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## GEOPOLITICS OF THE INFORMATION AGE

### GEOPOLITYKA ERY INFORMATYCZNEJ

#### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this article is to clarify the essence and nature of geopolitics as a social science and academic discipline. The author's position is that geopolitics is an academic discipline within the field of social sciences, and its purpose is to study how political phenomena are influenced by geographic conditions that change over time and space. Analyzing the evolution of geopolitics to date, the author posits that its nature is unchanging. In his opinion, geopolitics is still the same in its nature, while the geographical conditions (as well as the ways of understanding them), which act as explanatory factors in geopolitics, change. These changes, in turn, are a consequence of the processes of socio-economic development, especially successive industrial revolutions. It is due to the rapid development of information technology that the activity of political actors in cyberspace has been added to the list of geographical factors influencing political reality. The author postulates that the relevance of human information activity in cyberspace makes it necessary to distinguish another sub-discipline of geopolitics, namely information geopolitics.

**Keywords:** geopolitics, information geopolitics, information technology, nature of geopolitics.

#### **Origins and nature of geopolitics**

Geopolitics as a social science and political practice has been separated from political geography. At the same time, political geography is difficult to separate from geopolitics and both social sciences are in mutual relations (interactions). There are still many ambiguities and misunderstandings in this regard. Since there are many definitions of political geography, its subject-matter and its relationship to geopolitics are more important.

Forerunners of the term political geography, including Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), considered as its object of study the relationship between political units and their geographic (material) surroundings. In the concepts of these thinkers, the emergence and development of states are an extension of

natural processes and their causes lie in both physical conditions and the characteristics of local populations<sup>1</sup>. Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) compared the state with a biological organism ('an organic state') whose 'food' consists of living space (*Lebensraum*) and raw materials. Thus, in a natural way, states constantly compete for space and resources. There are two key factors in F. Ratzel's research: location (*Lage*) and area (*Raum*) (Ratzel, 2018; por. także Eberhardt, 2015). In this sense, the power of a state is strictly determined by the geographic physical size of its territory. In turn, its change affects the modification of its position. The annexation of a territory is an increase, while the loss is a decrease in the power of state.

Thus, only from this short derivation is clear that political geography is a subdiscipline of geography that researches the relation between human political activities (political processes) and geographic physical space (geography). There are many areas of political geography research now, in particular studies on political borders, as well as electoral geography. But the nature of this relation is important here. Thus, political geography studies geographic phenomena and their attributes resulting from the political process, i.e., the impact of human political activity on a geographical landscape. As a result of political decisions, the human modifies his natural geographical environment, and it has a significant impact on the essence of the concept of geopolitics, where the direction of this relation is exactly reversed.<sup>2</sup>

In the literature, the term 'geopolitics' was first used and propagated by Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922). Kjellén's geopolitical concept referred to the organic theory of the state, in which the key factor was the territory. Geopolitics was treated by Kjellén together with four other criteria for studying the state (*Kratopolik, Soziopolitik, Ethnopolitik and Oekopolitik*). Kjellén was a representative of the contemporary school of political realism. He believed that states still compete for the highest possible position in the hierarchy of international system (Kjellén 1917; Eberhardt, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Turgot's work was discussed, among others, by M. Heffernan (1994), while Kant's concepts were analyzed by W. Wilczynski (2011). Editor's note.

<sup>2</sup> The difference in the formulation of the research objectives of political geography and geopolitics, which have an identical object of study, was established in the classical period of the development of geography, as expressed by W. Wilczynski (2021, p. 16): *If geography explains the landscape with a variety of factors, including political ones, then geopolitics does the opposite: political phenomena and processes are explained by factors of geographical nature, including the very location of different types of objects.* Editor's note.

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was the first publicly to define geopolitics as the social science of the geographical limits of political phenomena and political spatial organisms and their structures with the methodology of geographical sciences. What is from our perspective important, Haushofer treated political phenomena as the impact of geographical conditions (Haushofer, 1979; Eberhardt, 2009). At that time, this concept of geopolitics was also shared and theoretically developed by Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914), Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), Nicolas J. Spykman (1893-1947), Aleksander P. Seversky (1894-1974), and then continued by their successors, such as Donald W. Meinig (1924-2020), David J. Hooson (1926-2008), Robert Strausz-Hupé (1903-2002), Samuel Huntington (1927-2008), Saul B. Cohen (1925-2021), Henry Kissinger (1923-), Zbigniew Brzeziński (1928-2017) and Yves Lacoste (1929-). Polish geopolitical thought was developed at the same time as in Western Europe. Prominent representatives of the Polish geopolitical thought are: Oskar Żebrowski (ca. 1809-1883), Walerian Kalinka (1826-1886), Józef Szujski (1835-1883), Michał Bobrzyński (1849-1935) i Stanisław Smolka (1854-1924), Adolf Pawiński (1840-1896), Tadeusz Korzon (1839-1918), Wacław Nałkowski (1851-1911), Władysław Smoleński (1851-1926), Jerzy Smoleński (1881-1940), Aleksander Rembowski (1847-1906), and most of all, Eugeniusz Romer (1871-1954). The Polish geopolitical thought of the Second Polish Republic was also strongly involved in promoting the geopolitical concept of the intermarium and the Promethean policy. During the Second World War, a number of works related to the analysis of the international system and the policy of the great powers were written by Feliks Koneczny (1862-1949), Ignacy Matuszewski (1891-1946), and Jerzy Niezbrzycki (1902-1968). During the period of People's Republic of Poland geopolitics was developed in the form of history and geography of civilization e.g. by Andrzej Piskozub (1933-2021), as well as in political emigration circles e.g. Jerzy Giedroyc (1906-2000) and Juliusz Mieroszewski (1906-1976). Prominent representatives of contemporary geopolitics are Leszek Moczulski (1930-) and founder of the Polish school of powermetrics studies - Mirosław Sułek (1952-).

Finally, all these thinkers were interested in the influence of various geographical factors (space-time conditions, independent variable) on political reality (dependent variable). Many of them combined this geopolitical perspective with a typically geographic approach, in which political realities and decisions are the explanatory

factor (independent variable) and the landscape and everyday life of societies are the explained factor (dependent variable). As a result, both political geography and geopolitics interpenetrate and complement each other.

These considerations lead us to adopt the definition of **geopolitics as a social science and academic discipline<sup>3</sup> that studies the dynamic impact of various space-time conditions on the political phenomena.**

### **What kind of geopolitics?**

Various opposing adjectives of geopolitics are used in the literature. The most common are 'old' and 'new', 'classic' and 'contemporary', or 'realistic' and 'critical'.<sup>4</sup> The latter is broadly searching and promoting by Klaus Dodds (2019). But what does this really mean? Are we dealing with a different kind of geopolitics? In my opinion, absolutely not (!) **Geopolitics is still the same: only its meaning (perception) is transformed.** So, the fundamental question is: How is geopolitics changing? To answer this question, it is necessary to determine the reasons, directions, and consequences of the transformation of academic geopolitics.

There are two types of variable geopolitical indicators in the definition adopted above. The first are various space-time conditions (STCs), and the second is their influence on political phenomena. The first indicator is the independent variable, and the second is the dependent variable. The second indicator depends on the first, so we will focus on the role of the first, which will show us the directions and consequences of this transformation.

Initially, according to a geographic determinism theory, STCs have been expressed by **geographic physical space** with a particular dominant role of land space (Kjellén, Ratzel, Haushofer, Mackinder and Spykman), sea space (Mahan), and air space (Seversky). These factors have been *de facto* primarily examined from the point of view of foreign

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<sup>3</sup> In Poland, the first university studies in geopolitics were established on the initiative of the Cracow branch of the Polish Geopolitical Society in 2021 at the Pedagogical University in Kraków (Wilczyński, 2022). Editor's note.

<sup>4</sup> Many works have been published on the need to adapt classical geopolitics to changing conditions, especially to the development of technology. Many authors pointed to the decline in the importance of the location factor in the era of globalization, which, according to them, justified the thesis of the decline of both geography and geopolitics. Opinions of this type have not been left without criticism (e.g. Wilczyński, 2015). Editor's note.

and security policy. From this trend, **geostrategy, as a subdiscipline of geopolitics searching the influence of various space-time conditions (factors) on the strategies, doctrines, and political practices in the geopolitical military domain** has been gradually developed. Thus, we can see that the influence of STCs (independent variable) on different types of political phenomena (dependent variable) determines the type of subdiscipline of geopolitics. In this way, in addition to geostrategy, **geoeconomics, geocultures, or geocology** can be indicated. However, it should be clearly emphasized that subdisciplines cannot compete with geopolitics or replace it. The role of subdisciplines is to limit the vast research area and academic knowledge (courses). The concept of **information geopolitics** as a geopolitics subdiscipline has a slightly different nature.

### **Information geopolitics**

The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has significantly expanded the nature of the information space (infosphere) in both quantitative and qualitative sense. Cyberspace, as a new type of space, has become a key part of the infosphere. Many authors, without sufficient arguments, claim that cyberspace is intangible, infinite, and limitless. Such a position may incorrectly indicate a lack of spatial-time conditions in cyberspace. This is a broad cognitive problem that requires separate research and discussion. I only wish to signal one layer of perception. From a legal and technical point of view, it is easy to point out the limitations of cyberspace. This is clearly demonstrated by the existence of a 'national Internet', such as the Russian 'Runet'. The essence of cyberspace is the huge flow of powerful streams of data and information. If we measure the amount of information transmitted in cyberspace (Hartley-Shannon information theory), it has a tangible form. The development of artificial intelligence (AI) may also break these boundaries, but in this case we are talking about a great civilizational revolution comparable to the 'world of robots'.

What is the information geopolitics? In a general sense, **information geopolitics as a subdiscipline of geopolitics is dealing with the study of the impact of the information space (infosphere) on the process of making strategic decisions (particularly political) by geopolitical actors creating the distribution of power and interests, as the main feature of the international system** (Białoskórski, 2022, p. 94).

In the case of information geopolitics, the infosphere is affecting the political processes in a wide range of activities of any organization (especially states). The main academic task of information geopolitics is the scientific study of the impact of strategic information streams on the political management of key areas of state activity in the political, economic, military, technological, and cultural spheres. The influence of information warfare (not only Russian) on the current geostrategic situation of Ukraine in the military sphere or on its geoeconomic situation in the economic sphere is a good example as the subject of a geostrategic information case study. Another is the impact of Russian warfare on the American electoral system in the political sphere. However, the case study is not the purpose of this paper. To have an impact of efficiency in the infosphere, the organization has to develop its **information power (IP)**. It is a rather new term in the geopolitical literature. The mostly presented approaches treat IP as a **cyber power (CP)**, e.g. Kuehl (2009), Barnett & Duvall (2005), Betz & Stevens (2011), Nye (2010), van Haaster (2016), Voo et al (2020), *Global Cybersecurity Index 2020, Measuring commitment to cybersecurity* (2020). However, both of these concepts are not and should not be treated as synonyms. In my opinion, in a general sense, **the information power (IP) is the organization's ability to pursue its strategic goals by influencing the information space (infosphere)**. It is a kind of hybrid structure of two integrated components: **psychological information power (PIP)** as a kind of 'soft information power' and **cybernetic information power (CIP)**, as a kind of 'hard information power'. The increasing value of IP determines the ability to achieve **information domination** in different kinds of activities in infosphere (e.g. information warfare)<sup>5</sup>. Another important factor in information geopolitics, as well as information power, is the 'strategic culture' of geopolitical actors that formulate information policy, strategies, and doctrines. In the general sense, 'strategic culture' is culturally conditioned patterns and perception schemes characteristic of a given society. It affects the perception of the security environment, the assessment of security threats, and the crisis management process (Snyder, 1977; Klein, 1991; Zaman, 2009). A similar theoretical approach is the concept of '**security and defence culture**' developed by Marian Cieślarczyk, the prosecutor of the Polish

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<sup>5</sup> This is a part of the concept of 'information warfare' presented in paper 'Theoretical Concept of Information Warfare. The General Outline' to be published in the Polish journal 'Humanities & Social Sciences' (<https://oficyna.prz.edu.pl/en/>) soon.

school of security and defence culture. According to this concept security and defence culture is a kind of social matrix, *'the pattern of basic assumptions, values, norms, rules, symbols, and beliefs that influence perception of challenges, opportunities and (or) threats, and the way of feeling security and thinking about it, behaviour and activities (cooperation) of individual or collective active social actors connected with this, in a variety of ways «articulated» and «learned» by them in education in broad sense, including internal and external integration processes in natural adaptation and other organizational processes, as well as in the process of strengthening broadly (not just militarily) understood defence, serving the harmonious development of these individual or collective active social actors, and achieving by them broadly understood security'* (Cieślarczyk, 2010; Piwowarski, 2017, p. 27). It distinguishes three integrated spheres (dimensions) of the security and defence culture of each organization: the sphere of mental culture, the sphere of tangible culture, and the sphere of organizational culture (Cieślarczyk i in., 2014, p. 28). It follows that Russia's strategic culture is different from the American one, as well as American differences from the Chinese, e.t.c.

### **Controversies and critics around academic geopolitics**

Geopolitics comes in two practical forms: academic geopolitics and applied geopolitics. In the first case, it means an independent scientific domain with its scientific paradigm and the faculty of academic education (geopolitical studies). Applied geopolitics is the (geo)political doctrine and practice in international relations. In my opinion, the main critical pole towards academic geopolitics result from its contact area with applied geopolitics. Often, practice results come from theory. It is even justified that geopolitics applied to the widest possible extent should use the scientific achievements of academic geopolitics. However, the problem arises when this achievement is consciously distorted by the power elite in the process of its implementation into (geo)political doctrine. In practice, the world of science is different from the world of doctrine. The perception of reality by scientists is different from the vision of the world of doctrinaires. First of all, for scientists, reality is objective, but for doctrinaires it is subjective. Scientists strive to learn the truth about the world, and doctrinaires prefer a vision of the world consistent with their actual preferences.

This is the main reason for accusing academic geopolitics of being linked to fascism. It was claimed that the Nazis used a geopolitical perspective in their political programme, promoting and legalising

German expansionist policies. In particular, this applies to the geopolitical work of Karl Haushofer. The research indicates that it could have played an important role in inspiring the Nazis as doctrinaires of national socialism. However, Haushofer blamed Hitler from the very beginning for using his geopolitical theories and personal influence to justify war and genocide (Dodds, 2019, pp. 39–43). Unfortunately, the risk of abuse by the world of doctrinaires is still serious in the world of science. However, this must not hinder nor block scientific research.

## **Conclusions**

Geopolitics is still the same in its nature and only its meaning (perception) has been transformed. It makes no sense to call geopolitics 'old' and 'new', 'classic' and 'contemporary', or 'realistic' and 'critical'. However, different schools and directions of geopolitical thought can be identified. Geopolitics can be considered as a social science (academic) discipline that studies the dynamic impact of various space-time conditions on political phenomena. Here, various forms of geopolitics subdisciplines, such as geostrategy or geoeconomics, come from. Various space-time conditions are changing with successive industrial revolutions and exploration of the natural geopolitical environment. Human information activity in cyberspace leads to the separation of another geopolitical subdiscipline, information geopolitics, dealing with the study of the impact of the information space (infosphere) on the process of making strategic decisions (particularly political) by geopolitical actors creating the distribution of power and interests, as the main feature of the international system. To be able to efficiency impact in the infosphere, the organization has to develop its information power which increasing value determines the ability to achieve information dominantion in different kinds of activities in the infosphere (e.g. information warfare). In a general sense, information power is the organization's ability to pursue its strategic goals by influencing the information space (infosphere). Another important factor in information geopolitics, as well as information power, is the 'strategic culture' of geopolitical actors. The main controversies and critics pole around academic geopolitics result from its contact area with applied geopolitics, represented mostly by geopolitical doctrines.



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**Streszczenie:**

Celem artykułu jest wyjaśnienie istoty i charakteru geopolityki jako nauki społecznej i dyscypliny akademickiej. Autor stoi na stanowisku, że geopolityka jest dyscypliną akademicką w ramach dziedziny nauk społecznych, a jej celem jest badanie wpływu, jaki na zjawiska polityczne wywierają zmieniające się w czasie i przestrzeni warunki geograficzne. Analizując dotychczasową ewolucję geopolityki autor stawia tezę o niezmienności jej natury. Jego zdaniem geopolityka jest wciąż taka sama w swojej naturze, a zmianie ulegają warunki geograficzne (jak i sposoby ich rozumienia), pełniące w geopolityce rolę czynników wyjaśniających. Zmiany te są z kolei konsekwencją procesów rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego, a zwłaszcza kolejnych rewolucji przemysłowych. To za sprawą szybkiego rozwoju technologii informatycznych, do listy geograficznych czynników wpływających na rzeczywistość polityczną dodano aktywność aktorów sceny politycznej w cyberprzestrzeni. Autor postuluje, że istotność ludzkiej aktywności informatycznej w cyberprzestrzeni powoduje konieczność wyodrębnienia kolejnej subdyscypliny geopolityki, a mianowicie geopolityki informatycznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** geopolityka, geopolityka informatyczna, istota geopolityki, technologia informacyjna.