

From Absolute to Relative and Cognitive Space: Evolution of Geopolitics

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Abstract

The complexity of global order is often obscured by the oversimplified representations of international relations, illustrated through political maps. These maps, while seemingly objective, are subjective projections that reflect the ideology of their creators and fail to capture the nuanced dynamics of power and control among states. Such a misrepresentation contributes to a distorted understanding of global dynamics. Meanwhile, the origins of political geography can be traced back to the 18th century, particularly with the establishment of the first school of political geography in Saint-Petersburg, Russia, between 1720 and 1750. Political geography, however, is not entirely homogenic; it encompasses several competing theories regarding the perception of space. It has developed gradually with the changes in perception of space: as an absolute, relative and cognitive space respectively. Recognizing the complexity and evolutionary features of a political map and political geography as whole thus appears to be crucial for understanding global politics.

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1. The Reason behind the Global Order being Obscure

The widespread use of a simplified understanding of international relations has a clear but poorly understood reason: the political map of the world. At this point we need to confess and repent, because the political map as a model representation of the world's political space is one of the greatest hoaxes in history, as it has already been mentioned in relation to Anderson's work. Over the past centuries it has, alas, degraded popular understanding of the functioning of the system of international relations. And it is not even because any flat map distorts the outlines of a spherical planet, and our ideas about the scale of countries and continents and their location relative to each other are very conventional. Moreover, each nation with its own cartographic tradition will have a different image of the Earth's surface. To place Antarctica at the bottom or at the top, what vertical line to take as the centre of the map to count the west and the east from it, which countries to draw, and about which ones (say, not recognised by us) to keep silent, in the end, in what colours to paint the states? All these questions are not so obvious if you take a look at the collection of atlases from different parts of the world.

Any political map that we perceive as an objective reflection of the world is, by and large, just a projection of someone's vision, a narrative that quietly whispers to us the ideology of the author. Finally, a political map shows, in fact, the control of states over land only, to say nothing about sea, air, underground, space, virtual and other spaces.

In fact, the source of the geographical hoax is even deeper; it lies in the distorted basic parameters of any political map of the world. As everyone knows well, on a political map, roughly speaking, each country corresponds to its unique colour, which denotes the territory controlled by this state. Thus the political map, without wishing to do so, tells us that the system of international relations consists only of a set of relatively equal to each other states that are not in hierarchical relations, each of which stably controls its territory and is not present outside it.

International relations have always been an asymmetric and dynamic system with many disparate and diverse players, but hierarchically organised. There is a kind of competition like 4×4 chess: four players participate in each game, which naturally complicates the overall disposition. And in the world there are actually two hundred players, each with a different number of pieces and no common rules. Probably, everyone would be calmer and safer if the relations between the players turned into a more or less frozen game

with a constant arrangement of pieces. But the world of politics is not like that and does not want to become one.

2. The Ephemeral Nature of the Territorial Structure

If someone had set a goal to display true international relations on a geographical map, then, firstly, it would be necessary to make it not a static image, but a dynamic image, and secondly, instead of using the 'fill' tool in a graphic editor, it would be worth using the 'spray' function. The result would be something like an animated painting by Wassily Kandinsky: the states would not disappear from such a map, but would turn into clearer clots of the same colour, magnets that attract splashes of their own tone.

The territorial structure of the world, in which only states with their clearly defined borders are the sources of international order, is a phenomenon that is familiar to us, but far from natural. Over the centuries of civilisational evolution, most of humanity has come to the importance of unity of command: one God - one law on earth and in heaven. But pagan polytheism continues to operate in international relations: there is no single law, but a shaky order based on a set of recognised interests of each other. To be sure, many imperial powers have endeavoured to subject the world to a single foreign policy rule: from the Holy See, which tried to place the supremacy of God's will over the sovereignty of nations, of which it was the agent, to the Chinese emperor, who considered himself the suzerain of all other rulers in the world. In a sense, the attempt to create a globalist world order with common norms and rules, based on universal immutable values, also proceeded from the advantages of a single beginning in world affairs.

But it turns out that universal values have a way of changing even for the person who invented and preached them. The Era of Modernity established a completely different principle - the system of international relations consists of a multitude of states with exclusive sovereignty. If the world order had a single source of power, there would be no need for a political map (there was none before the Modern Era). But the existence of numerous formally equal bearers of sovereignty required the introduction of a simple principle of dividing the space of their functioning. Nothing simpler than the territorial principle of separation of sovereignties - here my exclusive right operates here, and there yours - could be invented. The principles of territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs became obvious consequences. Thus, territory turned out to be the main sign of sovereignty, the key resource of statehood with all the resulting and well

understood positive and negative features of the territorial division of the world.

As a matter of fact, the rigid territorial principle of the organisation of the international system was not an alternative way of solving the problem. Look how the network principle operates in the seemingly neutral and common World Ocean. But an even closer example is the delimitation of the functioning spaces of Christian denominations. In the Catholic Church everything is subordinated to Rome, but the Orthodox and Protestant churches operate on the basis of the logic of polynomialism. Simplifying somewhat, they are represented by a set of local equal churches, partially recognised by each other. But the line of separation between them is not so much in land as in people: a person does not fall out of the congregation and norms of his church when he moves to another place. The Orthodox Churches have a very interesting example of the organisation of polynomialism, which combines the demographic principle with the territorial principle (canonical territory).

If one tries to draw an ecclesiastical-political map of the world, indicating where which ecclesiastical law is in force, one will get, at best, a blurred Kandinsky-style composition with separate clots of certain colours and a motley periphery.

Thus, the established world order with relatively stable borders and a more or less understandable limited number of states as the only bearers of sovereignty is not a norm, but a fairy-tale anomaly, an artificial simplification of reality, born out of the desire to reproduce the world order from a picture in a school geography textbook. For a brief moment in human history, this model allowed us to systematise and stabilise the dynamics of world life and, frankly speaking, behind the fair criticism we did not have time to see and appreciate the advantages of such an arrangement.

Somebody for some reason decided that the world order should look like trading in a prestigious auction house: there are clear rules, everyone is equal and the honour and reputation of the seller and the buyer guarantee everything. Alas, it was possible to believe that the world order looks like that only after forgetting another dream of Vera Pavlovna. In reality, the world order in which we live looks different. Either it is a slave market, where there is only a semblance of fair trade, and in fact the seller dictates any conditions to the buyer (or vice versa), and the main thing is that it is easy to turn from a buyer or seller into a commodity and the subject of the transaction. Or the stock exchange, where market rules seem to be in force,

but in fact everything is decided by mass speculation and media manipulations.

We should add two more possible images to the piggy bank of images. In the Eastern bazaar, it seems that there are no laws, everyone is both a seller and a buyer, but in fact there are rules, they are just not universal, the price is set each time by negotiation and depends on the unique context. Transferring the example to diplomacy - it is a world of double, triple, quadruple and so on standards. Moreover, formulating a single standard in such a model kills the meaning of diplomacy, which is needed when the traditional rule does not work and a special approach and a unique solution is required.

Finally, another model is the fair, where people come not so much to sell as to show themselves, and it is the fact of participation in it, rather than trade success, that confirms your status. The meaning of the allegories proposed above is to remind: structurally the world order can be of very different properties, the set of principles and motives for creating general rules is much wider than we are used to thinking about.

3. Sketching the Obscure

Today, speculation about the coming change of the world order has become commonplace, but the prevailing assumption in predictions is that the changes will be nothing more than a rearrangement of pieces on an already known chessboard, clarification of spheres of influence and polishing of the norms of international law. I am afraid that the future world order will seem to us rather the opposite. The following are some of its expected features.

- Only the absence of common rules will become a common rule. The world order will turn into a patchwork of overlapping regional and problem-oriented world subsystems, organised according to different principles and on different norms. All significant centres of power will act in their own world order the way, roughly speaking, different Christian denominations live now. There will be a place for the 'auction house' when, say, a dispute between good old friends over an unimportant matter will be settled, but more in use will be combinations of the 'stock exchange' with the 'oriental bazaar', ad hoc rules (for a given case) and norms ad libitum (at one's own discretion). The unifying umbrella of global international relations with world forums and international organisations will turn more into a necessary planetary fair of vanity and inaction.

- The geometry of the world order will turn into an optical illusion. The same configuration will look unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar from different sides of the globe. For example, in relations with one power, a country will behave as if there were a unipolar world, where it is only necessary to blindly follow the precepts of the hegemon-guide. With another country, the relationship will be a zero-sum game: either everything is ours or yours, as if the world were divided into rigid coalitions of a bipolar world. Finally, with the third country - flexible manoeuvring, as if everyone exists in a multipolar environment woven from soft coalitions of interdependence. In fact, the world will turn out to be unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar at the same time: constantly changing, it will shine one or the other of its properties to different players. The same will happen with any pseudo-geographical opposition such as 'West-East' or 'North-South', which seem immutable to us. South Africa, for example, can be the vanguard of the growing East and South, or an outpost of the developed West and North.
- The increasing complexity of public demands will make world politics asymmetrical and multileveled. A resident of modern Brussels votes in elections for the municipality, the linguistic community, the federal province, the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union. Why is his opinion asked so many times, is it impossible to establish political preferences once and form all levels of government at once? But no, it used to be that a person's political orientation was determined by one ideological platform. Today, say, in local elections he will support the leftists who will provide him with greater social support, in national elections he will stand for the rightists who will protect him from uncontrolled migration, and in pan-European elections he will choose populist Eurosceptics to keep the Eurobureaucrats in check. And this is not a reason to immediately diagnose him with schizophrenia, it's just that in his mind the political process is divided into different spatial levels, to each of which he addresses specific interests. In other words, the increase in the number of floors in world and national politics is not a consequence of the weakening of the state (which is not weakening at all, as recent events have shown), but a result of the increasing complexity of human and social demands, which can only be realised by an asymmetric and multilevel model of politics.

- Regional integration favours local fragmentation, and vice versa. We are accustomed to think that the erasure of borders that takes place in the course of integration processes is the opposite of local fragmentation with its separatism and, on the contrary, the erection of new borders. In reality, however, the two processes are mutually reinforcing. Multilevel identity leads to the fact that the strengthening of its continental component (I am European) actualises its local form (I am Basque), and vice versa. The possibility for a local community to realise its security and economic development needs, bypassing the national government within a wider integration entity, will support both the expansion of local autonomy and the development of supranational integration.
- Fifth. There will be more borders, but there will be fewer visible ones. In today's global world, it seems that borders are being erased: you get on a train, drive along, and don't even notice how countries change outside the window. Or you get up in the morning in one country, open the internet and work in another, and then go and watch a concert broadcast from a third. But this is also an illusion: in order for a passenger to travel on this train and not feel the border, the agencies of the countries must carry out a lot of coordination, develop a darkness of regulations and exchange so much data that, in fact, in the administrative and bureaucratic sense, this border is much more tangible than a barbed wire fence.
- Sixth. Community states will replace territory states. There is now a serious discussion of what to do with the states that will soon go underwater because of rising sea levels. And the basic solution to which experts are inclined is to fix them within the boundaries of official water areas, i.e. people will live somewhere else, but will retain their citizenship and belonging to the existing political institutions of the sunken island. Quasi-states created by residents of an eco-village or a cruise liner are not far off. States as territories will gradually give way to states as communities whose citizens live in different parts of the world but remain connected to a related political system and national identity. This will make the territorial problem less acute: it is quite possible that if the status of a territory is disputed, one part of the population living there will associate itself with one community-state and another with another.

- Seventh. Mixed forms of sovereignty over territory will spread. The modern world order is based on the fact that one and the same territory can be assigned to only one state. This makes it impossible to resolve territorial disputes by consensus and, in fact, undermines the viability of the order itself. The general erosion of the territorial structure of the world order will eventually lead to mixed forms of administration of disputed territories: they will be administered jointly or in turn.

4. The Emergence of Political Geography and why it does Matter

One may always merely follow the “rules of a game”, yet wouldn’t it be wiser to understand the logic behind them? Since the political map is omnipresent in our political reality and, moreover, shapes the latter, we cannot afford neglecting its history and evolution – those have led it to its current state.

We shall examine a particular theoretical work on the history of political geography, published earlier in *Geopolitics Quarterly* by prof. Hafeznia. Apparently he states that Kant and Turgot were the first ones to use the term ‘political geography’ (Hafeznia,2014:1). Though we shall challenge that statement and grant superiority to other scholars, thus presenting this term as a constellation of ideas, coined by a wide array of authors. The roots of political geography as a term can be traced up to the XVIII century indeed, still they are obscure and the main and only inventor cannot be singled out.

Not only were there works, mentioning the political dimension within geography, prior to Kant, he himself affected its development, stating that although political dimension was present, he had no intention of studying it. The very distinction, including political geography, was introduced by Hübner in the late XVII century (Hübner,1693:3-4), with the first works labeled as ‘Political geography’, however, being written and published in Saint-Petersburg, Russia. Actually we ought to claim the first school of political geography to be established in Russia as well, somewhat between 1720-1750. That particular school belongs to the branch of “regional studies” and defined the development of political geography for over a century ahead.

The school functioned under the Geographical Department of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and its leaders were C.N. von Winsheim, J.-N. Delille and G.W. Kraft, who introduced the term ‘political geography’ into scientific circulation and wrote the first textbooks on this discipline. The key work of this school, Christian Nicola von Winsheim's “Concise Political

Geography”, is the first book in the world to be called specifically political geography. Winsheim may not be the author of the term ‘political geography’; it appears to have entered world science as a synonym for historical geography as early as the late seventeenth century. Winsheim himself provides a more precise and narrower definition of the discipline in the introductory paragraph of his book *Political Geography*, saying that it gives “a general notion of the different kinds of governments and states in the world” (Winsheim,1745:5). He also stated that the true distinction of power and advantages of individuals is determined not by geography but by political rules (Winsheim,1745:6), thus highlighting the need to differentiate between political geography and political science.

The first use of “political geography” in Russian publications is attributed to Georg Wolfgang Kraft, an academician of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and colleague of Winsheim. In the 1738 his textbook on mathematics and physical geography was published, which defines the subject of political geography as: “different countries and lands which are divided into various states, regions and cities and subject to the dominions of the great Potentates (lords)” (Kraft,1738:2). Around the same time, outstanding Russian historian and geographer Vasily Tatishchev also began to use the term, defining the subject of political geography as follows: “description of villages great and small, like towns, wharves, etc., civil and spiritual governments, abilities, diligence and skills, in what the inhabitants of that area are practised and prevail, as well as their manners and states and how these circumstances change over time” (Tatishchev,1950:211-2). However, the very idea of singling out a ‘political’ component in geographical knowledge has an older history. The author of this idea and the founding work that laid the tradition of political geography was the German geographer Johann Hübner. At the same time, Hübner does not use exactly the term ‘political geography’, in 1693 he wrote that “the Earth circle consists of mathematical, natural and political divisions” (Hübner,1693:3).

The widely recognised founder of modern political geography, Friedrich Ratzel, in his 1902 book ‘*Land and Life. Comparative Geography*’ notes that “Büsching's multi-volume work ‘*A New Description of the Earth*’ has dominated all political geography since 1754, even outside Germany’ (Ratzel,1903:47). However, there is every reason to believe that the formation of the scientific approach of Anton Friedrich Büsching (1724-1793) could have been influenced by an earlier book by C.N. von Winsheim

in 1745 and, in general, by the Petersburg School. That Büsching was well acquainted with Winsheim's book is evidenced by the fact that Büsching's personal library kept a copy of Winsheim's *Concise Political Geography* in German. Thus, it can be considered that Winsheim's book is not only one of the first with the title 'political geography', but also a key link in the development of the discipline, the central axis of the initial period of its development can be labelled as Hübner - Winsheim - Büsching - Ratzel.

Thus we may conclude that indeed the sheer essence of political geography stems not from Kant and Turgot, yet from the plethora of other authors. The first work labeled as such emerged within the Russian school, and later shaped into the axis Hübner - Winsheim - Büsching - Ratzel. Moreover, of particular interest is its nature and impetus of establishment. It's an extremely valuable knowledge that the book on political geography emerged not out of mere scientific curiosity, but as an object of particular interest among the ruling elite.

5. Defining Political Geography

However, political geography isn't homogenic itself. Within geography there are several theories on how to perceive space — as an absolute whole (geographically determined approach, common for classical political geography); as a concept of relative nature (ascribed to the revisionist paradigm); or as a product of reason, cognitively constituted (whose champions are critical political geography pundits). To a certain extent the way one understands space shapes the philosophy behind political geography: its goals, features and the very definition.

To the present date political geography is generally acknowledged as one the most influential disciplines among social sciences. Geopolitics is granted with an unprecedented amount of attention, with geopolitical issues being the ones that form the domain of international relations. During its inception, though, political geography used to be perceived as a merely complimentary branch to other sciences. Geopolitical topics were examined through the lenses of other, allied disciplines, such as political science, economics, region-specific studies (also known as regional geography) and geography itself. In the light of such an obscure nature political geography and geopolitics are often mistaken for each other, not to forget the plethora of interpretations, introduced and followed by various schools within political geography.

Should we turn to acknowledge classics in the field of studying political geography and geopolitics, the latter would be mentioned as a complimentary discipline. For instance Taylor states that political geography observed the relationship between territory and state/nation (Taylor and Flint, 2000:4-5). Even though we may not observe such wording as, precisely, “a state/nation”, implying a single state to be studied as an object, it’s still quite transparent. International Political Science Association (IPSA) draws the waterline in a similar way. Geopolitics is defined as global and international and political geography as national and subnational.

By chance we ought to mention that in this particular work we stick to such a design where geopolitics can be identified as the current balance of powers and correspondent knowledge of it, and political geography, therefore, stands for a rather systematic and institutional field of study. Such a point of view is typically ascribed to the Russian school of political geography. For instance within American scientific tradition, political geography is usually roughly equal to geopolitical studies, which in turn is coupled with foreign policy and policymaking in general. This could be showcased by the visible integration of geopolitical thinkers in the process of formulating foreign policy goals within the US political system, see The National Security Strategy (NSS) for references.

Its definition, however, depends not only on a particular school of thought, but on a certain epoch in question. As we have already mentioned, at the very beginning political geography as a discipline used to be nothing more than an extension of other sciences. Gradually it (or rather geopolitics) has become indispensable from everyday reality, and political geography as one of the means to understand it, has received well-deserved acknowledgment. Peter Taylor speaks of several “lenses”, suitable for structuring political geography, which overlap with research questions, commonly examined by political geographers. Among these lenses are (geographical) **dimensions of a historical system** and study of **power-politics dichotomy** (Taylor and Flint, 2000:52-6). Works on political geography may be sorted out in these groups based on their focus: the absence of political analysis versus strong emphasis on the latter respectively. Few theories among them, though, cover the very theoretical issues, with the majority being a contemplation of some kind about certain historical periods or the whole timeline, being an extension to regional geography, mentioned above. In this work we aim to discuss primarily theoretical concepts regardless of a “lens”.

6. The Classics of Geopolitical Studies

Classical political geography views space as an absolute. The “Heartland” concept, articulated by Halford Mackinder, stands as a landmark of particular importance for the evolution of political geography. As a geopolitical idea, it can be ascribed with both analytical and prognostic features, assessing historical experience out of political considerations. Thus the world saw the first and perhaps the most well-known geopolitical concept. In his famous work “The geographical pivot of history” Mackinder changed the common perception of the geopolitical subject from a single country (even a large one as the British Empire) to the whole globe. Without that extension it would have been impossible to assess the importance of a region - the Heartland itself - since its might should be projected onto the whole world to be considered impressive. Thus, based on the amount and value of available resources and its strategic location to ensure control over the world, Mackinder claimed Eurasia, namely its Volga-Siberian-Tibetan part, as Heartland (Mackinder, 1904:4). To be more precise, the initial division wasn’t just “heartland/the rest of the world”, with heartland being the most popularised concept out of all his theories. Mackinder divided the world into three groups: the World Island, the Offshore Islands and the Outlying Islands, and Heartland belongs to the World Island area. Historically the Russian Empire or later the USSR was the closest to controlling the whole Heartland and the World Island area, consequently, according to Mackinder, controlling the world.

We may trace Mackinder’s “footsteps” in other geopolitical theories, say, “Crush zone” by James Fairgrieve or “Shutterbelt” by Saul Cohen. Although “Intermediate Region” by Dimitri Kitsikis shares a handful of resemblances as well, the respectful perspectives differ: just as Spykman, Kitsikis distances himself and his theory from representing geographical determinism, accusing Mackinder of the latter. However, unlike the socio-economic approach within the “Rimland” concept, “Intermediate Region” relies on civilization-based differentiation, which naturally shifts groups’ borders (Kitsikis, 1985:8). The Intermediate Region, according to Kitsikis, excludes China (and the overall sinosphere) and Germany (Prussia to that date); Rimland encompassed wider territory, including Germany and China. Both these concepts are still quite liberate in terms of including/excluding countries from the key region regardless of its name, especially in comparison to Mackinder’s original “map”. Replying to Mackinder, Karl Haushofer presented his own theory, underlining the unique nature of

Germany, not to mention his overall impact on political geography at the beginning of the XX century. We may clearly trace pan-eurasian ideas in his theory, for instance, his firm point on the inevitable alliance between Germany, Japan and the UK.

7. Revisioning the Classical Geopolitics

After the two world wars had happened, the global community was eager to find a reason for that, and the geopolitical studies was accused of bringing the world to the brink of war and, indirectly, flaming those conflicts. Naturally, geopolitics was banned and the whole geopolitical subject became a taboo. However there is always an exception to the rule, and in the US and France there were still advocates of geopolitics, though from a different angle. One of the most challenging questions was how to prevent another war – and the new paradigm, the revisionist one, focused itself with that.

Mackinder's ideas were reconsidered and partially enhanced by Nicholas Spykman. Not to forget, the perception of space also changed: it has shifted from absolute to relative. As the original concept failed to explain existing polars of power outside of the Heartland and relative weakness of Russia, Spykman provided a valid reasoning by introducing the concept of Rimland (Spykman, 1944:49-51). Though he followed the major idea by acknowledging that there indeed should be a place, key to controlling the whole world, he drastically disagreed on its location and features. Not only did he speak of "the Old World" dominance in the international realm, but he also claimed that resources are of less importance than the ability to use them fruitfully. Not to mention the decisive role of the functional disposition, which he preferred to the size of a country in question. For instance, it would have been more beneficial for a country to be situated near a coast to exploit its natural delivery features rather than to be merely large and vast. Out of these considerations he believed Europe to be the centre of the World, and the one holding it to be controlling the world. He named this central region Rimland instead of Heartland along with shifting its borders. What is peculiar, Spykman's Rimland lies not only on natural resources, but on one's capability to wield them properly as well (e.g. industrial development) and demographic potential (Spykman, 1944:37-41). There was a strong emphasis on socio-economic factors and less on geographically determined, and with that being said – Rimland stands as a more elaborated theory. Some, nonetheless, would say there is little

resemblance of Spykman's Rimland to Mackinder's Heartland, and there is more similarity with the "debated zones" of Mahan.

Nowadays the revisionist paradigm is deeply connected with international studies, especially theories of international relations. Given many vivid discussions within the scientific community and plethora of concepts, analysing and presenting an explanation for the ongoing changes, there are two major takes. There are competing paradigms on the issue of stabilising the global order and ensuring world peace: the theory of democratic peace and concepts of balance of powers and/or hegemonic stability.

John Mearsheimer, a prominent political scientist, sticks to the offensive realism theory, which is in turn constituted by several subsequent (yet not less important) notions. These are: balance of powers, great power politics and hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2009:5). Balance of powers theory suggests that international stability is maintained when military capabilities are distributed in such a way that no country is strong enough to dominate others. To maintain their security, states will form alliances and counter threats. Great power politics theory emphasises that the behaviour of great powers is crucial in shaping international relations. Finally Mearsheimer argues that states seek regional hegemony to ensure their own security. He cites the example of the United States in the Western Hemisphere, where it seeks to prevent any rival from gaining a dominant position.

On the other hand there is liberal approach and theory of democratic peace, which stems from Immanuel Kant's ideas. Basically it can be generalised as follows: democracies are less likely to declare a war on one another compared to other types of political systems. It relies on many arguments, like shared values, international institutions and interdependence, but still is disputed a lot. The correlation between democracy and peace is not absolute, critics argue, and point to the cases where democracies have come into conflict with non-democratic states or with each other under certain conditions.

8. Critical Notion on Geopolitics

Revisionist paradigm wasn't the only option to preserve geopolitics as a scientific field. Whereas revisionists questioned the geopolitical system and "the global chessboard" configuration, an alternative approach confronts the very object of political geography. Traditionally, as in other social sciences, such a paradigm was labelled "critical" (see critical theory of IR, critical economic theory, etc). Its critique is far more institutional, touching upon

the main dogmas within political geography. Critical political geography disputes the ways geographers observed the world all those years. The main methodological introduction undoubtedly concerned space, which was considered as a product of cognition, thus a completely anthropogenic phenomena. They claimed it to have been western-centric and designed out of imperialism and capitalism ends, before it finally took the right turn to a more just and representative constitution.

To get the full picture one should compare the topics within both revisionist and critical approaches. Revisionists consider the leading question of classical geopolitics to be wrong. This deceiving question had a corresponding perspective: since the motivation was to find a way of acquiring global domination and ensuing one's stable position within the global arena, the "one and only" beneficiaries were global powers, to that date — colonial empires. Such a logic used to be blamed for sparking two world wars, therefore it was "banned" and substituted by the other — instead of promoting hegemony and prosperity of a single state, revisionists promote prosperity of all the states and global peace. The leading question to them is "How to prevent a war?"

Critical thinkers among all disciplines don't criticise one or two parts of a theory, they question the whole system, according to which it functions (Gallaher and Others, 2009:275). In relation to political geography, critique fell into its epistemological essence. We shall briefly sketch their rhetoric. They believed its conceptualisation to be malicious from the very beginning. Say, how can a theory be applicable to states across the globe, if it has been developed by less than a half of it? Or, frankly speaking, by a bunch of short-sighted scholars and politicians, who saw nothing but for their own goal of acquiring global power and expanding one's borders as far as possible? And critical thinkers saw their mission as to demolish these injustices. Edited by Sara Smith, "Political geography: a critical introduction" stands out, being a constellation of critical notions on geopolitics (Smith and Others, 2020:5). In some sense it follows the evolutionary path of political geography, beginning with such concepts as nation and power and arriving towards spatializing inequality and securitizing low-key vital yet overlooked issues.

Critical political geography largely lies on philosophical foundations. Its pundits seem to be greatly inspired by postmodern thinkers (poststructuralists). They derived their ideas from topics, occupying

philosophical minds a few years prior to them: biopolitics, gender imbalance, various perspectives on inequalities, etc. Thus, in “Critical Political Geography” it’s bluntly acknowledged that the main inspiration for the biological lense on political geography was Foucault’s notion of biological power (Smith and Others,2020:636-8). Moreover, postcolonial studies as it is are in between political geography and political science. Even Edward Said, whose genius gave us “Orientalism” and established postcolonial studies, positioned himself as a geographer and political scientist. To a large extent it’s explained by the nature of colonialism as a societal phenomenon, which is by design indispensable both from geography and politics. Apparently postcolonial studies and imperialism studies (based on the same motives) could be declared as the pattern object of interest for geopolitics.

An interesting notion on the origin of a political map has been articulated by Benedict Anderson, who claimed it to be connected with colonialism on the very basic ontological level. Thus, a political map of the world could have been devised out of intention to divide the “virtual” geographical world in conquerable pieces and forge newly acquired territories (Anderson,2006: 42-3). Since prior to the Modern era maps had been vague and contradictory to each other, the urge to set boundaries and take count of every piece of land in a unanimous manner, a new unified type of maps was introduced. Subsequently “the Old World” adopted a political map as an instrument of justifying imperial aspirations of any nature, and from a modern perspective it could be regarded as a key concept for colonial empires, like the British Empire.

We ought to mention, however, that the history of critical approach to political geography doesn’t begin at the end of the XX century. In fact an alternative (to the classics) was introduced at the beginning of the century, decades prior to the 1990s. Earlier Paul Vidal de la Blache, the founder of human geography, emphasised the role of a human, a single person in political geography. De la Blache didn’t merely point out the role of an individual, he was among the first ones to propose studying social phenomena within geography. His followers and theories inspired by de la Blache could be considered as a critical approach to geopolitics, though they had no such an aim to oppose the classics, nor did they label themselves as mainly critical geographers.

We shall be free to conclude that with the historical run of events and further evolutionary changes within the “global chess board”, geopolitical concepts have evolved respectively, echoing and institutionalising those transformations in scientific theories. As notably mentioned by Taylor & Flint, various phenomena like globalisation have been present throughout the history of human life: earlier the world witnessed the epoch of great explorations, the colonial era, two world wars, so another “global” phenomena seem not that new after all. Moreover, political geography has successfully managed to adjust itself to these historical facts. The future of political geography is, though, to the present date too obscure to state anything. From the world-systems perspective the ongoing globalisation presents not a mere challenge, but rather an omnipresent precursor of inevitable transformations on the fundamental level (Taylor and Flint, 2000: 12). Though yet again we ought to at least try and find out what is going on with the global order and how to perceive it through the geopolitical lens.

In the long run, the treatment of the territory as a joint stock company will prevail: states will have different percentages of shares, including, say, a ‘golden share’ with the right to veto joint decisions of the shareholder states. The trends of changes in the world order, which are outlined today, seem to be the emergence of general chaos and a set of diverse disorders. Only international scientists of the future will find a coherent logic and regularity, but we cannot see it from inside the process. But this should not prevent us from removing our blinders when looking at the world and realising that it is experiencing a structural and qualitative transformation rather than a rearrangement of its components.

Until the new world disorder takes shape, let us continue to look with nostalgia at the good old political map of the world - the most authentic impression of the utopian fantasy of international relations that mankind has been dreaming about for the last centuries.

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