



The Perch Pod Episode 28

Reflecting and Breaking Down the Idea of Geopolitics with Phil Kelly

Jacob Shapiro:

Hello listeners. And welcome to another episode of The Perch Pod. As usual, I'm your host, I'm Jacob Shapiro. I'm also the founder and chief strategist of Perch Perspectives, which is a human-centric business and political consulting firm. I get a lot of questions about people who are interested in international politics or for getting a grounding in geopolitics about what things they should read. And it's hard for me to believe it now, but I've been doing this for over 10 years. And I've trained a fair number of fellow geopolitical analysts in my life.

Jacob Shapiro:

And when I do, I usually assign five books. I always assign something from a kinder, usually the geographical pivot of history, but anything, just pick up some random, a kinder, anything would do. Politics Among Nations, which is Hans Morgenthau. Saul Bernard Cohen's, Geopolitics of the World System. The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, not really geopolitics, but I think relates to the way that you think about things by Richard Heuer. And then Classical Geopolitics by our podcast guest, Phil Kelly.

Jacob Shapiro:

Phil Kelly is a professor at Emporia State University. He's written a number of books and journal articles about geopolitics over a career that spans multiple decades. And I was honestly tickled that he agreed to come on the podcast and talk to us a little bit about geopolitics and in particular, his definition of classical geopolitics and the geopolitics of Latin America. This conversation might get a little wonkier than some of our previous podcasts, just because you've got two geopolitics nerds who have found each other in a pandemic and got a chance to talk at least over Zoom and over Zencast, which is how we record this podcast.

Jacob Shapiro:

But I still thought it was hugely valuable and hope you all enjoy it. The emphasis on Latin America is of course not coincidental or by chance. I'm doing a lot more work on Latin America these days as we put out our LatamPolitik newsletter in conjunction with our partners at VisualPolitik, the YouTube channel. Please consider checking it out at latampolitik.com. You can sign up for a two-week free trial, after that, it's \$5 a month. It's the price of a cup of coffee or a pint. And if you enjoy listening to this podcast or you



think that what Perch is doing is cool, consider signing up for that and consider contributing a pint a month to the cause.

Jacob Shapiro:

Otherwise, all the usual stuff applies. You can check us out at perchperspectives.com. Our free newsletter still comes out twice a week. You can write to us at info@perchperspectives.com, whether you have questions or comments about the podcast, or whether you want to talk about some of the geopolitical consulting services that perch offers clients. We're here for all of it and I'm reading everything that comes in, so happy to get your emails. Other than that, hope you're all staying safe. Hope you're all either getting vaccines or in line to get vaccine soon.

Jacob Shapiro:

I got my first dose just this week from a Walgreens pharmacy. And was happy to do it, although, that shot really did kick my butt for a couple of days. I was not worth much for the two or three days afterwards, but totally worth it. And I'm glad that there is at least some light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel ahead of us. So take care of each other and thanks, Phil, for coming on, and we'll see you out there. Cheers.

Phil Kelly:

Well, thank you. This has been very stimulating to me, and I must admit since clarified some of my ideas. So thank you.

Jacob Shapiro:

Like the old Swedish proverb, nothing's so bad that isn't good for something. It's what my dad likes to say. Listen, before we get started, before we get into some of the stuff we talked about, I'd like to personalize geopolitics a little bit because it can be very abstract and very macro-perspective oriented. So could you just tell our listeners how you came across geopolitics and why it interested you in the first place? It's kind of a niche subject.

Phil Kelly:

It came basically later in my career. I had moved to Kansas in 1980. But I had read before that time an article by Jack Child of American University, in the Latin American Research Review on South American Geopolitics. That stimulated an interest. I started reading, and I've always tried to read as much as I could. And in the middle of 1980s, I published a couple of articles on Meira Mattos of Brazil and Shatterbelts. And in 10 years, I've met Jack at various conferences since then. And he and I agreed to do an edited book on South American Geopolitics. I think we had seven or eight Latin American writers. We had six North American writers, one Brit. And that was published in 1989.

Jacob Shapiro:

It's a good time to be publishing things on geopolitics in our spacious-



Phil Kelly:

I haven't stopped since.

Jacob Shapiro:

If I might ask, I mean, I'm familiar with your work on geopolitics. What were you working on or focusing on before you got into it?

Phil Kelly:

A little bit of... I was dealing with United States ambassadors, their backgrounds, especially the regional placements. I did a statistical study on that, where I located the more experienced US ambassadors going to the larger countries, which is of course common sense.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Which is not common-

Phil Kelly:

And I must say too before that, from my PhD dissertation, I took a part of it on Latin American voting in the general assembly of the United Nations, did a Guttman scale, which is sort of a rank-order scale, and plugged in regression analysis. Found that distance from the United States affected Latin American voting in the United Nations. At the time, I didn't realize that was geopolitical. So I was doing geopolitical before 1979 and Jack Child, I just didn't realize it. So that disease must have been somehow within my blood.

Jacob Shapiro:

It does have that attribute to it. Well, why don't we dive straight in because Classical Geopolitics was the first book of yours that I read. And I think it does a really great job of unpacking what geopolitics is. I particularly love the passage where you talk about, "Look, it's not realism." Everybody tries to make it about realpolitik and it's not, it's not. The Wall Street Journal every other day, there's a new geopolitical change in the market, and some catastrophe, it's not that, it's really something else. So how do you define classical geopolitics?

Phil Kelly:

Well, it's very important to define it because I think that's one of the problems. As you probably know, classical geopolitics does not get a good press in the United States. And that's up to the present. I just published an article where I rescued geopolitics from some of the negative articles that are just coming out and have come out for the last half century. I want to talk about both definitions and theory. And wanted to give some preliminary remarks. Classical geopolitics would be traditional geopolitics. It follows a couple of routes. The geo-strategic would be English. The organic would be German.

Phil Kelly:



Why I point that out is that the organic would be more South America, but pretty much Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman. And there is a contrast in geopolitical approach. I'll just mention it once. We can certainly go into it later, but I'll mention it just once. That would be the critical geopolitics, which stems from political geography, mainly, European, Canadian and United States. And this is where geopolitics is seen as a negative. It's a tool of exploitation, postmodern radical approach. I don't subscribe to that, although I've written quite a bit about it. So I'll just leave that if you want to come back to that.

Jacob Shapiro:

Sure.

Phil Kelly:

I'm an academic theorist. I have dealt with theory and the application of theory. And that's my contribution to classical. I think theory is essential, both to understanding international relations, but particularly to understanding classical geopolitics. In my recent book with Stanford, I located over 60 geopolitical theories. So very important. A theory is probability. If X happens, there is some likelihood, some probability that Y will happen because of X. Now, in some cases you can plug that into statistics, in most cases you can't. So this is a bit rough, but I don't see any way around it.

Phil Kelly:

But again, theory is a probability. If something happens it probably links back to an earlier stimulation. Let me just give another definition too. I use the word model. And model to me is a collection of theories that fit a particular definition. Now I don't see geopolitical theories. I see theories that fit a geopolitical definition, and if they do, they enter into that basket, which we would call a geopolitical model. And then one brief point beyond that is that my mission in geopolitics is to clarify theories and then to try to appropriately attach them to international understanding, to attach them to that. So apply them to that.

Phil Kelly:

So that would be my introductory point. The definition of classical geopolitics is essential to this discussion, because I think that's one of the problems with geopolitics. It is either never defined or it's wrongly defined. Some of that comes from perhaps the fascist heritage, harsh authors, World War II, 1930s institute in Germany. I think also that you have the idea of power politics that is attached, a negative that's attached to geopolitics also. To me, I think this is correct. I'm still working on it. But power politics would be more or less large countries in aggressive diplomacy.

Phil Kelly:

You wouldn't have Paraguay as in power politics. Obviously the relationship between Russia and the United States would be power politics. To me, I don't have a problem with that, but I just don't attach it to either geopolitics or the realist model. It's just a particular trait of international politics. So I have tried to be very careful on my definition. Okay. And I'm going to do it in three levels. And I think it'll be clear



when I say this, that simpler level is that geography affects foreign affairs. Now that's a pretty simple, not complex.

Phil Kelly:

You could go a higher level and say... and this is one I often use, geopolitics is the study of locations and positions of states, regions, and resources affecting foreign affairs. So I've added location and position of countries, regions, and resources. And then if you want to get more lengthy, then to that, both of those, you can add such features as, distance, climate change, environmental, migration, demography, development, places of leverage, sea power. You can go on with a lot of those concepts that you're going to attach to that definition itself. But again, there is the geographical fixture to geopolitics. It's a spatial concept.

Phil Kelly:

Now, one point further on this, what is the contribution of classical geopolitics? What does it give us? Well, I look at two things. One is that it gives us a geographical map, a sandbox, a structure, a configuration of international relations. If you look at say the ancient geo-Peloponnesian War, you can look at that war as a platform. And then secondly, you look at all of the theories that would activate that platform. And so again, you've got a platform, a spacial platform for looking at a region or a continent or Intercontinental relationships. And then you have concepts and theories that play on that platform. And then I just published a short article and I wanted to give a little more on what I look at on classical geopolitics and the theories.

Phil Kelly:

And so I'm just going to read a paragraph of that, "The classical is neutral to values and to individuals, is theories, timeless, logical, sometimes cyclical and state-centered. The actor are states, not individuals. You don't hear individuals. The States are the performers. It's generalizations apply universally. They would go to Paraguay, they would go to Russia. They do not focus on power, conflict, and war, but on space. And they can conform to the dynamics of technological change. So again, neutral to values and neutral to individuals. The theories are timeless, logical, sometimes cyclical, state-centered. They're universally applied. They're not focused on power, conflict, and war, but on space. And they can conform to change."

Phil Kelly:

In other words, I published a chapter in a book, 10 years ago, where I took the Peloponnesian War, many, many years ago. The platform had a variety of theories to it, shatterbelts, checkerboards, sea power, land power, distance, et cetera, et cetera. I could take those same platforms, apply them to contemporary South America using the same theories. And it was interesting that I could come out with different patterns. The Peloponnesian War, the geopolitics of the Peloponnesian war, where strife, were stressful, they were conflictual.

Phil Kelly:



In many ways, they sort of ended Classical Athenian Greek culture. And on the other side for South America, those same concepts and theories lent themselves to peace and stability. In other words, I could take the same platforms, the same theories over time and get different patterns, or maybe the similar patterns. Now, just one other point here, that geopolitics does not emit a lot of policies. Policies are more long-term, that again, you don't have statesman issuing geopolitical policies, that we have geopolitical traditions such as the Monroe Doctrine, or we have these theories, but they're really not immediate. They would be more long-term.

Phil Kelly:

Where in the case of the realist model, which I really like. I really like the realist model. That model is focused on the careful utilization of power among countries. And in that, you do get policies that are immediate. And certainly, they apply to the stability of the international system. So geopolitical is more long-term and realism would be more immediate on that. I have to say that in the research, geopolitical offers so many expressions for research. I have to add a little anecdote. I was to give a talk in Kentucky and tornadoes followed the airplane into the airport.

Phil Kelly:

And by the time I got up to Western Kentucky State they had canceled the convention. They had canceled classes. I sort of snuck in a library. I didn't have much to do. Came up with another theory. Paraguay is a lintel state, sort of a lintel above stabilizing relations between Brazil and Argentina. So that there's a great deal of ripeness, a great deal of expansion with classical geopolitics. I'm by no means done with my research on classical geopolitics. So that's my point on definitions and theories.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah, there's a lot to unpack there. And I want to ask you a few questions. The first one I want to ask is, why do you think geopolitics get so much bad press? Is it because of the Nazi appropriation of it? Is it that simple?

Phil Kelly:

I'm not certain of that, Jacob. I simply don't know. This is one of those areas where I have tried to clarify theories. I've tried to clarify the definition. That's by way of bringing geopolitics as a model to international relations theory. I don't have a good answer for that. This plagues me, but I don't know why power politics necessarily equates with geopolitics.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. And I wonder also-

Phil Kelly:

We need the ideas on that.



Jacob Shapiro:

Well, I don't know. I mean, some of it has to be the Nazi appropriation, I would think, but I also, at least in my own personal work, I've always struggled. And you alluded to this when you said that geopolitics is neutral to values and individuals, I certainly agree with values. It's harder when you get to individuals because I feel like if there's classical geopolitics, there's also a school of vulgar geopolitics out there, that starts to veer on determinism and starts to say that, "Because there's a mountain here and there's a river here and there's this resource here, therefore all of these things are going to happen this particular way."

Jacob Shapiro:

And they discard the probability bit and then use the arguments in order to make these deterministic arguments. And actually a lot of my work has been to break that apart. Just because you have the space and the position perfectly understood doesn't mean that all these second-order things like power and war and conflict are necessarily predetermined. That's one of my guesses, but how do you negotiate that line between determinism and geopolitics?

Phil Kelly:

I have been accused of being a determinist and perhaps there's something to that. Obviously I am emphasizing geopolitics when I look at international relations. And I'm emphasizing that platform, a spacial platform and the effect of theories on it. So I think that geography doesn't necessarily determine outcomes, but it certainly influences them. I think there's no hard and fast rule of connection in determining geography affecting international behavior.

Phil Kelly:

But all of the theories and the probability sense lend them to that. I think that the Heartland Theory, for example, we'll come back to that later. But the Heartland Theory, I think does hold water. And a theory again, gives you more depth in understanding international relations. And so obviously you're going to be accused of determinism because you're relying so heavily on theory, as far as your approach to understanding international relations.

Jacob Shapiro:

It's funny you mentioned the Heartland Theory because in some way, I mean it's... everybody has to read Mackinder's Heartland Theory when you're studying geopolitics. But in some ways it's my least favorite of his work because it's the one where his policy desire start to infect a little bit. Because I think that he's arguing from that geo-strategic perspective, not just that the Heartland is the pivot of the world island, but also that Britain should be involved in making sure that nobody else controls that, there's that sort of undertone to it. And it's hard to extricate them even within successive sentences in that piece. Do you feel that way at all?

Phil Kelly:



Yes, Jacob, I'm very much... I didn't put a lot of store on Mackinder or the heartland, because again, it doesn't work. Because Mackinder put it in Eurasia. And the Eurasian heartland would be basically Russia or the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union never made it to effective ocean shores. They were pretty much encircled. But then I did a recent article that was dealing with the North American heartland. And so I took Mackinder's theory, now, again, it would be an isolated core area of a continent. And within that core area, you have resources and you have some measure of unity, which I think probably Russia did. But Russia never made it to the oceans.

Phil Kelly:

And of course the United States easily made it to the oceans and didn't know that we'll it to the oceans, but we are the global sea power of international relations. So the United States not only made it to the oceans, but we made it over the entire globe, so that we have a push-pull factor. We have a push factor from the heartland. We have a pull factor onto Eurasia. And Eurasia would be the dominant continent, but the United States because of its wealth and its centrality and its protection is the global heartland.

Phil Kelly:

And so, as we know that United States security is using its navy and its army, offshore balancing forward presence maintaining a paper ball balance of power on Eurasia for American security. And so I do put more stress on Mackinder because I have changed Mackinder's placement. I have refined this theory for one thing. I have changed his placement. And to me it makes a lot more sense to say that the United States is the global heartland. And my bias, you may not accept that, but my bias is that of all of the areas, all of the continents of the globe, the United States occupies the wealthiest most powerful place on earth. Now, the Eurasia may be larger, maybe have more power, but it's divided. And the United States is able to play off that division.

Jacob Shapiro:

Would it be fair to say that if someone united Eurasia that you would have to change your mind or is that an impossibility?

Phil Kelly:

Yes, I would have to change my mind. Or if the United States succumbed and no longer was united, breaking into a variety of countries, then yes. The international perspective would radically change.

Jacob Shapiro:

Well, I think that's a great segue though, into maybe talking a little bit about Latin America specifically, because one of the reasons I appreciate your work so much, is that so much of what geopolitics is out there is all focused on Eurasia. And I think it really doesn't look close enough at the periphery and your work on Latin America is some of my favorite work that does that. And I say it's a good segue because you talk about the American heartland. The Rio de la Plata seems to me like it could be a heartland if some of the countries in the region wanted to get their act together. So tell me a little bit about how you approach bringing some of these geopolitical theories in your model to Latin America.



Phil Kelly:

I say it Latin American geopolitics, South American geopolitics, but I think basically South American geopolitics is much more in existence. I haven't found any authors in Middle America that would be a prominent geopolitical thinking. So when I say Latin American geopolitics, in some cases I switch to South American geopolitics, but let me start and give the three Americas and then stretch to other topics from that, because I think this is a good starting point for looking at South American, Latin American, North American geopolitics. I look at three different Americas in a geopolitical focus. North America, its geopolitics points East and West, strategically, Intercontinental toward Eurasia.

Phil Kelly:

North America is the prime global heartland in Mackinder definitions. It is united. It's a core continental area of course. Very protected, it doesn't have many immediate threats from Eurasia. It's united, it's resource rich. And as I said before, it extends easily into the naval area. Secondly then, you have Middle America, which to me would be the Caribbean and Central America, also strategic, but in a negative sense. It is not a heartland obviously. It's very weak, very divided, very dependent on the United States. It is susceptible to shatterbelts.

Phil Kelly:

In other words, a shatterbelt would be like the Cuban Missile Crisis. It's two levels of conflict within a region or a country. And you have international strategic players from outside coming into that conflict. And so you've got two levels of conflict in a shatterbelt. One would be the local, one would be the strategic. And the real danger of a shatterbelts is escalation of conflict. So the Cuban Missile Crisis was a shatterbelt. I think a good example today would be Ukraine or Germany would be shatterbelts.

Phil Kelly:

And so that again, North America, strategic Eurasian, Middle America is Monroe Doctrine, where this would be a weak area, susceptible to Eurasian penetration. The United States would have an interest when there is a threat coming from the South. But if you look to the South American geopolitics, very, very different. No strategic feature to South American. In other words, it is continental. It has very little ties with other continents. You never hear Mackinder, Spykman, they're a little bit in the Brazilian area.

Phil Kelly:

But it's the... I call it an independent area, a marginal area, an isolated continent in geopolitical terms. Its geopolitical thrust is within the continent. And again, the continent is not united, is divided into 13 countries, 10 manage countries. It lacks wealth and resources with some exceptions. It lacks unity and I don't know if it will ever be unified. We'll come back to that. I just don't see South America being much of a strategic player. Now, earlier on, General Meira Mattos, during the 1960s, 1950s looked upon Brazil as a strategic player.

Phil Kelly:



And of course he was leading Brazilian military forces in World War II in Italy. But it's going to have to be some future time if South America ever plays some kind of a strategic role. And so again, you've got three Americas and I think it's a good starting off place. North America, Middle America would be strategic in different ways. And then South America would be continental interior. We'll come back to that when I give more description. But the geopolitics of South America would be border stability, development. Those kinds of areas, integration, security, wariness of Brazil. These kinds of features. So again, that's the way of looking at it. I could go on then to another topic taking from that.

Jacob Shapiro:

Well, could I ask just one question though?

Phil Kelly:

Yeah.

Jacob Shapiro:

I wonder, do you lend any credence to the fact that... A lot of these South American countries have become, I don't want to say dependent, that's a wrong word, but their economic relationships with China have deepened considerably. And China's need for some of the resources that they do have, whether it's lithium or soybeans or whatever else has also deepened considerably, especially as China tries to wean off of the dependence on the US. So do you think we're at a little bit of a pivot point where maybe South America could become more strategic because of that relationship with China? Or am I putting the cart before horse?

Phil Kelly:

Yes, I think, and especially China on the Pacific Coast of these Latin American countries, has made major economic ties to Peru, to the Panama area. So I would think this would be certainly a concern of the United States as a violation of Monroe Doctrine. But to me, it would have to be much more serious or it would have to be in military basis, more than economic development. So this would be a concern and that certainly is a possible contradiction, but a very weak contradiction to the Monroe Doctrine. But certainly a good point. And there's a lot of literature on that at present.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. And secondly, does Venezuela today fit your definition of a shatterbelt or is it too much... it's really just domestically contained and the US, is the only real power there into the extent Russia and China are fooling around, it's not?

Phil Kelly:

It could be. I hadn't thought of that. That's a good point. That's a good point. So Venezuela would not be to me a clear example of violation of the Monroe Doctrine, but it would be in that area.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Although also to your point, I mean, it also faces the Caribbean and is as much... is in that border area between a South American state and a Central American state as well.

Phil Kelly:

Yeah. Yeah. So let me go to another topic on that same point. If we switched totally to South America, the geopolitical origins come from the geomatic examples, the organic example of geopolitics, classical geopolitics. Early military attaches brought in some of the features of that. I have picked up organic thrust of classical geopolitics in Argentina, certainly in Paraguay, Chile, throughout the South American continent. Again, organic would be, developmental features. It would be borders and frontiers, national development, regional and border security, some integration of resources.

Phil Kelly:

I think that the organic fits South America nicely as a geopolitical definition where North America would be a geo-strategic English. So you've got an English in North America, you've got a German in South America. I lived in Paraguay for a time, and interesting that... and I'm going to come back to that point later, but I picked up a book in a bookstore in Asunción, Hennigan Cornegg. It was a book that had been published in German, in Munich, had all kinds of fascist, racist terminology that had been translated into Spanish and was a textbook in military academies.

Jacob Shapiro:

Huh! That's wild.

Phil Kelly:

There's a lot of that kind of a feature. So again, that would be one contrast. But again, I think that the organic does fit South America. The geo-strategic does fit North America. So again, South American geopolitics is isolated, is on the margins. Its freights are basically internal to the continent, not strategic or linked to other continents. It would be an organic classical geopolitics.

Jacob Shapiro:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And in some of your writing, you've compared... interestingly to me, you've compared Brazil and the United States in some ways. That they have more similarities in common than maybe some of the other South American states in part, because Brazil seems to have this... it's almost programmed to try and reach West in the same way that the United States was, except of course, Brazil has never been able to do that. Is that a correct reading?

Phil Kelly:

Yes-

Jacob Shapiro:



And do you think that Brazil will ever pushed that way? I mean, is that a fear to you?

Phil Kelly:

Well, I think there was some suspicion of that. I'll come back on heartlands and other things too. But certainly there is a weariness of Brazilian expansion to not only the West, but also to the North and even in Antarctica. I don't know how much that would be. I think it comes up in cycles. But one of the traits of South American geopolitics would be weariness, suspicion of Brazilian expansion. And of course there is the idea... I think Kissinger was promoting this.

Phil Kelly:

That Brazil would be a key nation for United States foreign policy. In other words, we would put our emphasis on Brazil and it would carry out our policies for the rest of the continent. I don't know how viable that is today, but certainly Brazil looks upon itself as differently. And if anything, they would have more of a strategic interest and maybe someday they might be able to play that role. Interesting point though.

Jacob Shapiro:

Does the Bolsonaro government... what evidence or the rise of the Bolsonaro government, does that push in any direction for you? Is that an example of any kind of emerging trend or is that really just sort of the dustbin of domestic politics that gets swept away?

Phil Kelly:

I think it's probably more domestic politics. 1950s, 1960s into the 1970s, Golbery, Theresa de Castro, Meira Mattos. I think were all pushing this idea that Brazil was ranked the sixth most powerful economic country of the world, and that it should have a role in world politics. I don't think that was ever played out. And I don't hear that so much in Brazilian geopolitics today. What I thought I would do then, Jacob, is look at some of the basic theories or concepts.

Phil Kelly:

I have eight of them. I think we could find others, but I thought this might give some indication too, of South American geopolitics. The theories that I will give would be not only characteristic of South America, but they would be ubiquitous. They would be global. But I think they do help characterize South American geopolitics.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah, great.

Phil Kelly:

Not that this is necessarily the most important, but you raised the point of heartlands. And basically, you could locate four heartlands that I have seen in South America. One would be the Charcas Heartland of



Bolivia, is sort of a triangular. Louis Tams writes about this. I use this in some of my research. Is the idea that you have a triangle of three major cities of Bolivia, Santa Cruz de la Sierra would be in the Amazonian jungle area, the oil area. The other two cities would be up in the Andes.

Phil Kelly:

But the idea of the Charcas Triangle is that who dominates Santa Cruz de la Sierra dominates the Charcas heartland or the Charcas Triangle. Who dominates the Charcas Triangle, dominates the middle of South America, and eventually the entire continent of South America. The only difference between this is pretty Mackinderistic, but the idea is that the Charcas is weak and vulnerable to Brazilian intervention. And so that Brazil, paving its highways in that direction toward mountain passes and the Charcas Triangle could be an avenue to Brazilian domination of the continent.

Phil Kelly:

I don't think you can carry it any further than that. Golbery of Brazil, a very influential general at that time talk about a welding zone in the Central Brazilian Plateau, sort of a military term of a marching area. And I think he interpreted that as heartland where Brazil would work out from that area through the Ecuadorian passes, through the Brazilian passes on into the Pacific. I don't know how much happened on that, but that was certainly lending to suspicions of Brazilian aggressiveness, both the Charcas and the welding zone.

Phil Kelly:

I have also heard too that the Itaipu hydroelectric plant on the Parana River, which is one of the largest hydroelectric power plants of the world, it serves most of the Southern Brazil, has been seen as a heartland. And the Paraguayans look upon their country as a pivotal area in the Southern Cone and as a heartland too. They all vaguely follow Mackinder's traditional Heartland Theory. But again, I don't know how important this is. But at least you do hear the word heartland and the Charcas and the Brazilian heartlands and the other heartlands too.

Phil Kelly:

And it does lend some color to South American geopolitics. Another issue of buffer states. And of course there are four buffer states going from the Northwest to the Southeast, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay. And the interesting thing about the buffer states are, I call this a clash zone or a crush zone, which is sort of a shatterbelt term too. Is that, five of the six South American wars were fought within that crush zone of the buffers. And all of those wars, the buffers lost territory to the larger countries. But I look upon that, that crush zone or the buffer area still stabilizing South America.

Phil Kelly:

In other words, they still buffer the larger countries. And I think that is a major factor in the stabilization of current South American politics and geopolitics. So the bumper states are very interesting. Thirdly, the checkerboard. And the checkerboard is a leapfrog pattern, geopolitical pattern. My neighbor is my enemy, the neighbor of my neighbor is my friend. You had this in the Peloponnesian War. I think we had



this in the Vietnam Conflict. You can see it in the Middle East. And it certainly is in South America. And I think this is very alive and well today. Brazil, Chile, Colombia versus Argentina, Peru and Venezuela.

Phil Kelly:

You saw this, especially in the Falklands/Malvinas War where Argentina occupied the Falklands, Malvinas Islands against the British. In that war, about in the early 1980s, Brazil was silent. Chile actually aided the British in their naval area. Peru was the only South American ally of Argentina. So you do see the checkerboard formation in South America. I think you, Jacob, referred to this also, a fourth would be Brazilian encirclement. That despite the checkerboards, there is the Spanish American weariness of Brazilian expansion. That certainly, the Charcas and Gold Berry's welding zone, the Amazonian roads into the West aimed at the passes of Ecuador, the passes of Charcas in Bolivia.

Phil Kelly:

I think there was some reason to believe, at least in the 1960s that the military governments of Brazil were looking for a passage to the Pacific, of course, that never happened. A fifth term would be shatterbelts. There are no shatterbelts in South America. Their last shatterbelt was a Cuban Missile Crisis in the Caribbean, but there were some early colonial shatterbelts in South America at the La Plata mouth and the Amazonian estuaries. The estuaries of Brazil would be Dutch and English. The estuaries of the La Plata would be Spanish and English.

Phil Kelly:

But you don't have any shatterbelts in South America because there is no strategic alignment with the continent. You can look at organic borders. My take, I think I'm correct on this, South America, I call, is a zona de pace, a peaceful area. There simply is no border dispute. So there is no tendency for warfare. I think the only exception would be the Marañón River Valley on the Pacific in Peru. You did get an occasional flare up of the military between Ecuador and Peru. The South America and the entire Latin American area is a nuclear free zone also.

Phil Kelly:

There simply are no nuclear weapons in South and Latin America. There is no a possibility of even building nuclear weapons in Latin America. This was an agreement with the United States and Latin American countries to simply denuclearize the whole area. I don't think there are major disputes in Middle America either. And then just a couple more here, integration, if you look at the South American, MERCOSUR, the Common Market of the Southern Cone, this is a variety of countries throughout the area. And I think even Israel is a member of MERCOSUR.

Phil Kelly:

Integration is really a geopolitical attribute. This is... especially Quagliotti in Uruguay, the editor of the Heosur Publication. And you had a pretty good spurt of this in the 1990s. I don't think it's done much since then. And then just one other point, the Camino del Sol. The idea that Latin America or South America just simply doesn't play a role in strategic Northern geopolitics, Eurasia and North America. So



those are the eight theories. And you can see the importance of theories in looking at South American geopolitics.

Jacob Shapiro:

If I might ask, where... You mentioned the three Americas, and I would feel remiss if I didn't ask, is Mexico in North America in the division of the three Americas?

Phil Kelly:

That's a good point. I sort of go back and forth on that. A lot of this, my mind is not settled on. You like to hook Mexico into North America because of NAFTA. But still Mexico is a Latin American country. So I think that you could say that Mexico may look both ways into South America or Latin America and into North America. So that's a very good point. And quite frankly, one that I haven't worked out.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. But it seems to me that... Well, I don't know if it's going to be one of the themes, because this particular... and AMLO's government in Mexico seems to be a little bit more active in South America itself, whether it's backing... well, I don't want to say backing Maduro, but taking a more neutral stance toward Maduro. They slapped OAS in the wrist over OAS going after Morales. I mean, it feels like Mexico is trying to break out of whatever box it's been forced in.

Phil Kelly:

Yeah. And I think it's also been very active in the Caribbean too. And I would agree that it does want to break out of that fixture that would be the United States. It's so tied to the United States that I think it wants to relieve itself and be more autonomous for the United States. I don't know what the future will hold on that

Jacob Shapiro:

Is it also... I mean, obviously when we're looking at Central America, migration would be a major theme, but do you see any migration theme in South America itself or is that-

Phil Kelly:

That's already happening. That you're getting a lot of immigration from Brazil into those border areas. But also as you're having global warming, I think this will be both Central America, the Caribbean for the North. And then certainly, the Southern Cone or South America going into Uruguay, going into Chile, going into Argentina, as you have global warming. I think we're going to have a major factor in the Americas for immigration. It's going to be a major theme for Latin American geopolitics. On the Northern area, this might be more controversial, but I don't think the United States has a choice, but to take a good number of those refugees from Central America.

Phil Kelly:



I think we can facilitate their settlements in America. I think that will stabilize the areas, the Central America, that is certainly changing through climate change, through corrupt governments, through lack of resources. And those people simply have no other way to go, but to go North. And we're certainly going to have this in Europe too and Asia, where they're going from the middle latitudes into the northern latitudes, but we're going to see immigration as a major factor in Latin American geopolitics. Very good point

Jacob Shapiro:

The point you just made may be controversial to some, but it's not controversial on this podcast. And anybody listening who thinks it's controversial can go stick their heads in the toilet, as far as am concerned. But I'm really glad you brought up climate change though too, because I do just want to... I wanted to ask a question about climate change in the sense that, have we ever... when we're dealing with geopolitics, is there an analogous trend or development like climate change that has the potential to change so much of these things that usually trend more towards immutable and universal? Have we ever dealt with an analog like this? Or are we really on an unprecedented ground?

Phil Kelly:

No, and this is new, but certainly climate and global warming is inherently geopolitical. And that it's obviously going to be disruptive. I'm rather pessimistic on this, Jacob. I don't know a good answer to it. But I look at our globe, has too many people. We have dwindling resources. We have the middle latitudes throughout the world, are heating up. There will be vast stretches of the middle areas of our global, the latitudes where people will simply have to leave. Now when I look at the globe, I look at the North as having land territory continents, the South, having oceans, waters.

Phil Kelly:

In other words, if there's going to be migration out of those destitute areas because of global warming, the movement is going to go North and I'm thinking more of Middle Eastern and Europe and Africa. I think they're going to go both ways in the Americas. But you're going to have massive migrations out of unhealthy areas into healthy areas. And are the healthy areas really going to accept those migrants? In other words, we're going to have a gated community in the future, or we're going to have a very progressive environment in the future? And I'm not sure if the progressive or the walls.

Phil Kelly:

I don't know what alternative we're going to have. I have my suspicions that we're going to have the North, wealthy countries wall themselves off and try to resist the immigration coming in from the South. And we're already seeing, of course, in North America, the United States wanting to wall the Southern boundary from Mexico off. I'm very much against those walls.

Jacob Shapiro:

Is there a similar dynamic in South America itself, except that's going to be from Argentina upwards? Or is that-



Phil Kelly:

Yeah, I think there probably will be. I think there's going to be some resistance to, say for example, Paraguayan immigration into Uruguay and especially into Argentina. There are major areas of Paraguayan settlements in Buenos Aires and in the anterior of Argentina.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Phil, I could talk to you all day. We're honing in on 50 minutes. So I guess I would throw it at you. Are there any parting thoughts you'd like the listeners to have or anything we haven't talked about that you want to touch on before we close?

Phil Kelly:

Well, no. Again, I think that geopolitics is a very alive area. It's a very stimulating area. Is one that could be very useful and is neglected in international relations. And my ambition in geopolitical research is to try to clarify these theories and their application as a way of legitimizing classical geopolitics as a legitimate, usable international relations model. And that's my envision.

Jacob Shapiro:

Well, I think you've made a lot of headway in that ambition. And at least know that in me and in some of the analysts I've trained in my life, we're all secret fans of yours and are rooting for you from afar. So I hope that we can have you back on the podcast soon. And thank you so much for making the time.

Phil Kelly:

Thank you for having me. Thank you, Jacob.

Jacob Shapiro:

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Jacob Shapiro:

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