

THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY UPON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS¹

Undoubtedly, in terms of international relations analysis – including also the geopolitics, geostrategy, security studies etc. – the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century were, and still are dominated by the studies of the American scholars, who did pioneering work, created schools and opened new research directions in these areas. The works of Robert D. Kaplan, author of 15 books on foreign affairs and travel, chief geopolitical analyst at the famous Stratfor and senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington, confirms this rule (www.RobertDKaplan.com).

Starting with the *Preface*, suggestively entitled *Frontiers*, the author exploits a series of truths, blurred or overlooked by the general euphoria after the collapse of USSR (1991), but perennial geographically and geopolitically: the role of mountains as a "conservative force" (p. xiv)², the meaning and role of peoples and civilizations developed organically, yet separated by state borders (p. xvi, e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan)³, the clear distinction between "frontiers" (actually, the frontier regions) and "boundaries" created by man (pp. xviii-xix), initiated by the Anglo-Saxon geopoliticians and completed by Michel Foucher, the creator of the term *horogenèse* (describing the "*genesis of the frontiers*"). These historical, geographical and geopolitical parameters are not always stressed out by the decision makers in international relations.

Although the book's title refers only to geography, the avid reader will discover a fabulous analysis of the contemporary world, which provides a fundamental truth: the neglect of geography (and, implicitly, of history and geopolitics) draws to "revenge". The author gives us a fundamental message which is, basically, the key to understanding his work: "The only thing enduring is a people's position on the map. Thus, in times of upheaval, maps rise in

¹ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, New York, Random House, 2012, 403 p.

² *Commonplace* at French geographers and geopolitical thinkers of the interwar period.

³ Favorite theme of the German geopoliticians of the same period.

importance. With the political ground shifting rapidly under one's feet, the map, though not determinative, is the beginning of discerning a historical logic about what might come next" (p. xviii).

The scientific approach of the author of the reviewed book is divided into 3 parts (Part I: *Visionaries*; Part II: *The early Twenty First century map*; Part III: *America's destiny*), which are also divided into 15 chapters.

The first part of the book contains 8 chapters (*From Bosnia to Bagdad; The revenge of geography; Herodotus and his successors; The Eurasian map; The Nazi distortion; The Rimland thesis; The allure of sea power; The "crisis of room"*), which capture a series of general principles of geography and geopolitics influence on the history and, in general, on the prospective international politics.

This section has a strong theoretical character, reviewing significant literature from Antiquity to the present day, dealing with the influence of geography on history and implicitly of geography on geopolitics and international relations. In this respect, brilliant pages on opinions expressed for this topic by Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun, Halford J. Mackinder, Nicholas John Spykman, Hans J. Morgenthau, William Hardy McNeill etc. are written. In our opinion, the author is strongly influenced by McNeill's famous ideas concerning the historical rise of the Western civilization. In the fifth chapter, exaggerations of Nazi geopolitics are discussed and condemned. The next two chapters are focused on profound ideas concerning Rimland (Nicholas John Spykman) and Sea Power (Alfred Thayer Mahan).

The author emphasizes idea that perennial considerations of the founder of USA's doctrine concerning naval supremacy (i.e. Mahan) are also good for this century, because the American naval supremacy will be challenged by China and India.

Generally, in the chapter called *The "crisis of room"* are analyzed and amplified Paul Bracken's ideas strongly expressed in *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York, HarperCollins, 1999). The basic idea of this chapter is that while the U.S. and Western Europe focuses on globalization, Eurasia focuses increasingly on nationalism and military power.

The second part of this work contains six chapters, representing a geopolitical analysis applied to the former and current major regional powers, or great powers of the world (*The Geography of European division; Russia and the independent heartland; The geography of Chinese power; India's geographical dilemma; The Iranian pivot; The former Ottoman Empire*).

This part could be considered as one of practical application of the theoretical principles presented in the first section. In the chapter concerning

Europe, the analysis is focused on the political and economic issues. Worthy of consideration is the geopolitical idea that the Mediterranean Sea will return to his old role of connecting the southern Europe with the northern Africa. Also, Robert D. Kaplan suggests a transfer of real power from Bruxelles to Berlin.

The chapter related to Russia contains a lot of geographical and historical data which try to suggest that the destiny of this huge country was, it is and will be strongly influenced by its geography. It is reinforced the idea that Russia, as a land power, constantly had feared invasions (actually, this idea appeared in the 17th century, our note). To keep away from these dangers, Russia always sought to expand its territory. From this text results undoubtedly that Russia is not considered as the main enemy for the United States.

In the chapter on China, idea that this country will become, economically and military, the main opponent of the USA is subtly suggested.

The chapter on India emphasizes geographical and historical connections between this country, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. Also, the demographical, economic and military potential of this country is well analyzed.

Based on many data concerning geographical position, historical and cultural traditions of Iran, the author offers to the reader many pages on the role of geopolitical pivot played by this country.

Last but not least, the second part of the book ends with the chapter on the space of the former Ottoman Empire. Very interesting geopolitical data on Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Israel – which were parts of this Islamic empire – are offered.

The last part of the book involves only one chapter, entitled *Braudel, Mexico and grand strategy*, deals with the destiny of the only nowadays military superpower: USA.

Remarkable are here considerations made by Fernand Braudel (related to classical *longue durée*, *conjunctures* and *l'histoire événementielle*) Edward N. Luttwak (about the *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*) and Arnold J. Toynbee, used by Robert D. Kaplan as theoretical support of his demonstration.

The issue of possible threat of U.S. by Mexico is analyzed in a careful and balanced manner. The author shows, however, it would be possible that around 2050 a third of the U.S. population to be Spanish-speaking.

At the end of the book, it is shown that the United States should promote the unity of the Western Hemisphere, in order that it cannot be threaten by a power from the Eastern Hemisphere. Also, the USA must bring equilibrium in Eurasia and become a unifying force in North America.

It is hard to achieve perfection in a work with a lot of geopolitical aspects. A simple glance at the bibliography used shows that this book is mainly based on

Anglo-Saxon sources – great geopoliticians outside the U.S. and Great Britain being practically ignored.

Undoubtedly, the next edition of this remarkable scientific endeavour will be really fantastic if the works of some authors like Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer, Yves Lacoste, Michel Foucher, Aleksandr Dughin, Ezzatolah Ezzati, Mohammad Reza Hafeznia will be used.

The scientific notes, the bibliography and a useful general index complete this work, giving the measure of a fully formed author, with a deep knowledge of the operating mechanisms of the multi-polar world in which we live.

Overall, the book – that has already become a Best-Seller – is a great scientific success and an useful tool for students, experts and decision makers in international relations, geopoliticians, militaries, and all those who are interested in creating a more stable international environment and, implicitly, safer.

Florin PINTESCU
Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava