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GEOPOLITICS IN TRANSITION

Geopolitics is an integrated science (involving geography, history, ethnology, sociology, and religious studies) that, by the means of abstraction, reveals the major forces underlying international relations and, more broadly, global politics. Through the consideration of these major forces one can draw a fundamental division within the science between its classical and critical approaches.

Classical geopolitics studies the physical and historical maps of the world and believes that some of the map's constituent parts determine international relations. One of its basic formulations argues that, according to some criteria, the world territory could be divided into that related to sea-based and land-based power. Each of the two territorial types supports its own unique type of civilization with environmentally determined features. Powers are antipodes, struggling against each other, and their various potentials for hegemony are often differently esteemed by different observers.

One classic example of this geopolitical conception is that of Halford Mackinder, who wrote in 1904 that sea power had been dominant for several centuries because of its ability to tap a wider area of resources thanks to the economic advantages of sea freight. However, land power, based in areas without easy access to waterways (and therefore inaccessible to sea power), would become ascendant because of the power of railroads to mitigate the economic advantages of sea freight. He thought that land power has a greater potential because land power could, with its new access to resources, launch attacks against maritime powers while its core area remained safely away from naval assault. Therefore, while being stable and unchangeable itself the «pivot of history» (as Mackinder referred to this protected core area) has an ability to influence and even determine the political evolution of other territories. This theory was an update to the work of Alfred Mahan, famous proponent of sea power, who considered that the key advantage of naval power is its maneuvering ability. While land power is static, sea power can shift, change, outflank, and finally overbalance land – based forces. The evolution of this idea is now reflected in the popular geopolitical doctrines of Atlanticism and Eurasianism.

Another significant dimension of classical geopolitics is ethno cultural one. The importance of culture was particularly underlined in the work of Samuel Huntington, who introduced the concept of 'civilizations' to post-Cold War geopolitics. Huntington suggests that economic and military development helped to liberate suppressed civilizations from Western cultural hegemony and the future will lead to only stronger and deeper cultural differences. For him it is civilization identity and cultural cognition, rather than purely economic or defensive factors, that are going to define the creation of blocs and distribution of conflicts on the world map. However, there are observers who argue that the future will only bring cultural cohesion and homogenization. For example, French geoeconomist J. Attali considers that economic progress will make states, nations, culture, as well as territory, irrelevant since people acquire practically unlimited mobility, grow less tied to certain places (particularly their native country) and people (family, society) and cultures assimilate. For him the only significant factor to remain in the future is money, and it is its circulation among great economic centers that will determine the world order.

Unlike Classical geopolitics, to which a brief introduction was given above, Critical geopolitics deals with mental maps, map of discourses. While each of the classical geopolitical theories generally observes the world from a particular point, critical researchers emphasize that there is no neutral or objective way of looking at the world, because our representations are always

strategic and selective [1]. As long as our perceptual ability is limited we can never really know everything that happens around us, let alone globally; we can only imagine that we know. Critical researchers believe that geopolitics is far more influenced by perceptions and discourse than by environmental or other 'objective' factors. The material world is shaped by the way people structure it through their social interactions, and in turn it shapes people's decisions about how to interact. Critical researchers do not even believe that casual and well known geographical notions such as regions and borders exist in reality except as concepts that people invest with meaning. The object of critical geopolitics is thus to study how geographical assumptions and representations influence world politics.

Differences between the objects, or real and imaginary maps, constitute some further fundamental differences between the branches of the science. Traditional maps are static and so are all the objects that are studied in classical geopolitics; Eurasia can't become a part of North America and the Mackinder's "pivot of history" can't move from Russia to Western Europe. Furthermore, the civilization lines drawn by Huntington have also existed for centuries. However, in critical geopolitics objects are inconstant. They are flows rather than rigid objects. They can move, alter and change in incredible ways. The idea of Europe is a good example in this case, as it can consist of just Western Europe, can contain Eastern Europe, and can sometimes even include Turkey, Georgia or Russia.

Physical maps used in classical geopolitics do not change with time (or does very little), and therefore time has little significance for it. We can therefore say that classical geopolitics has only one, spatial, dimension. The changing objects of critical geopolitics demand the appearance of a time scale in addition to the spatial one. Moreover, since distances on the virtual map could be deliberately shirked or extended by those with a vested interest in portraying them a certain way, and ultimately the spatial dimension virtually ceases to have much importance. In this way the time dimension becomes dominant in critical geopolitics, so that some observers employ the term «chronopolitics».

Flexible views of the environment and the existence of a time scale constitute important features of critical geopolitics. Classical realities were rigid and pre-given, and thus immune to human alteration. Humans existed within established boundaries and were treated as an object rather than a subject. Critical geopolitics not only empowers humans to influence politics but makes them the main engine in the creation of today's political map, as all the discourses and assumptions of that map are human creations.

In conclusion, using the definition of geopolitics we gave in the beginning and taking into account the deliberations described above, we can define the classical division in geopolitics as geopolitics that regards objective socio-geographical factors as the main force in world politics while critical geopolitics as a school of thought that sees subjective geographical presumptions and discourses as the driving factor there.

REFERENCES:

1. Dodds K. Geopolitics in a Changing World. UK, Harlow, 2000.