

# MILITARY GEOGRAPHY

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From Peace To War

# **Military Geography: From Peace to War**

Co-Editors:

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# Preface

**M**ilitary geography is the application of geographic information, tools, and techniques to military problems. The subfield links geography and military science, and in one respect is of an applied nature, employing the knowledge, methods, techniques, and concepts of the discipline to military affairs, places, and regions. In another sense, military geography can be approached from an historical perspective (Davies, 1946; Meigs, 1961; Winters, 1998), with emphasis on the impact of physical or human geographic conditions on the outcomes of decisive battles, campaigns, or wars. Traditionally, both the applied and historical approaches have focused on the military's wartime role. This rigid interpretation of the scope of military geography has long neglected the plethora of opportunities that occur during "stability and support operations" (SASO), previously referred to as "military operations other than war" (MOOTW), or peacetime. Generally, militaries spend far less time at war than they do in peace, although the current global war on terrorism may obscure this fact for some. As I have advocated elsewhere (Palka, 1995, 2002, 2003; Palka and Galgano, 2000), it is imperative to broaden the scope of the subfield to address the wide range of problems that militaries experience during SASO and peacetime scenarios. The latter two contexts have long been fertile ground for military geographic inquiry, but have become most apparent since the end of the Cold War.

Expansion into the SASO or peacetime arenas does not necessitate abandoning traditional themes in military geography. What is called for is a broadening of the military geographic perspective to keep pace with contemporary military concerns. To *not* expand the scope of military geography accordingly, would severely constrain the continued growth of the subfield and ignore the unmistakable trend that has occurred since the end of the Cold War.

This book introduces and showcases a military geography that is broader in scope, essentially devoting the information, tools, and techniques of the discipline to the three distinct contexts within which the U.S. Military (and the militaries of virtually all other countries of the "Western World") has been required to operate. The organization of the book implements the model that was previously introduced (Palka and Galgano, 2000) to conceptualize the scope of military geography across the spectrum from peace to war (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 reflects a conceptually broader military geography, capable of addressing military problems across a full spectrum of employment scenarios, or *contexts*, from peacetime to wartime. The scheme enables one to identify the magnitude, or *scale* of the operation, and the geographic methodology, or *approach* involved. By also indicating whether the perspective is *applied* or *historical*, this model provides a comprehensive, yet useful method for organizing and classifying research in military geography.

Previous attempts have been made to develop generic classification schemes to distinguish or categorize work in the subfield. One scheme differentiated between topical, systematic or regional endeavors, based on the nature of geography (Peltier and Percy, 1966). Another common practice classified work as either tactical or strategic military geography, based on the level of warfare. The former scheme has limited utility, and the latter has long been obsolete.

The current model, which considers context, scale, approach, and perspective, will facilitate organizing research themes and help to clarify the boundaries of the subfield. The latter will serve to reduce traditional ambiguities and enhance coherence. Perhaps most important, military geography will now be able to address an assortment of military problems that have previously occurred outside the range of the traditional, yet narrowly construed military geography.

Based on the structure depicted in Figure 1, this book is organized into three sections. **Part I** is devoted to military geography during war. We begin with the wartime context because this is the most traditional forum for military geography. As in the case of the other two contexts (SASO and Peacetime), the focus can

range from the tactical to the strategic level of analysis, using either a systematic, topical, or regional approach. And, the work can be presented from either an applied or historical perspective. The chapters of Part I are not all-inclusive of the possibilities that exist within this context, but merely representative of the types of military geography that address the military's problems during wartime. We have included battles and campaigns from the American Civil War, World War II, the Korean War, and Iraq to address different timeframes, as well as varied geographical realms.

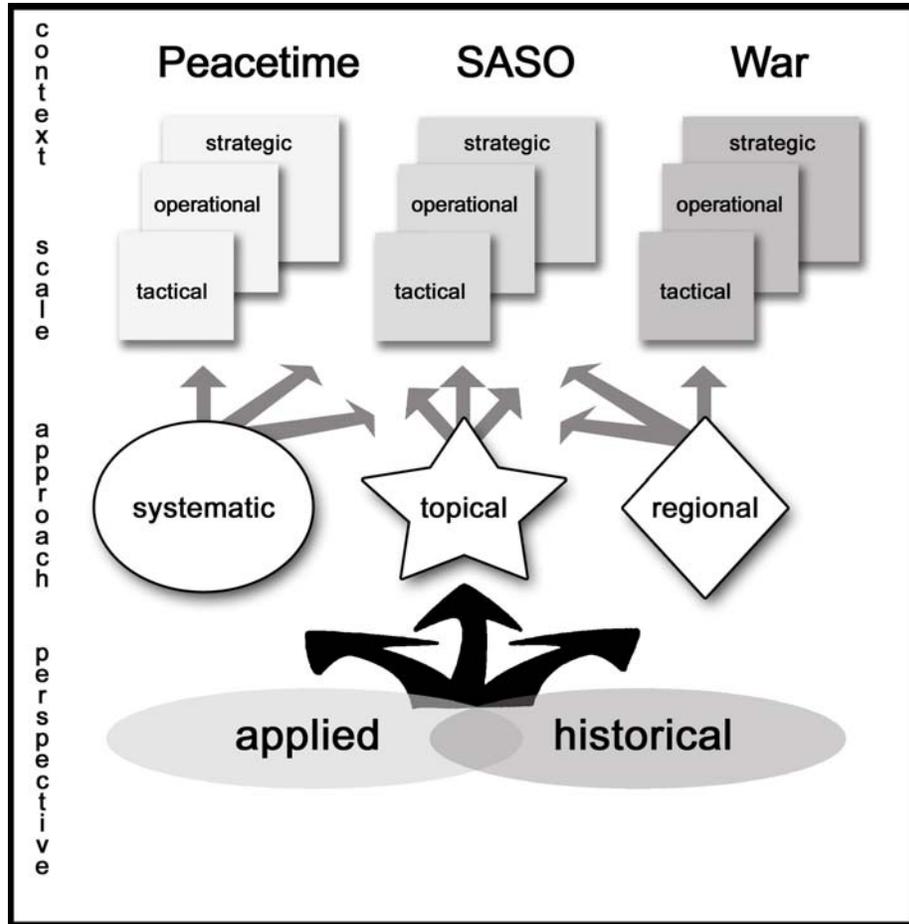


Figure 1. The Scope of Military Geography. Adapted from (Palka, 2003).

**Part II** is devoted to stability and support operations (SASO). This context has been at the center of the stage for the U.S. Military (as well as for other "Western Militaries") since the end of the Gulf War. Indeed over the past decade, the U.S. Military has conducted more missions within the SASO realm than it had throughout the entire Cold War Era. SASO span the globe. Some are nearly spontaneous in response to natural disasters, while others can be planned in great detail for several months before any formal undertaking. Operations can range from a couple of days (in the case of refugee evacuations for example) to several years (such as operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Afghanistan). Rather than focusing on specific operations within the SASO context as we have done during the wartime section, we have included several chapters that present a broader perspective and address the general applications of military geography to the SASO context.

**Part III** addresses military problems during peacetime. Virtually all militaries spend far more time involved in peacetime training and operations than they do in the other two contexts combined. Surprisingly, however, this is the least developed of the three contexts. Again, we provide only a sample of problem areas with which the U.S. Military must contend within the peacetime arena. The chapter on recruiting, a current dilemma for the U.S. Army represents an age-old problem with which all volunteer militaries have had to contend. Other chapters on land-use planning and training area management constitute areas that have become increasingly important over the past two decades, after years of neglect.

A quick glance at the table of contents might prompt one to conclude that this book is an eclectic assortment of readings loosely linked under the umbrella of military geography. Yet a closer examination of Figure 1 will reveal that every chapter fits well within the scope of its section, and the sections collectively provide organization and coherence to an expanded military geography.

The broadened scope for the subfield, envisioned in Figure 1 and presented in this book, serves as an "enabler," rather than a constraint. Military geography requires the additional latitude to pursue complex problems at various scales

across multiple disciplinary and subdisciplinary boundaries, from either an applied or historical perspective (Palka, 1995, 2002, 2004). Recent works by Corson and Minghi (1996a, 1996b, 1997) and Shaw et al (2000) clearly illustrate the positive benefits of this mindset.

Wartime endeavors will continue to necessitate the use of geographic information, tools and techniques, as long as battles are waged on the surface of the earth or in its atmosphere. But military geography must continue to keep pace with technological developments, global instability, and the changing role of military organizations. Geographic information, principles, and tools that have great application to wartime problems have equal, if not more relevance to SASO and peacetime scenarios (Corson and Palka, 2004).

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