

## MILITARY GEOGRAPHY IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOGRAPHIC DETERMINISM

## Abstract

The influence of geographic factors on the society as well as on different social realities had special importance within the whole history of social-philosophical thought. From this perspective, the theory of geographic determinism has emerged as an essential conception. The supporters of this theory paid special attention to the geographic factors demonstrating and underlining the importance of their place and role in the process of formation and development of various social phenomena. This article mainly focuses on the place and role of military geography in the study, organization, and modelling of social processes.

*Keywords:* military geography, geographic determinism, geographic factors, geopolitics.

## Introduction

The social-philosophical thought always had an emphasized positive attitude towards the influence of the geographic factors on society and social phenomena. Philosophers always paid great attention to the fact that geographic, climatic, territorial, and such other factors have a significant impact on public life, socio-biological realities, and even forms and mechanisms of state government. Hippocrates (1994) was among the first ones who paid particular attention to the mentioned realities and in his book “On Airs, Waters, and Places” expressed this idea: “...in general, you will find the forms and dispositions of mankind to correspond with the nature of the country...” (p. 304). Such an idea can also be found in Aristotle’s work “Politics” in which he wrote: “Those who live in a cold climate ... are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill. ...the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they want in spirit, and therefore they

are always in a state of subjection and slavery” (Aristotle, 1885, 1327b).

The ideas of the influence of geographic factors on society, social realities, their formation, and development were widely spread, especially after the so cold “era of great geographic discoveries”. The new progressive doctrines, formed during this period, and first of all “geographic determinism,” were trying to explain the social realities from the perspective of an objective, natural, and of course geographic, but not divine or any other motives.

The further development of these ideas reached its peak in the viewpoints of one of the first representatives of French Enlightenment – Charles Louis Montesquieu. He is considered to be the founder of modern geographic determinism. The main points of Montesquieu’s (1999) conception can be described as follows: *the climatic conditions and weather of a state, territory, or region determine the habits, inclinations, character, manners, and qualities of nations and*

*peoples, on which depend the social structure of the particular nation, people or state, their way of life, the nature, peculiarities, and essence of the laws, the political structure and infrastructures, even the existence and degree of development of freedom-loving ideas* (p. 265).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “geographic determinism” was wildly spread and mainly reflected in the ideas of the representatives of German philosophy, particularly those of Carl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel. Carl Ritter was trying to justify the decisive significance of the geographical environment and, first of all, the geographical position of the particular state in the context of the fate and “historical fortune” of nations and peoples, while Friedrich Ratzel was considered to be the thinker who boosted the shift from geographic determinism to the theory of geopolitics. Ratzel was arguing that the geographical environment was the factor that influenced the degree of economic development, the nature of the political structure, and the level of the general development of each nation. He was also insisting that people’s destiny is conditioned by the influence of the factors of earth and sky, flora and fauna. He considered that “the location of the state in one of the hemisphere, on this or that continent, on the peninsula, or the presence, close location or absence of seas, lakes, rivers, deserts - all these factors determine the course, nature and features of the history of a certain people, nation or state” (Ratzel, 1901, p. 102).

#### Geographic Determinism, Geopolitics and the Origin of Military Geography

Most researchers concur that ‘geopolitics’ appeared as an independent scientific direction only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Swedish geopolitician Rudolf Kjellén’s work

“The State as a Life-Form” published in 1916. This work served as a ground for the separation of ‘geopolitics’ from the so-called ‘military geography’. According to Kjellén, geopolitics is a science about the state “as a geographic organism that develops in space” (Holdar, 1992, p. 312).

In this context, it is important to state that still in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe was laid the foundation for the formation and development of a new science ‘military geography’. The wars of the French Republic and the Napoleonic wars boosted the appearance of ‘military geography’. During the military operations, it was necessary to investigate the geographic factor’s role in general and that of the terrain in particular, as the wars were wildly spread from Paris to Warsaw and Moscow (and from Moscow to Paris). Neither geography nor geographic determinism, and even geopolitics, could solve this problem in their separate, local domain.

It can be stated that the military geography emerged on the cross point of geographic determinism, geopolitics, military sciences, and geography. It aimed to fill the gap resulting from interests’ clash of these sciences and conceptions.

Henri Jomini started military geography in Russia, a well-known military theorist of his time, general of the Swiss (in 1812, Russian) army. During the seven anti-French coalition wars, the military geopoliticians collected a great number of factual materials and right after Waterloo started heated debates over the subject and method of their science.

Colonel Yazikov became involved in this debate led by Jomini in Russia. Colonel Yazikov wrote and published in 1857 the textbook of Military Geography for the Russian Academy of General Staff. Russian military practice included

almost ongoing campaigns and battles on various battlefields that completely differed by their conditions. These facts predetermined the depth of Yazikov's explorations.

During the period when in Western Europe (mainly in Germany) the essence of the conceptions of military geography was confined to the creation of terrain directories for tactical and strategic use, Yazikov was the first to talk about the influence of not only topography on the military operations and military system of the state. He also mentioned the influence of other factors, such as population, economy, state structure, climate, etc.

In Russia, Yazikov's book became a subject of heated discussions on the place and role of military geography in the system of military sciences. The main motive of the discussion was the set of questions whether the subject of investigation of military geography is only the natural conditions (from the viewpoint of German authors), or it should be viewed within the frames of investigation of the young science must be included information from political and economic geography, philosophy and demography, as well as other social phenomena (from Yazikov's viewpoint). The result of the discussion was that the military theorists unanimously decided that the limitation of the subject of military geography by the study of physical-geographical factors does not correspond to the real demands of the war. It should involve the frame of sciences dealing with the study of economic, political, demographic, social, and other phenomena.

In 1845, colonel D. A. Milyutin was appointed Professor at the Russian Academy of General Staff and head of the Chair of Military Geography. Soon he published the booklet "Critical Studies of the Importance of Military Geography and Statistics". The brochure indicates the

main direction of development of the new branch of science. It is taken into consideration that the military geography, according to its definition, does not include the whole range of issues of geographic factors influencing on the state's military affairs and military policy. Therefore, the formation of new science that Milyutin called "military statistics" was a necessity. Currently, the science that meets Milyutin's requirements is called geostrategy. As geostrategy is the name of the military sphere of geopolitics, in fact, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>, Milyutin founded and developed the science that now is called geopolitics.

The main theses developed by Milyutin even preceded those set by Ratzel, Kjellén, and Mackinder half a century later.

The subjects "Military Geography" and "Military Statistics" developed by him compiled a quarter of the whole education process. The practical course of geodesy was included, and the corresponding specialization was founded.

Milyutin was the founder of the School of Russian Military Geopolitics.

"The human being fights on the surface of the earth, in the air and under the ground, so the geographical factor is the constant companion of war. It is impossible to imagine a war out of geography and also out of space." These are the words of A. E. Snesev - Milyutin's pupil, the Head of the Russian Academy of General Staff.

According to Snesev (2006), "the military geography studies the territory, forces and means of the state from the military point of view at the given historical moment" (p. 512). The peculiarity of Snesev's viewpoint is that he considers military geography as not just a unity of dry knowledge of some physical quantities (territory, boundaries, population, etc.), but as a breathing science. As Snesev (2006) wrote, "Since the population flexibility and its spirit are the touch-

stones of the success of the war nowadays, the study of population and its quantity from this point of view becomes urgent and mandatory for the military geopolitician, no matter how difficult it is. The statistical method cannot answer these questions sufficiently; besides, it is necessary to search for the solution in the wide range of data that include the history of a nation, its state, cults, customs, etc., all that can be combined under the phrase ‘national-spiritual character’. Our strategic analysis will refer to the relatively valuable geographical objects that are revealed not only by their geographical indicators but also by the combination of historical, economic, and other conditions” (p. 512).

During the researches in India, Snesev was planning to outline the new science - military geography, which differs from the classic geography with its complex nature. A military geopolitician is the unity of physical geopolitician (relief and climate of the terrain, water resources, and minerals, fauna, etc.), social-economic geopolitician (industry, agriculture, human potential, demographic issues, transport opportunities, etc.), sociologist, ethnographer, and intelligent military specialist. Military geography must be able to answer four main questions:

- description of the terrain,
- description of the population,
- means of warfare (military-economic potential, its level, and connection with the international economy),
- Armed forces (number, types of weapons, national peculiarities of the troops, fortress structures and conditions, roads of strategic importance, river crossings, etc.).

Before Snesev, the spies of the General Staff of Russia were mainly investigating the first and the fourth questions. The coordination of the materials through military analysis prism

for one person or even for a small group of people is a rather difficult issue. It is a job for a whole team, and the main disadvantage is the weak combination of the mentioned sections. However, Snesev successfully corrected the mistakes, as he had several professions - wide profile specialist in geography, mathematician, linguist (he knew many languages - English, French, German, Farsi, Pashto, etc.), member of military personnel, who passed professional training of military specialists at the General Staff Academy.

#### Socio-Strategic Significance of Military Geography and Its Place Among the Geographical Sciences

Military geography (among the founders of which was Snesev), as an independent subject, later became one of the main activity spheres for the reconnaissance of many countries all over the world.

The history shows many examples, when geography stands on one of the first places among the sciences, solving the issues of significant importance for the state. From the times of Peter the Great, the geopoliticians realized such explorations as comprehensive descriptions of Russia’s regions that included many different data on nature, population, economy.

The renowned explorer, member of Russian Geographic Society N. M. Przhevalsky and his many colleague geographers, the officers of the General Staff of Russia, were realizing not only the popular description of the places they visited, but also carried out significant comprehensive analytical explorations.

In the article “Geography and War” published in the journal “Science and Life (Nauka i zhizn’, in Russian)” (N 11-12) in 1942, A. E.

Fersman, the vice-president of USSR NA, mentioned that geography, which was considered to be a descriptive science, nowadays among the fundamental sciences, became a leading force in solving the most critical problems of the world conflicts. Explaining the reasons, he mentions, "...geography is not a science about separate facts of the surrounding world. Geography is a science about deep interrelations of links, existing in nature between social phenomena and the human beings engaged in it" (Fersman, 1942).

The given examples refer to the time when the Soviet Union was facing not ecological, but military-political issues. It should be stated that geography fulfilled its leading role in solving these issues with honour.

During the Great Patriotic War, the Geographical Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences was involved in the Red Army Geological-Geographical Support Commission's activity. Since 1942 July, the scientists of the Institute were compiling the military-geographical descriptions of the terrain of future battles from the Volga to Berlin. This team, realizing the job for the staff of engineering forces, consisted of different specialists headed and coordinated by the geographer, future director of the Institute, Academician I. P. Gerasimov. The fact that the Institute of Geography was marked as a strategic object for bombing on German pilots' maps could not evidence the practical importance of geopoliticians' work.

In the years of the Great Patriotic War, as a result of the calculations and recommendations of G. K. Tushinski, the Professor of Moscow State University, Department of Geography, the avalanches were falling on the German mountain-infantry divisions. Tushinski was also involved in organizing the prevention of avalanches' fall on the military roads. The Soviet forces were

moving by safe slopes following the routes marked by him.

The Professor of Moscow University K. K. Markov was engaged in the works of the engineering forces of Karelian front staff (1944 July-August). He developed the course "Military Geography" for Frunze Military Academy, and in 1944 he was awarded the title of Professor of the Academy.

During the post-war years, the Academician I. P. Gerasimov included the term 'constructive geography' in the terminology of natural sciences. By this step, he underlined the importance of geography in the solution of military and many other national, economic issues. Today, it became impossible to solve many problems in the modern constantly changing world without the participation of geography.

It is worth to mention the names of the following American authors: John M. Collins, Eugene J. Palka, Francis A. Galgano, Harold A. Winters, etc.

John M. Collins' book "Military Geography for Professionals and the Public" was published in 1998 by the USA National Defence University Press, in Washington. The author joined the American army in 1942 and finished the military service with the rank of colonel in 1972. During his military service, he was in Europe, Korea, and Vietnam. In 1951, he received a Master's Degree in Geography from Clark University, Massachusetts. He has been a leading national defence specialist at the Library of Congress for 24 years.

The special course "Political and Military Geography" was taught in many military universities during the Soviet period, but unfortunately, this course is not taught any more or is just presented in a shortened version.

## Conclusion

In the frames of social-philosophical studies, the joint analysis of the military geography from a military-political perspective has great importance, especially in providing a serious worldview basis for expanding the outlook and developing unique qualities of thinking and judgment, that is essential in the process of building and developing the comprehensive, systematic knowledge, skills and capabilities of the junior and senior commanders' staff. Besides, it provides an opportunity to realise a comprehensive, global analysis of the existing realities and challenges, revealing a number of hidden motives of the subjects of international politics, our near and far neighbours. The deep natural-, social- and military-geographical knowledge can show our society, particularly the young generation, the complicated system of relations the Republic of Armenia is engaged in and will help find the worthy place and role of the Homeland received independence in this kind of complicated relations.

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