

## COMMUNICATIONS AND GEOPOLITICS

**Benea Ciprian**

University of Oradea, Faculty of Economics Str. Universitatii No. 1 e-mail: c\_benea@yahoo.com  
tel.: +40 751 24 99 75

*This article presents the great connection which exists between the technological development which has reverberation in communication field and how a state can exercise its power on international stage, how can consolidate its will and power, and how can it manipulate the environment with communicational tools.*

*Keywords: communication, geopolitics, state power, maritime states, land states*

*JEL code: F02*

Geopolitics is the “analysis of geographical influences upon power relationships in international politics.”<sup>16</sup> Geopolitics is constructed on two concepts which made its core nucleus: territory and power.<sup>17</sup> One of them, territory – or geography – is the most stable factor upon which the power of the nation depends.<sup>18</sup> But power of one state and the projection of its power depend on technical means developed by that state and which can promote that power. And the state that can adapt the technical means to its geographical position and its geographical peculiarities can promote better its power on regional and/or global stage. Put shortly, the state’s geographical position is sustained and valued in terms of power through technical means; here we must bring in debate the technical means as *transportation and communications*.

Good transport facilities permit the utilization of the resources of a wider area. Good communication facilities permit better and opportune information for the government. Both of them permit and sustain the centralization of political decision in a state. With mobile armies the rebellions can be swiftly suppressed. The rapidity of communications enables the central government to supervise the local officials effectively, thus preventing the disintegration of the state. The radius of efficient military action depends on the state of transport and communication.<sup>19</sup>

As the means of communication were used more and more by states with great geographical size, there could be identified the advantage derived from their size; they become much stronger, and could subjugate their smaller neighbors more easily. Put in a few words, the fate of the nations and of civilizations has often been determined by a differential in the technology;<sup>20</sup> and here if we mention the importance of communication means, there could be seen easily their importance for state’s power.

If we look for example to the relation between political unification and centralization and the road system, it would be easy to discover the importance of communication for the state.<sup>21</sup> Each empire built roads and maintained them in a good state. And as a consequence of these facts we should expect, that whenever an improvement in the technique of transport and communication occurs, which is not counterbalanced by an increase in the weight of equipment nor by a rise in

---

16 Enciclopedia Britanica

17 Mircea Malița, Zece mii de culturi, o singură civilizație. Spre geomodernitatea secolului XXI, București, Editura Nemira, 1998, p. 117

18 Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Fifth Edition, 1973, p. 112

19 Stanislav Andreovski, Military Organization and Society, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971, p. 79

20 Hans J. Morgenthau, op. cit., p. 121

21 Stanislav Andreovski, op. cit., p. 80

the relative effectiveness of defence, the size of political units *and their influence on regional or global scale* will tend to grow.<sup>22</sup>

But the control upon geographical space is different, and it depends upon the type of economical and political organization of a specific nation.<sup>23</sup>

And now we would proceed to the analysis of this aspect. Looking upon France's example, we could trace the following conclusion: a couple of centuries before French Revolution, there could be identified *two Frances*.

One was the *commercial state* represented during Revolution by Girondins, whose leaders came from the department of Gironde and the trading city of Bordeaux. Theirs was a mercantile network of French coastal and riverine cities, notably Bordeaux, Toulon, Marseilles, Nantes, and Lyon, connected to other cities around the world by a *fleet* of trading ships and protected by *naval power*.<sup>24</sup> Such power could be applied even at the global level, but only to spatially concentrated targets (other trading cities).

France two was the *territorial nation-state* represented at the time of the Revolution by the Jacobins, with a national capital in Paris, national bureaucracies, national communications along a road network with Paris as its center (the routes nationales), and national military power concerned (partly) with controlling the unruly provinces.

In the aftermath of the Revolution this pattern was exceptionally clear as the territorial France state had to take the port cities back from the trading interests, who sought a federal solution to France's problems rather than the "enlightened despotism" that would emerge in the person of Bonaparte.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, these two Frances coexisted, but when Napoleon acted in order to take away the commercial port-cities, he pursued this action with the motivation regarding the extending the territorial power of the France state upon the whole Europe, including the European part of Russia. But this French struggle was a part of a greater struggle which took place in Europe, with implications much more profound. It was the struggle between France and England. While France worked to perfect its territorial state in order to achieve a hegemonic position, England worked in order to give a perfect commercial nature to its state.

Looking from macro-technical (and geopolitical) point of view, there could be identified two types of states within European system:

- *trading states*, which are mercantile in character and generate wealth through trade;
- *territorial states*, which generate wealth through the occupation and exploitation of territory and are thus disposed to militarism.

It is noteworthy to be mentioned that the geographical disposition of one state can push it to be a trading state or a territorial one; but to the geographical disposition there must be added the national character.

A country which has long seashores, or has great openness to the sea, could become a very important trading state, which will generate its wealth through trade, and which will protect its maritime communication lines with its naval power. It needs fewer bureaucrats concentrated especially in its ports. Countries such as England, The Netherlands, and USA are good examples in this regard. It must be mentioned that USA became sea power after there was identified an "aggressive impulse", as there had been identified the possibility regarding the creation of a route through the Central-American Isthmus.<sup>26</sup>

---

22 *ibidem*, p. 79

23 Edward W. Fox, *The Emergence of the Modern World: From Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA., Blackwell, 1991, pp. 1-2

24 *ibidem*, p. 60

25 *ibidem*, p. 61

26 Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History. 1660 – 1783*, New York, Dover Publications, Inc, 1987, p. 26

States as Russia and France generate wealth through exploitation of a territory and centralize almost all their decisions in their capital cities. For this reason they need a great bureaucratic apparatus, concentrated in big cities, and of course, in their capitals. This kind of states will tend to develop communication networks which will have the main hub in their capital cities, and which through these communication networks, would provide the exploitation of a contiguous territory. In this moment we could identify the importance of railway and road systems for this kind of states.

As a commercial state, England pursued a different path regarding its communication policy: in order to provide the possibility for maximization of its capital accumulation, England was pushed to trade its knowledge and industrial capacities, for others agricultural products, which made the fleet an indispensable element for controlling a vast maritime network with global coverage; and the telecommunication networks became the technical means which helped the fleet and navy to rise their efficiency. It is simply to note that England pursued an insular geopolitics, concentrated on its fleet development.

But if there is brought into debate the strategic and military factors which influence the way a state conceives its communication networks policy, we could identify that the blockade and the commercial fleet's following up in the open sea works only against a commercial state, and fails when it is pursued against a territorial state. For example, during the American Revolutionary War, the blockade made by England's fleet against American coasts was inefficient, and the following in the open seas, senseless. This was due to the fact that the American Republic was a commercial state, but in the same time, it was part of a self-sufficient territorial economy.

The situation was different in France's case: although France is the first territorial state, it has sufficient peculiarities of a commercial state, and the blockade directed against its coasts hit the target. This pushed Napoleon to focalize upon "continental system" in order to become self-sufficient.

Even with the England's success against the first territorial state, at the beginning of the 19-th century, the insular geopolitics, which counted on the long fleet's arm, would be contested from three directions:

- 1) the *nation-state* (a version of the territorial state), governed by an efficient bureaucracy;
- 2) the *efficient terrestrial communications*, due to the invention of railway system and telegraph, which combined, created the possibility for appearance of great size political entities, which covered greater geographical areas;
- 3) the appearance, in the first part of 20-th century, of the possibility to use *air power*. For England this was of utmost importance because it mean that England wasn't anymore an island; it couldn't protect with its fleet its seashores, protection which was efficient only against the maritime power.

We can say that the appearance of territorial-state and its bureaucratic apparatus depended in the greatest measure upon the technical advance and the evolution in the land transportation – the appearance of railway transport which provided an efficient land transport – and in the instantaneous communications – electric telegraph. To the end of 19-th century it was possible from technical point of view, the creation of national territorial states, with a reduced maritime component. The railways and electrical telegraph provided the maintenance of a more efficient centralized control than during the period when it was provided by technical means as postal services, channels, national roads, or mechanical telegraph.<sup>27</sup>

---

27 Mark W. Zacher and Brent A. Sutton, *Governing Global Networks. International Regimes for Transportation and Communications*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 181

Furthermore, once there appeared the railway and telegraph networks, there were identified changes in four directions, with impact upon states' policy and administration:<sup>28</sup>

- 1) the geographical area occupied by the state increased;
- 2) the scope of state's functions multiplied and diversified;
- 3) there highly manifested the administration's bureaucratization;
- 4) the state's role and political representation in international affairs changed and diversified.

In this way, the rise of communication efficiency and the bureaucratization changed in a great measure the geopolitical balance in the favor of territorial nation-states,<sup>29</sup> providing means for the great size states' administration (such as Canada, USSR/Russia, SUA, Brazil).

Taking account of the importance of transportations and communications for administration, all empires and states paid a special attention to the development and smooth functioning of communications, to the point that "the subject of communications ... occupies a crucial position in the organization and administration of government, and as a consequence, in the Western empires and civilization."<sup>30</sup>

And the great jump registered in the field of spatial technologies – the appearance of communication satellites – brought great changes regarding the way in which classical geopolitics presented by Mackinder was to be regarded. If he presented a rule which contained valid realities for 19-th and 20-th centuries, 21-st century opens a new era: that which regards the using of satellite communications in a possible space war.<sup>31</sup>

Now the Mackinder's rule regarding the control of Eastern Europe and Heartland takes another shape:

- Who rules the circum terrestrial space commands the Earth;
- Who rules the Moon commands the circum terrestrial space;
- Who rules L4 and L5 commands the Earth-Moon system.<sup>32</sup>

But what could be written as a conclusion of those mentioned above is the following fact: *the nation who chooses to develop the best set of technologies and geo-strategies in order to manipulate the environment, to create wealth, and to project and protect the state's power, tends to become a hegemonic power.* Each change in technology of communication and transportation fields has greatest geopolitical implications, because they change the state's capacity regarding the control upon territory, the projection of that state's power, and the protection of its citizens.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Andreovski, Stanislav, Military Organization and Society, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971;
2. Fox, Edward W., The Emergence of the Modern World: From Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century, Cambridge, MA., Blackwell, 1991;
3. Hugill, Peter, Global Communications since 1844. Geopolitics and Technology, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999;
4. Innis, Harold Adam, Empire and Communications, Oxford, Clarendon, 1950;
5. Mahan, Alfred T., The Influence of Sea Power upon History. 1660 – 1783, New York, Dover Publications, Inc, 1987;
6. Malița, Mircea, Zece mii de culturi, o singură civilizație. Spre geomodernitatea secolului XXI, București, Editura Nemira, 1998;

---

<sup>28</sup> Peter Hugill, Global Communications since 1844. Geopolitics and Technology, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, p. 11

<sup>29</sup> ibidem, p. 12

<sup>30</sup> Harold Adam Innis, Empire and Communications, Oxford, Clarendon, 1950, p. 3

<sup>31</sup> Revista "Cadrul Politic", Anul I, Nr. 5-6, Iulie-August, 2003, pp. 16-17

<sup>32</sup> Mircea Malița, op. cit., p. 267

7. Morgenthau, Hans J., Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Fifth Edition, 1973;
8. Zacher, Mark W. and Sutton, Brent A., Governing Global Networks. International Regimes for Transportation and Communications, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996;
9. \*\*\* Revista "Cadran Politic" , Anul I, Nr. 5-6, Iulie-August, 2003;
10. \*\*\* Enciclopaedia Britannica.