

BOOK REVIEW

Mihai A. Panu, 2018, *Geopolitical Doctrines. The Architecture of Power in the International System [Doctrina geopolitice. Arhitectura puterii în sistemul internațional]*, Editura Universității de Vest, Romania, 276 pages, ISBN: 978-973-125-624-5

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The field of geopolitics has gone through a series of important changes ever since its emergence in the late 19th century. Thus, it initially saw a period of arguably spectacular expansion until the end of the Second World War, followed by a severe contraction that lasted until the 1970s, which, in turn, led to its revival and the regaining of its legitimacy in academic literature. Throughout all this time, the field has maintained a distinctly interdisciplinary character which makes it suitable both for policy analysis as well as for academic settings. In other words, this means that new exploratory endeavours into its origins, structure, and workings are both relevant and necessary.

Thus, it is with this fact in mind that one must approach the work by Mihai A. Panu on geopolitical doctrines. The author points out from the very beginning that the work itself does not aim for a comprehensive, exhaustive approach when dealing with its three chosen geopolitical schools or with the field in general, but rather serves to complete the existing debates in the Romanian space. This is relevant particularly due to Romania's position in the current geopolitical configuration, which sees it part of the Euro-Atlantic alliance

system, with the Romanian state thus bound to be greatly influenced by any developments in any future Great Game between the major power blocks. Throughout its chapters, the work deals with three important concepts, namely, geopolitics, geostrategy, and geoeconomics, while also paying attention to the evolution of various ideas championed by some of the most important theoreticians of the previous centuries, yet without neglecting the important contributions of lesser known authors.

The first chapter of the book serves as an introduction to the idea of geopolitics, its importance and its precursors, ranging from Thucydides and his account of the Peloponnesian War up to the 19th century uses of the term “political geography”. Throughout this introductory chapter, the author deals with a number of important concepts related to geopolitics, whilst also taking into account its origins and evolution. The second chapter contains an exploration of the Anglo-American school of geopolitics, which is seen as a “natural consequence of certain (political-cultural, economic compatibilities) and [...] of the strategic partnership between the two great powers” (p.24). It is ultimately unsurprising that this chapter is also the most extensive in the book, firstly due to the impact of the Anglo-American strategic alliance. Secondly, this is due to the influence of authors such as Alfred T. Mahan and Halford Mackinder, whose writings were centred on sea power and land-based power, respectively, but also the works of authors such as Saul Cohen and Alexander de Seversky, who represent newer trends such as interconnected regions and the increased importance of airpower for geopolitical realities.

The book’s third chapter deals with the German school of geopolitics. As the author himself puts it, this is a school which “reflects the security dilemmas and the historical anxieties of an entire nation” (p. 140). Furthermore, it represents a phenomenon with multiple causes, born of a people’s collective resentment when “confronted with numerous identity mutations in a relatively short time, but also through the ideological ‘blindness’ of an intellectual class which let itself be drawn in the totalitarian trap” (p.170). A number of important figures are discussed this chapter, including the Swedish author Rudolf Kjellen who was responsible for the concept of “*Geopolitik*”. A large portion of this section of the book deals with the work of Friedrich Ratzel, who popularised the concept

of “*Lebensraum*” – which he explicitly used for the first time in his 1901 work *Der Lebensraum*. Lastly, the author explores Karl Haushofer’s work, with its importance in setting up the basis for his distinctive view of pan-regionalism – which eventually settled on the three core nations of the United States, Germany and Japan –, with Haushofer himself being considered “the first German author to develop the concept of ‘geopolitics’ to the point where it holds a sufficient methodological-ideaistic weight in order to turn into a stand-alone discipline” (p.188).

The fourth chapter is focused on the Russian school of geopolitics, which has been profoundly marked by the deep changes which took place in the Russian cultural space from the Kievan period to the present – a space which took on an imperial identity and which functioned as an intermediary between West and East. Three elements are identified to have played a crucial part in the Russian school, that is, conservatism, Orthodoxy and nationalism. The figure of Aleksandr Dugin naturally dominates the Russian school, along with the concepts of Eurasianism, which developed after the First World War, and Neo-Eurasianism, which grew in the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration. Moreover, the chapter includes a look at the so-called “fourth political theory” promoted by Dugin as an alternative to liberalism, communism, and fascism, a path which essentially represents a mix of national sovereignty, social equity, and a revitalisation of tradition (p.227), and the enemy of “Atlanticism” (p.228).

A number of important concepts are discussed throughout the book, including classic terms such as Mackinder’s well-known and influential “Heartland”. Yet at the same time, the book also deals with newer concepts, such as Saul Cohen’s “shatterbelts” (p.123), geopolitically vulnerable areas which are spatially fluid, and “gateways” (p.126), which point to the importance of global interconnectivity. And while the patterns of globalisations are taken into account – with an acceptance of the fact that nation-states might well be anachronistic in the long run – the book favours an approach centred on the importance played by foreign policy in geopolitical contexts, including a focus on the role of spatiality in the development of power relations. Moreover, as the author is right to point out, one must also consider the impact of the practices influencing the behaviour of international actors, both old and new, thus

essentially arguing for the continued relevance of history and of historical legacies for the field of geopolitics. Overall, the book will be of interest to specialists in the field but will also be useful to students of political science. Lastly, while there is certainly great potential for a more detailed treatment of certain topics in a future edition – particularly with regards to the Russian school – the work as it stands already makes for an important and welcome addition to the existing debates on geopolitics in the Romanian cultural space.