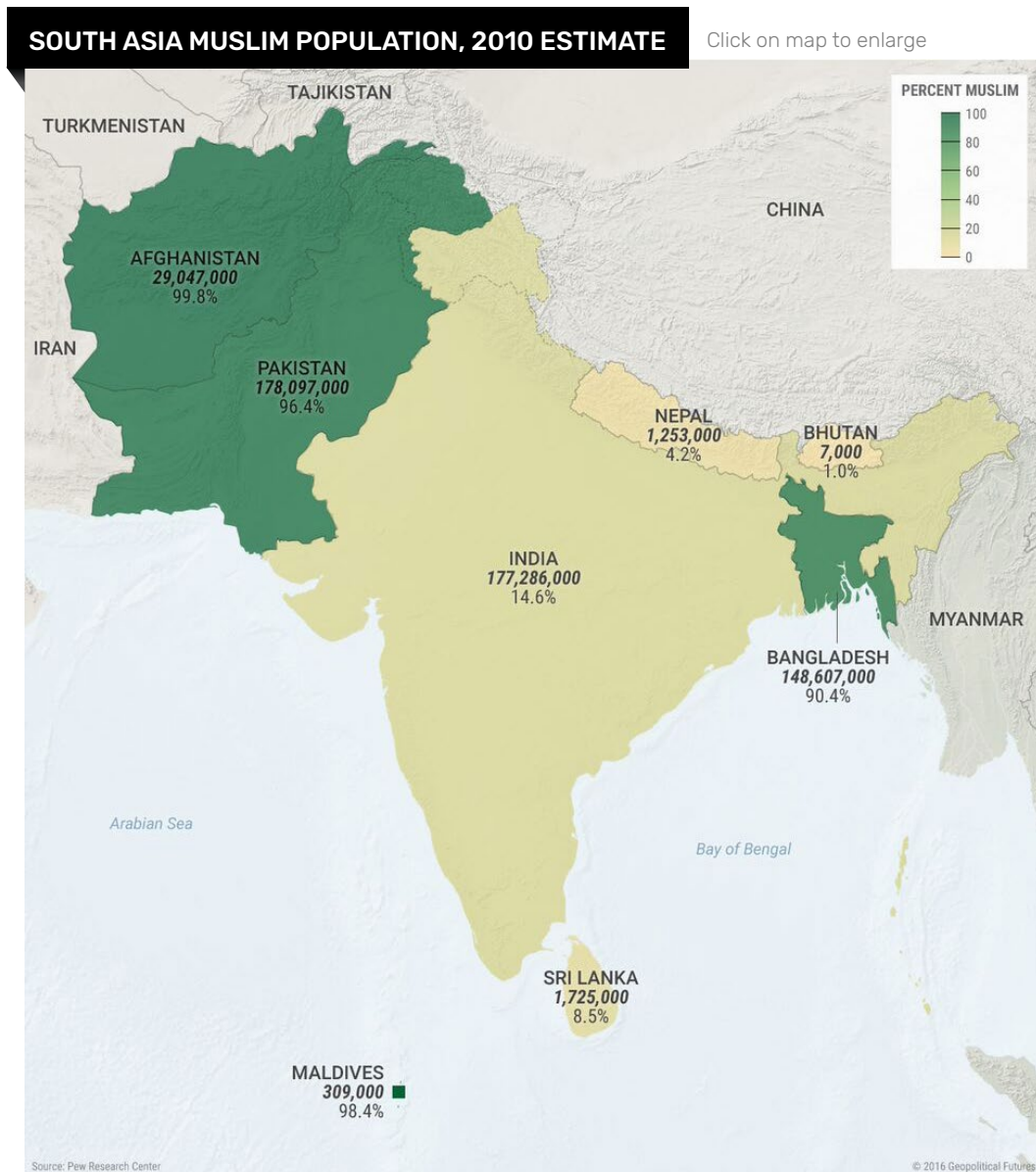
Click on map to enlarge



South Asia is extremely ethnically diverse. India has at least 30 languages, each with at least a million speakers. This makes for a great deal of conflict, which it can be argued historically enabled outsiders to conquer the area. Two main religions dominate this region. Hinduism, with roughly 1.1 billion adherents, has the largest religious community followed by almost half a billion Muslims. Islam

came to South Asia in two separate stages. The first stage was in the early eighth century, when the Arab commander Muhammad bin Qasim conquered areas of what is today southeastern Pakistan.

The major Muslim expansion into South Asia, however, came from Afghanistan, which was a launch pad for many Persian-Turkic dynasties from Central Asia. These dynasties successively took control of large parts of the South Asian subcontinent largely via the Khyber Pass. These invasions began in the late 10th century under the Afghan Ghaznavid dynasty. The first major Muslim rule over India was the Delhi Sultanate in the current Indian capital in the early 13th century. The Delhi Sultanate, under the control of various dynasties, lasted for well over three centuries.



Meanwhile, incursions by Afghan and Turkic-Mongolian warlords continued, and between the late 14th and early 16th centuries, much of South Asia experienced intra-Muslim conflicts between competing dynasties. Out of these conflicts emerged the Mughal Empire, which ruled India more or less uninterrupted from 1526 to 1857, when South Asia fell under British colonial rule. Great Britain (via the British East India Company) had begun taking over parts of South Asia a century prior to the collapse of the Mughal Empire. Between what are known as Company Raj (1757–1858) and British Raj (1858–1947), Imperial Britain controlled South Asia for two centuries.

In the lead up to independence and the onset of the nation-state era in the early 20th century, religious identity in India once again became a major issue. Muslims, who had held sovereignty in pre-British Hindustan in different forms for nearly a millennium, were deeply concerned about the domination of the Hindu majority in a democratic post-British Indian republic. Thus, in the few decades before the British left India, many Muslims opted for separatism and the result was the creation of two separate states, Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan in 1947. Religion, however, was not the only dynamic at play—ethnicity would lead to the secession of East Pakistan and its emergence as independent Bangladesh in 1971.

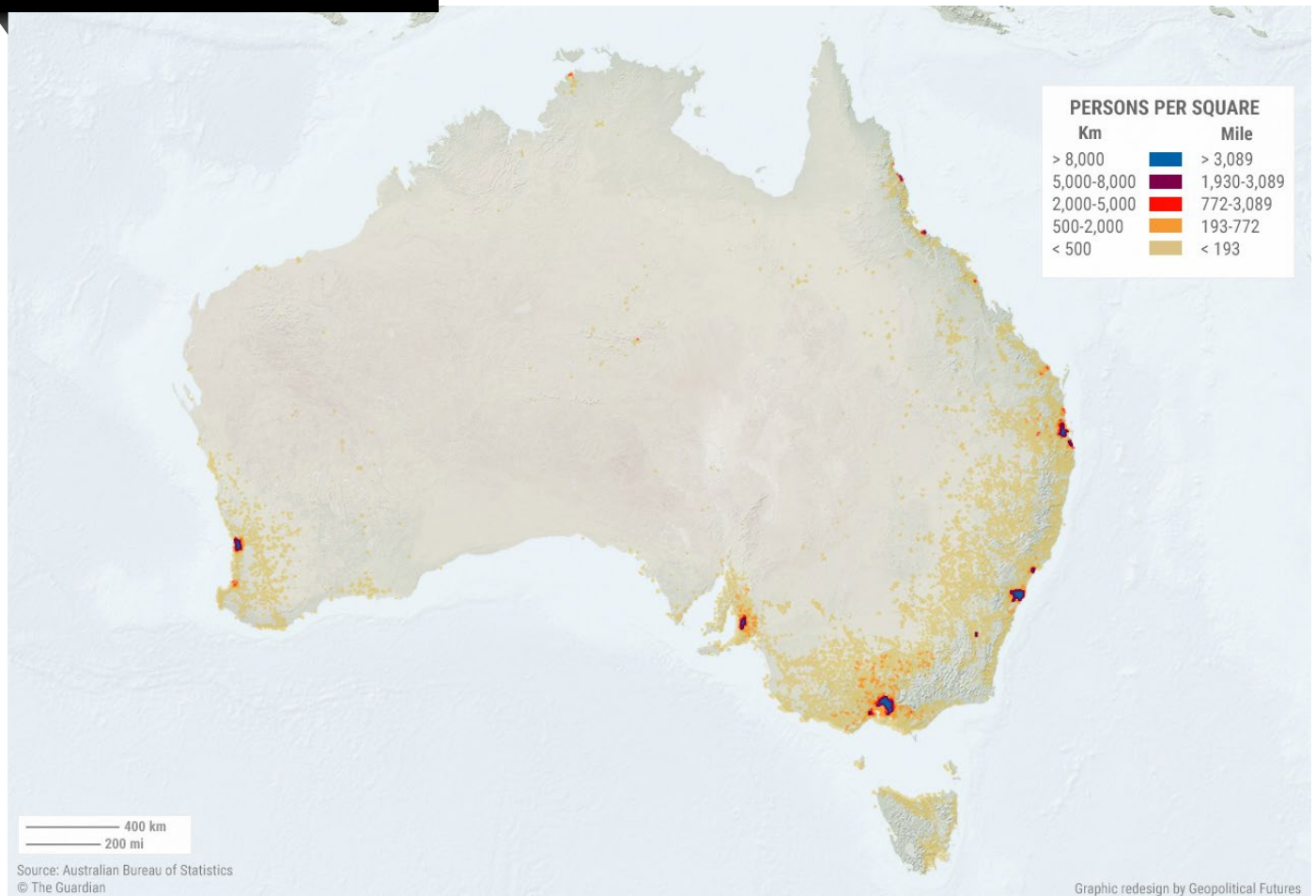
Throughout the 70 years since the British left India, the rivalry between India and Pakistan—manifesting in four wars (in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999)—has been the single most important driver of South Asian geopolitics. Islamist radicalism is the second most critical dynamic, which got a major boost in the form of the war against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Today, a variety of national and transnational Islamist actors—to varying degrees—are major players in all four of South Asia's largest countries—Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Thus, the religious issue is to a great degree an intra-Muslim issue, which is why South Asia is arguably a geopolitical extension of the Middle East.

SOUTH PACIFIC

The South Pacific is a region dominated by one country: Australia. The rest of the South Pacific is made up of island nations of various sizes. Indonesia is the closest well-populated country, but it is thousands of miles away from Australia's population core and also has rarely been unified or strong enough to pose a serious security threat. A deep understanding of the South Pacific requires a deep understanding of Australia, and therefore a map study of the South Pacific will focus inordinately on Australia's position.

AUSTRALIA POPULATION DENSITY

Click on map to enlarge



Australia is the world's sixth largest country in terms of landmass, as well as the 12th largest economy. However, these statistics are misleading. Australia is indeed vast, but the majority of

its population lives in various cities sprinkled all around the coast. Much of the Australian interior is inhospitable to large-scale human settlement. The largest cities are in the southeast. Almost half of Australians live in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, and more than three-quarters live in urban areas. Australia only has a population of roughly 23 million people—the 51st largest in the world.



Australia's greatest weakness is its reliance on sea lanes to overcome its isolation and to import and export raw materials and goods. Between exporting wool to Great Britain in 1901 and its over-reliance on iron ore exports today, Australia has always relied heavily on trade and would not have become the 12th largest economy in the world without it. However, Australia can only trade commodities and other goods by sea. The foundation of the Australian economy is keeping exports competitive and making sure they can leave the

country and imports can enter.

This makes the Australian economy extremely vulnerable. In terms of exports, Australia is disproportionately dependent on raw materials, particularly iron ore and coal. Furthermore, Australia is significantly exposed to China, which has reached the limits of its low-cost, high-growth, export-driven economy. Indeed, China, Japan, and South Korea together accounted for almost 60 percent of Australian exports in 2014. China alone accounted for almost 34 percent. China's economic decline in 2015 had a negative effect on Australia. According to reports from China's customs agency through July 2015, the decline of Chinese demand for Australia's exports had already resulted in losses of approximately \$15 billion for Australia—or 1 percent of GDP.

Australia also depends on imports, particularly of crude and fuel. Despite the fact that Australia is the world's ninth largest energy producer, it imported 90 percent of its transport fuel in 2014, according to a report commissioned by the National Roads and Motorists' Association. Of the 29 countries that are members of the International Energy Agency, Australia routinely has the lowest oil supply, often under the 90 days of stockpiles that the IEA makes a criterion for membership. As explained in "The Next Decade" by George Friedman, "Australia is like a creature whose arteries and veins are located outside of its body, unprotected and constantly at risk."

Australia's dependence on imports and exports defines its national strategy. Australia has always depended on a great naval power to guarantee its defense. Over 102,815 Australians have died fighting in wars all over the world. Very few of those soldiers died in the immediate vicinity of Australia. The rest died far away from the South Pacific in foreign wars. Over 16,000 Australian troops were sent to fight and over 500 died in the Second Boer War in present-day South Africa—a conflict between the British Empire and the

Despite Australia's dependence on sea lanes, which shapes the way it behaves in the world, Australia is an extremely secure country from a military perspective. Australia is the only significant power in the world that has never faced a land-based existential threat from a neighbor. No country—not even Japan in World War II—has attempted a ground invasion of Australia since British ships seeking to establish a penal colony made landfall in what is today Sydney in 1788. Australia's strategic position became key for the United States during World War II, and the country served as a depot for US forces to build up and support their attacks on the Japanese in the Pacific.

MAJOR PACIFIC THEATER OPERATIONS OF WORLD WAR II

Click on map to enlarge



As the United States attempts to extricate itself from its wars in Eurasia and refocus on the Pacific, its relationships with Australia,

New Zealand, and all of the small islands of the South Pacific have become even more important. In terms of military cooperation and intelligence sharing, Australia and New Zealand are among the US' closest partners and will remain so into the future. This is because for these states to maintain their quality of life, they require US security guarantees over sea lanes. The flip side of this equation is that to maintain that level of control, the US requires access to the various bases and cooperation of Australia and others.

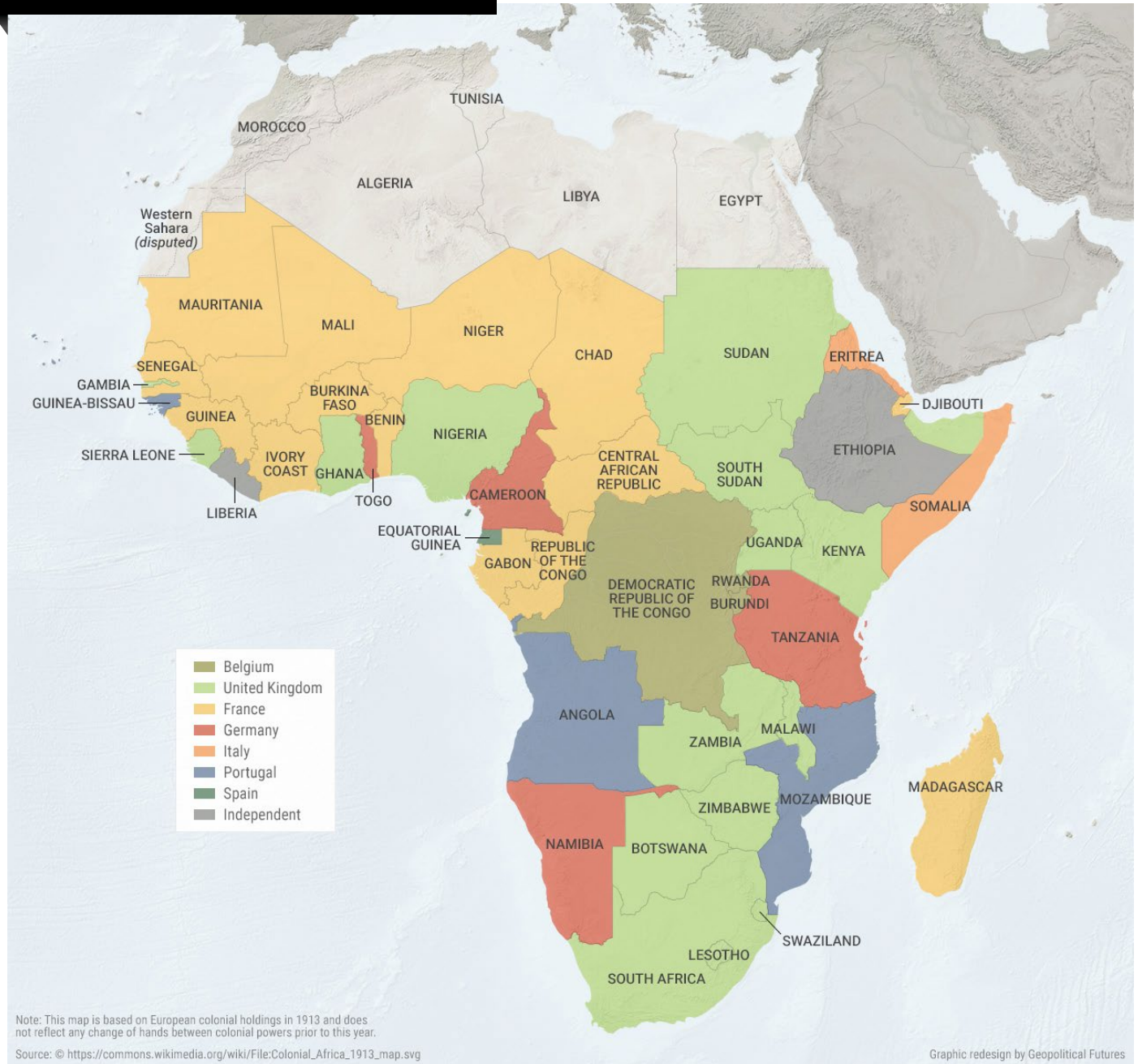
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa is an expansive landmass demarcated by the Sahara Desert to the north and Atlantic and Indian oceans on either side. The land is blanketed with a series of plateaus that are separated by plunging escarpments. As a result, land passage is nearly impossible and river navigability is poor, due to the high prevalence of rapids and waterfalls. The plateaus roughly divide sub-Saharan Africa into four decipherable geographic regions: the Western Plateau, the Southern Plateau, the Eastern Plateau (also referred to as the Highlands), and the Congo River Basin. The interplay between this geography and colonialism lays the backdrop for much of the dynamics observed in the region today.



COLONIAL POWERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Click on map to enlarge

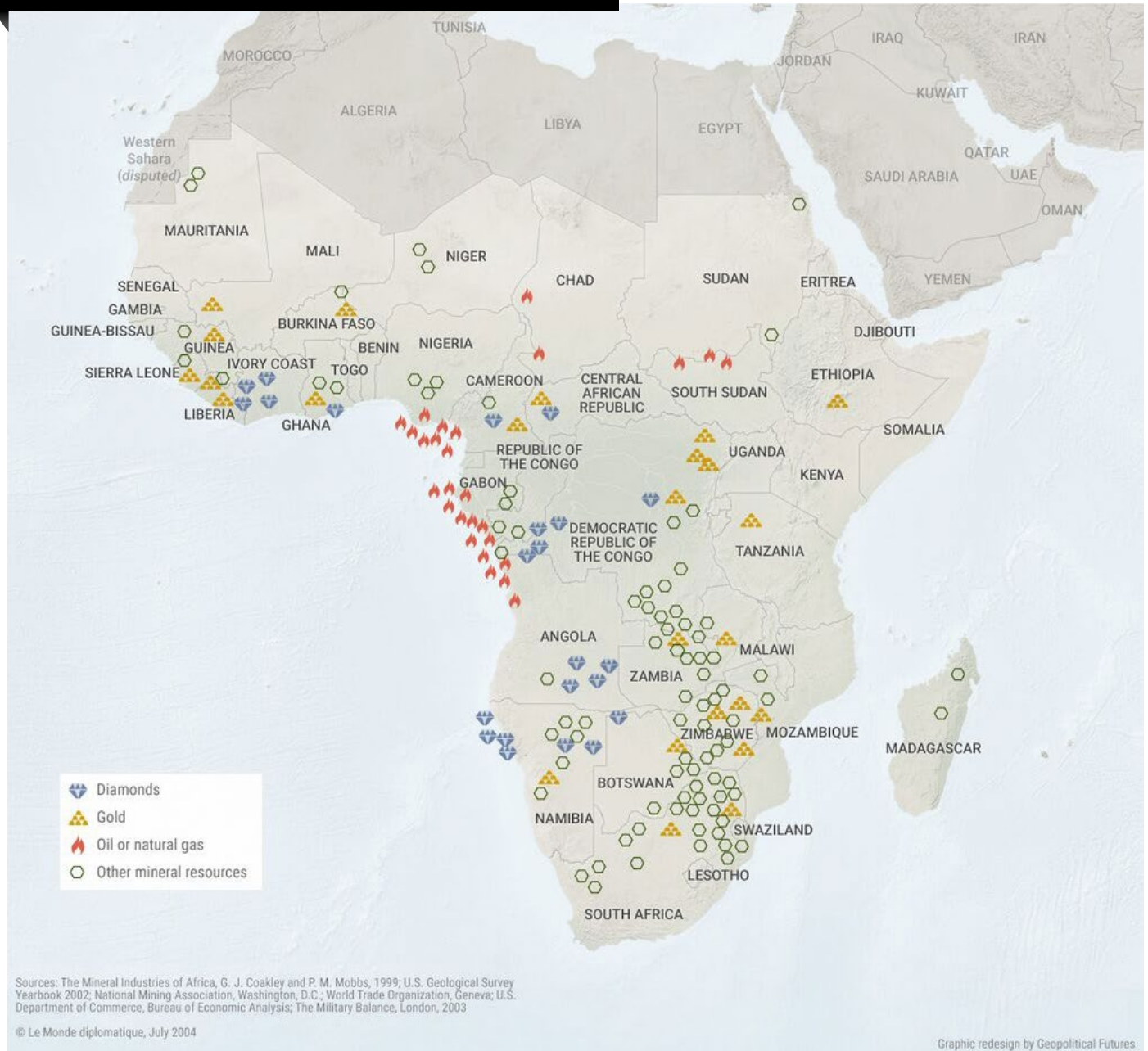


Sub-Saharan Africa was colonized at a time when the world's center of gravity was in Europe. From the 16th century through the 18th century, major European powers established coastal ports to support long voyages to the East Indies. As industrialization took hold in European economies, new territories were useful sources of raw materials as well as markets for selling finished goods. Sub-Saharan Africa become one of many locations in which European

powers competed to grab as much land as possible in the 18th and 19th centuries.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA NATURAL RESOURCES DEPOSITS

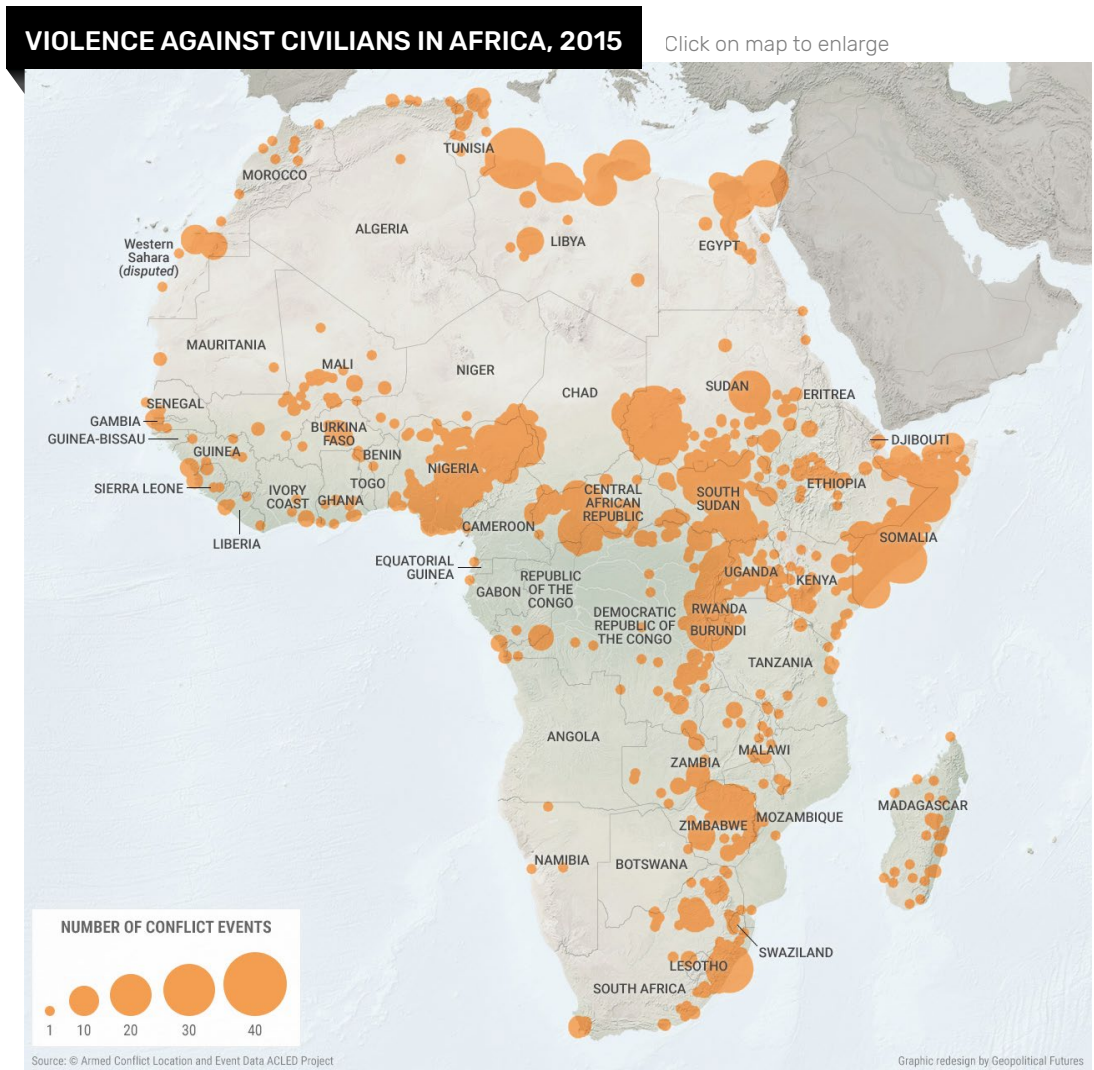
Click on map to enlarge



The basic infrastructure developed during this period did little to enhance connectivity within and between colonies. The limited railway systems built in African colonies were exclusively designed to get raw materials from the interior to the coast for export to external markets. Colonial powers prioritized developing their domestic

economies rather than those of the colonies. The aforementioned escarpments, plateaus, and unnavigable river systems also discouraged any further infrastructure development by colonial powers. To this day, cross-continent connectivity remains a challenge for sub-Saharan countries attempting to diversify trade routes—especially interior, over-ground routes.

Another major impact of Europe’s colonization of Africa was the severe disruption of the natural nation-state development process in the region and imposition of artificial borders corresponding to colonial conquests. Prior to European arrival, African kingdoms and chiefdoms were in the middle of this organic nation-state building process. The arrival of Europeans stripped kingdoms of power, established borders that did not align with natural kingdom boundaries, and forced divergent groups to coexist under one colonial power.



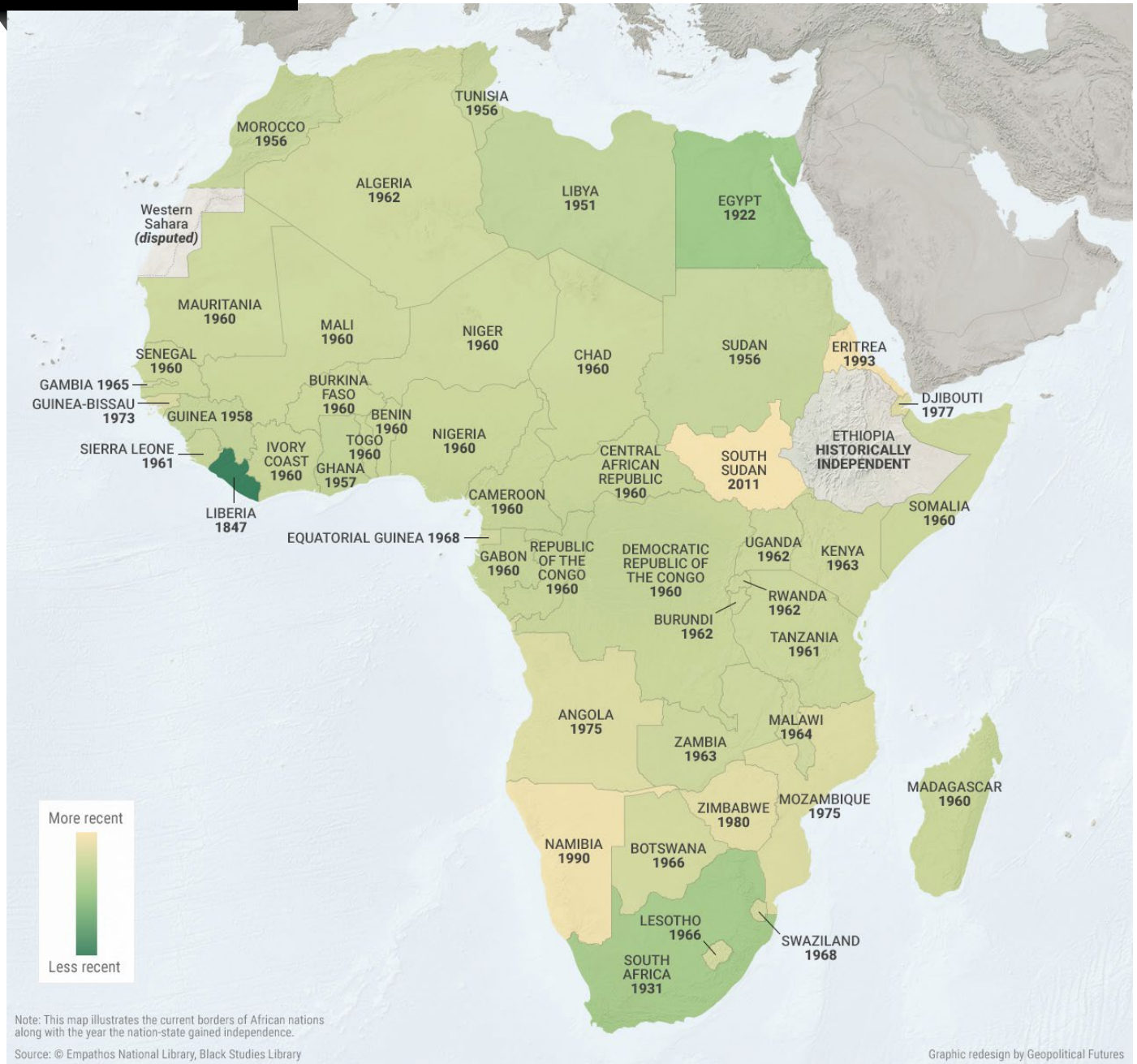
The boundaries and groupings did not take into account natural geographic, cultural, or population divisions. This set the stage for recurring conflict among indigenous populations, clashes between local populations and colonial powers, and frequent, massive cross-border migration flows. For this reason, many of the conflicts currently observed in the region occur within one country rather than between countries.

Another unique feature of the region is that these countries have not been independent for long. Nearly all of these states did not become independent until the latter half the 20th century. This inflection point in the region's history was brought about as a repercussion of WWII. After the war, European powers once again viewed sub-Saharan Africa as a means to an end—this time as a tool to help rebuild Europe after the devastating war. However, as a result of both the rising education levels and the Allied messaging against fascism during WWII, African populations quickly pointed out the hypocrisy of European colonialism in the region and began to demand more rights and equal standards of living. European countries soon realized sponsoring development in African colonies was too costly and eventually independence was arranged.



INDEPENDENCE IN AFRICA

Click on map to enlarge



The end of colonial rule created a power vacuum that ultimately led to a wave of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in the region. Colonial rule was a miserable experience for the vast majority of Africans and, therefore, many rejected government institutions and political systems that mirrored those in Europe. In addition, the colonial system created an elite and well-connected group of African leaders who easily stepped into power positions

once the Europeans were gone. Lastly, the conflicts between indigenous groups remained and, in some cases, were made worse by being forced to coexist within the same, artificial state borders. Those in power found repressing unruly populations to be easier than attempting to settle differences that existed for centuries. Sub-Saharan Africa is still wrestling with these issues around governance and civil society today.

CONCLUSION

All the maps included in this report play a vital role in our global assessments and analytical framework. Understanding these maps means understanding some of the fundamental geopolitical imperatives and constraints that dictate the behavior of countries worldwide. Geopolitical Futures uses this information and understanding to help lay the groundwork for analysis and forecasting.

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