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Excerpt

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Introduction. The argument: geopolitics for fixing the coordinates of foreign policy identity

STEFANO GUZZINI

How is it that, precisely as the Cold War came to an end in a development that demonstrated the historical possibility of peaceful change against all (determinist) odds and seemed to herald the superiority of non-realist approaches in International Relations,¹ many European countries – in both the East and the West – experienced a revival of a distinctively realist tradition, that of geopolitics – a tradition that suddenly dared to say its name?

Most prominent in this context is perhaps the case of Russia, which has witnessed a quite remarkable turnaround. Banned during the Cold War as a mistaken theory, if not ideology, by the Soviet authorities, geopolitics has since acquired an almost dominant place in Russian analysis of world politics.² For a while, even a new parliamentary committee on ‘geopolitics’ was established in 1995 (lasting until 1999), chaired by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s former right-hand man Aleksey Mitrofanov. Although the actual influence of geopolitical thinking on ‘ordinary Russians’ is debated,³ there have been consistent and widespread references back to early twentieth-century geopolitical thought and ‘geopolitical necessities’, not least by Aleksandr Dugin. The latter is perhaps the best-known representative of this resurgence, both through his *Fundamentals of Geopolitics*, reprinted several times, and through his political activism as party leader, director of a Centre for Geopolitical Expertise (founded late 1999) and adviser to the speaker of the Duma, Gennadii Seleznev.⁴ From Marx to Mackinder.⁵

But, the smaller countries in the post-Soviet space have also seen a revival. Although the exact status of geopolitical thought in Estonia continues to be

¹ Allan and Goldmann, 1992; Lebow and Risse-Kappen, 1995.

² Tyulin, 1997; Sergounin, 2000.

³ O’Loughlin, 2001.

⁴ Dugin, in particular, has attracted the scorn of critics, who have even likened him to a neo-fascist. See Ingram, 2001.

⁵ See now also Bassin and Aksenov, 2006.

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disputed,⁶ the place reserved for Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis in that country has been truly remarkable. Estonia's minister of foreign affairs wrote the foreword to the 1999 Estonian translation of Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. For the book's launch, Huntington visited Estonia and spoke at a press conference together with Estonia's prime minister and minister of foreign affairs.⁷ His book was extensively reviewed in major newspapers and has more generally become part of popular discourse.⁸ Nor does the revival stop on the Eastern side of the former Iron Curtain. Quite strikingly perhaps, Italy has also seen a revival of 'geopolitics', with military general and political adviser Carlo Jean as its figurehead⁹ and a relatively new journal of geopolitics called *Limes: Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica* (the Italian equivalent to the French *Hérodote*, but with national success on the level of *Foreign Affairs/Foreign Policy*) as its main outlet.¹⁰ In Italy, Jean's books are the most widely read books in international relations written by an Italian. Together with *Limes*, they have accompanied and arguably contributed to the permeation of the discourses of politicians and newspapers by geopolitical vocabulary.¹¹

So, why is this? By analysing the relationship between the events of 1989 and the resurgence of geopolitical thought, the present collaborative study aims to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between international events or crises and foreign policy thought (and strategy) – or, more generally, between modes of thought and particular historical contexts in international relations. At the same time, it contributes to constructivist theorising in proposing a way to study shifts in what Alexander Wendt has called the 'cultures of anarchy' in international society. The four central empirical claims it makes are set out below.

First, although we will show a relationship between international events and shifts in foreign policy modes of thought, this cannot be adequately understood in terms of a mere outside-in analysis, whereby an international event causes shifts in foreign policy ideas. In the context of the geopolitical revival after 1989 in Europe, it was apparently not self-evident – as our puzzle shows – that the success of *Ostpolitik* (the international event as seen by the German elite) would put an end to realist geopolitical thought as part of traditional Cold War thinking, in the same way as it did to the Cold War, even if many observers would have expected this to happen (particularly in Germany). Nor, as we will show, was a return to geopolitical thought necessary in the light of the ethnic

⁶ For an overview, see Aalto, 2000 and 2001.

⁷ Kuus, 2002, 307. ⁸ Aalto and Berg, 2002, 261–262.

⁹ Jean, 1995 and 1997.

¹⁰ Lucarelli and Menotti, 2002c. Dugin participated in the launch (and is a member of the editorial board) of yet another geopolitical journal in 2004, entitled *Eurasia: rivista di studi geopolitici*.

¹¹ Antonsich, 1996.

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wars in the Balkans, as suggested by many realists. In other words, '1989' – our 'event' – caused no necessary shift towards understandings informed by either peace research or geopolitics. Instead, the significance and effect of the event have themselves been a result of the ways in which foreign policy discourses in different countries understood that event. This study claims that we need to understand the role of international events on foreign policy ideas from the inside out – that is, in the way the meanings of such events as '1989' are articulated within national foreign policy discourses.

This leads to our second claim, namely, that the revival of geopolitical thought is best understood in the context of several foreign policy identity crises, a kind of 'ontological insecurity'¹² that foreign policy elites encountered in Europe after 1989. We can distinguish here three types of such potential identity crises – that is, instances where previously established self-understandings and external role conceptions were susceptible to challenge. In some cases, for example in Russia, a country's place in the world was no longer self-evident, as previously established roles and self-understandings no longer seemed valid (post-1989 Russia could neither unproblematically refer back to the Soviet Union nor to Tsarist Russia). Sometimes, a country's role had been previously defined in a passive fashion – as in Italy, where the Cold War divide had done much of the job for Italian foreign policy thought. And, finally, some states would be recreated (as in the case of Estonia) or reunited (as in the case of Germany) as a result of the events of 1989, making it necessary to articulate an updated foreign policy identity. Hence, we have three potential crises: no identity, no longer the previously established identity, and no identity yet. Accordingly, we claim that the effect of the events of 1989 on foreign policy thought are best understood in the context of an identity crisis. Such an identity crisis occurs when a country's general foreign policy or its national-interest discourses face problems in their smooth continuation, because taken-for-granted self-understandings and role positions are openly challenged – and eventually undermined.

Third, we claim that mobilising geopolitical thought seems particularly well suited to respond to such an ontological anxiety or identity crisis. Geopolitical thought provides allegedly objective and material criteria for circumscribing the boundaries (and internal logics) of 'national interest' formulations. Invoking national interests almost inevitably mobilises justifications in terms wider than the interest of the ruler or the government. Such wider justification can be given by ideologies, as in the case of anti-communism and anti-capitalism during the Cold War, or through references to the 'nation', for instance. But, when yesterday's certitudes have gone missing, national interests have to be anchored anew. In such a context, geopolitics in its classical understanding provides 'coordinates' for thinking a country's role in world affairs. Deprived of

¹² Agnew, 2003, 115. For the concept of ontological security, see Huysman, 1998, Mitzen, 2006 and Steele, 2005 and 2007.

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traditional reference points and with a challenged self-understanding or outside view of its role, spatial logic can quickly fill this ideational void and fix the place of the state and its national interest within the international system or society. And geopolitics is particularly well suited to such a role, since it relies upon environmental determinism from both physical geography (mobilised often through strategic thinking) and human/cultural geography typical for discourses essentialising a nation.

Yet, although geopolitical thought fulfils this function handsomely, there is no necessity that it will be mobilised in national security or foreign policy discourses. To assume otherwise would be to commit a functional fallacy. Accordingly, our fourth claim is that whether or not geopolitical thought is mobilised to fulfil the above-mentioned function is dependent on a series of process factors: the 'common sense' embedded in the national-interest discourse that predisposes for it, the institutional structure (and political economy) in which foreign policy thought is developed, and the mobilisation of agents in the national political game.

Besides answering the empirical puzzle of a geopolitical revival after the end of the Cold War, the present study also aims to adapt methodological and theoretical tools for constructivist analysis. First, it uses a version of 'process tracing' in an interpretivist manner. The analysis is a version of *process tracing*, since it does not simply assume that when outside pressures translate into more or less uniform outcomes, they do so for the causes hypothesised. Without empirically checking the process of how international inputs translate into domestic responses, it is not possible to control for the risk of equifinality – that is, the possibility that the same outcome may have been reached by following different processual paths. Moreover, whatever regularity found without checking the process can be spurious and easily falls prone to the functionalist fallacy just mentioned.

It is *interpretivist* process tracing because its starting point is in the understanding of international events, not with those events in themselves.¹³ The tracing starts with the already diverse national interpretations of the international event. The 'international' event is therefore no constant and equal input for all country cases, a constant against which the variance of national process can explain the differing political responses, as in many research designs around globalisation and the hypothesised convergence of (economic) politics and institutions, for instance. The significance of the input – and indeed the input itself – is endogenous to the process. Moreover, as the conclusion will elaborate,

¹³ Moreover, it is about the interaction effects of such an interpretation with the events themselves in that the interpretation of what '1989' means for post-1989' interacts with the events of post-1989. For the concept of 'interaction effects', see Hacking, 1999, 31–32. For the discussion, see Chapter 11 of this volume.

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this process tracing is best understood as a multilayered process of parallel dynamics and their interaction, rather than a single linear process.

Finally, the book wishes to contribute to theory development in constructivist IR by providing tools and micro-dynamics for analysing structural change. It does so by defining an analysis of social mechanisms that is consistent with constructivist and post-positivist assumptions, and by specifying two such mechanisms. The first mechanism of foreign policy identity crisis reduction is the core of the analysis. In the context of a foreign policy identity crisis, where self-understandings or outside role recognition have been challenged by the interpretation of events, agents try to remedy the situation in at least four ways: they either deny the existence of any crisis, define it as a misunderstanding and negotiate with the outside about it, adapt to it, or try to mould international society to fit its own identity discourses.

A second mechanism relates to the underlying 'culture of anarchy', to use Wendt's expression. If 'anarchy is what states make of it', and if that making happens through and within the lifeworld of different 'cultures of anarchy', then the proposed analysis probes into the dynamics of such cultures, since these cultures are also what states make of them. It suggests that the evolution of the culture of anarchy in Europe after 1989 is fruitfully analysed through the way the interpretations of major events are driven and interact with different national foreign policy discourses, and how those in turn interact with each other in the reproduction of the more general culture. For this, the book proposes a mechanism called a 'vicious circle of essentialisation'. This forms part of a structural but bottom-up analysis in which the meaning given to the events of 1989 – an event that, to use the categories of the English School and Wendt, should have heralded and reinforced a dynamic from a Lockean to a Kantian culture in Europe – paradoxically also produced a movement in the opposite direction. For if the theoretical parameters of geopolitical analysis were taken seriously on both the national and the international levels, its dynamics of essentialising physical and cultural geography would produce an environment more akin to a Hobbesian culture.

In other words, where geopolitics has been used to resolve foreign policy identity crises, the very success of the 'desecuritisation' that occurred at the end of the Cold War might contribute to ushering in a 'resecuritisation'. Or, put differently, under certain conditions Kant makes Hobbes possible again. Now, through our understanding of the concatenation of the two mechanisms at work, we are able to see that a movement to a more Hobbesian culture happened not *despite* the end of the Cold War, but *because of it*.

Accordingly, the present analysis shares a normative concern typical of peace research (but not only that) – namely, the possibility that interpretations become potentially self-fulfilling prophecies that contribute to producing a threatening world while appearing as simple response to it; in other words, a concern about 'self-fulfilling geopolitics'.

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The structure of the book is straightforward. The first part, consisting of three chapters, specifies the puzzle, along with the terms, central concepts and framework of the analysis. The second part provides six country studies. A concluding part first synthesises the empirical findings and then develops a constructivist understanding of process tracing and mechanisms so as to provide a way in which to conceive of the micro-dynamics of constructivist IR theories.

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PART I

The analytical framework

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1

Which puzzle? An expected return of
geopolitical thought in Europe?

STEFANO GUZZINI

Was not a revival of geopolitical thinking only to be expected after the end of the Cold War? This would be the classical realist claim, suggesting that the aftermath of the Cold War showed clearly the eternal wisdom of the realist tradition, including its more geopolitical component. The analyses of Mearsheimer and Huntington are there, so the implication, because of the nature of world politics.¹ The revival comes as no surprise to political geography either, where 'geopolitics' has come to cover 'critical approaches to foreign policy practices and representations,'² for in times of territorial change or even state redefinition it is only normal that geographical discourse should become more prominent.

However, the puzzle of this study is not just about a couple of more geopolitical references. To be sure, if 'geopolitical language can be recognized by the occurrence of words referring to boundaries and the conflict between territorially bounded interests,'³ then almost by definition the end of the Cold War had to increase geopolitical talk in Europe – as would the discussions by European Federalists after 1945 in their attempt to get the European countries to join each other in a federation. In itself, though, that is not a significant finding (at least, not any longer). The puzzle for this comparative study concerns the revival of a specifically classical and more determinist form of geopolitical thought; it is about a geopolitics that no longer shies away from using its arguments, or indeed its own name.

This chapter will therefore shortly discuss two possible rebuttals to the puzzle of this volume, informed by either realism or (critical) political geography. The realist rebuttal is unsatisfactory, since historical events underdetermine their interpretation. Realists are right, that the peaceful end of the Cold War does not naturally make everyone see the political expectations (and strategies) of peace research (*Ostpolitik*) confirmed. But for the same reason it is not in the nature of things that the end of the Cold War – a truly major historical event

¹ Mearsheimer, 1990; Huntington, 1993a.

² For this quote and for reference to the divide in the usage of 'geopolitics' between IR and political geographers, see Mamadouh and Dijkink, 2006, 350.

³ Dijkink, 1996, 5.

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achieved in an unexpected way for realists (despite later attempts to account for it) – would ultimately be considered of less importance than the Balkan wars, as realists would have it. And if political geographers are right to expect a flurry of geographic references in policy discourses after 1989, this does not necessarily require the more determinist version of geopolitics to (re-)surface. Finally, we need also to account for the fact that the revival did not happen everywhere. The puzzle remains.

1 ‘1989 and all that’: realist politics after the Cold War freezer

Many citizens of former Yugoslavia may be forgiven for having a less glorious view of the end of the Cold War. Realists believed that their views had been swiftly vindicated by the many civil wars that took place in the Balkans, and stressed the need not to be lured by the peaceful solution of the Cold War. For them, the post-Cold War era was a dangerous peace, resurrecting a host of factors that almost required a revival in geopolitics.⁴ Yet, as this section will argue, this does not invalidate the puzzle: it is not clear why geopolitics should so early and suddenly arise out of the ashes, both East and West. It is not self-evident why the peaceful end of the Cold War, an event of truly global proportions, would be overshadowed by the understandings and alleged lessons derived from the (regional) Bosnian wars.

For once, geopolitics as a distinct theory, and not just as a loose discourse, is akin to those very systemic and deterministic versions of realism that are usually considered unable to explain the behaviour of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. We have no ‘final’ interpretation of the end of the Cold War, and given the far-reaching political implications of its historical lessons, the debate will probably stay ‘essentially contested’. But it is quite safe to say that realist theories that concentrate mainly on systemic determinism (the balance of power) have been under severe attack within that debate.⁵ In relative-power terms, the USSR was not weaker in the mid 1980s than it was at earlier stages of the Cold War. Moreover, a geopolitical outlook that would add more geographical emphasis, including a focus on territories, would have to explain the relative ease with which the Soviet government under Gorbachev let its sphere of influence go.

And, indeed, a Waltzian systemic response was swiftly discarded by realists themselves. An early rejoinder by William Wohlforth was more inspired by the realism of Robert Gilpin and Stephen Walt.⁶ It mixed the idea of hegemonic decline and a moment of perception. Whether or not the relative-power

⁴ For a laundry list of factors that self-evidently led to the revival after 1989, see Jean, 1995, 5.

⁵ Kratochwil, 1993; Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994; Lebow, 1994.

⁶ See Wohlforth, 1994/1995 and the relationship to Gilpin, 1981 and Walt, 1987.