

A REVIEW OF WAR AND PEACE LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT: The paper contains a short review of the contemporary trends of research in the geopolitics of war and peace. Starting from the emphasis placed on such research in the inaugural issue of 'Political Geography Quarterly' (1982), the paper discusses in outline the significance of geographical factors in the occurrence of war and the strategies of war-avoidance. Within the larger framework of the agenda for research on 'peaceful co-existence and the realization of some elements of detente,' areas of study with a geographical perspective, having a bearing on peace, particularly in the third world countries are also suggested.

National security and its associated aspects, war and peace studies, fall under the distinct sub-sections of the future of nation-states, geostrategic studies and power analysis in political geography. It also includes the factors that determine the pattern of internal and external political geography of the individual states. It relies heavily on history to provide essential background to the problems, while political economy provides suitable methods to modify the approaches to the needs of the specific location. But, it essentially leans on its parent discipline — geography (to study the relationship and interaction between man and his environment) — for framework for analysis. Thus, with its traditions behind it, political geography can contribute significantly towards the understanding and relevance of the present theme in the contemporary global context.

Political Geography Quarterly in its inaugural issue in 1982 dealt with this aspect at length. The editorial board, while emphasising the necessity of such studies by geographers particularly by

political geographers, pieced together several research agendas that were related to national security, and war and peace studies, that came within the purview of political geography. The concluding remarks of the editorial board, highlighted the main issues and directed the attention of the practitioners to them. Accordingly, the Quarterly indicated the pattern of research. These were identified in stages.

This new thrust in political geography, after the end of the Second World War, revived geostrategic studies and reinforced the need for reviewing the study of the state systems in a more concrete manner. However, in passing, I will make some remarks towards a better understanding of nation-states, and the varying nature and pattern of boundaries as well as their strategic implications in the contemporary world order. I believe that political geography has its own identity. Its relevance lies in its scope and the ability of its practitioners to provide fruitful agenda for research, as is clearly evident from the fact that all states, at the international level are

accorded formal equality despite widely, varying natural power resources. Their underlying power capabilities establish no presumptive differentiations with regard to certain specific rights, particularly as a sole legitimate authority within a geographic area. But, the present international system is characterised by distinct differentiation of power capabilities between large and small states. The small states as a result have consistently emphasised regime restructuring as their foreign policy strategy to offer them a form of control which their limited resources would not permit.

The developing countries are further inhibited by the rigidity and weakness of domestic economic and political structures. Generally, the third world countries are dominated by agriculture and primary sectors with low levels of factor mobility. Vulnerability to external change exists in the weak political systems. Lack of manipulation of resources increases the impact of pressures emanating from the global environment. A viable international regime can control the external fluctuations or provide adequate resources to compensate for deleterious systemic changes.

In addition to the above, Post World War II International Organisation offered substantial alternatives. These organisations offered opportunities for the Third World programme to be feasible and effective. Thus, the Third World openly endorsed views and liberalism and the emergent dependences forged the South into a unified block.

The studies on such themes have indicated the significance and relevance of geographical factors; but, geographers, somehow, have not paid the necessary attention to the explaining of these factors. In any case, geographers particularly political geographers are rarely

heard in the general forum of social scientists or by administrators and politicians. This is evident from the review of contributions made in inter-disciplinary journals like the Journal of Conflict Resolution and the Journal of Peace Research, to mention only a few. These journals indicate the extremely small contribution of geographers. In addition, the term Geopolitics was also revived after being out of use in the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's. Today, it has been brought into use to denote general ideas about the international politics minus their specific geographical context. Marie-France Geraud and Peter Jay led this revival of interest.

In this writeup, I want to emphasize the relevance of geographical factors towards understanding the occurrences of war and the strategies of war avoidance. In the course of this effort, I will attempt to suggest the possible directions (that are implicit in such exercises) that can be subjected to geographical research and analysis. Towards this, the present effort, hopefully will pave the way for a better grasp of research priorities in a field where geography has a diverse and disputed history.

On Understanding War

War-Peace studies have made significant strides in the last few decades, particularly in the collection of data, hypotheses, and so on. This data provided for precise comparison of instances/cases over time and space. Thus opening up field for theory formulations and model-building. These efforts limited the possibilities of easy generalisations that could not be contradicted on a factual base. Scholars like Singers, Russel, Wright, Richardson, Sorokin among others, contributed towards generating a large number of interpretative reports that

brought to a fruition, a tradition of war peace studies in the West.

Problem regarding the definition of war and peace remain undefined and unresolved; but, I will attempt only to explain the nature of research findings and geographical relevance in this context. Singers' study revealed that basic geostrategic factors like location and strength of states were important considerations. Yet, these aspects despite his persuasive arguments are, contrary to domestic factors, of lesser scale, and appear to have negligible effect in accounting for the war proneness of the individual countries.

Again keeping in view the major global trends today, the prospects of peace and development is precariously balanced. From 1945 to 1985, there were nearly 150 conflicts in 90 countries, i.e. average number of wars on any given day was about 12. The most outstanding characteristics was that only about 5% of the total, took place in Europe and the remaining in the Third World Countries. Nearly 80% of the wars was anti-regime with external assistance while the traditional war across the international border involved two or more countries. The most important example of such wars was the one between Iran-Iraq which started in 1979 and is still continuing. Yet, this did not mean that the wars were confined within the states themselves. There were several evidences of intervention of the First and the Second World. However, the most prominent one was the intervention by the Third world in wars within the Third World.

Besides these, given the prevalence of deep class cleavages and differences all over the world, given the ratio of national entities to state (roughly 1500-to-150) and given the tremendous inputs and

scientific and technological talents, the prospects and the future are not good. This is basically connected with the development issues. This is inspite of the significant increase in the world food production and world manufacturing productions, in services and in trade (all these have shown and increase between 5 to 10 percent). There is a general worsening (deterioration) of living standards of many populations particularly in poor to poorest countries where it ranges from one-third to one-half of the population. Moreover, the gap between the rich and poor countries continues to increase and widen as do the differences between the rich and poor in the poor countries. This presupposes a close interaction where the elites in the poor countries (Bureaucrats capitalists,) and intellectuals, those working for the capitalists or working for themselves have almost the same standard of living as those in the rich countries.

Again when the poor countries or Third World is undergoing a modernization process, it is implied that there is a distinct effort to create institutions that work within the inter-governmental and non-governmental frameworks. These also participate in international spheres as well as exchange ideas and image. This then clearly suggests that the level of scientific and technological development and the transfer of technology are important aspects where understanding will go a longway in explaining the situations. Moreover, these have significant influences and implications on the patterns of

- a) Culture levels and reasons
- b) Social levels and reasons
- c) Geographic levels and reasons
- d) Political levels and reasons

- e) Economic levels and seasons
- f) Military levels and reasons

These levels and reasons will undoubtedly help to analyse

- i) the process of homogenization
- ii) the process of interaction and interdependence
- iii) activation of social forces through the transfer and scale of technologies

These aspects were also compared with diversity of the ranks of/in a country on materials and other related capabilities, or regime types, or traditional geographical interests in location — strength of states and so on. Behavioural and analytical responses alongwith interaction patterns were also considered to lead towards war situations or were conducive to it, e.g. arms race and trade pattern. These are often neglected areas of geographical research.

In fact, a geographical perspective of an arms race will suggest specific questions like, whether particular combination of countries enter an arms race on account of their position in the ecology of interstate systems? or on account of their trade pattern? Or it is an expression of the rivalry of bigger neighbours. As far as the trade pattern and the systems are concerned, it will be worthwhile to identify the extent to which the countries can deviate from their given political orientation and preferences for different types of countries for different purposes. (This should not lead to strain or possible adverse impact on the domestic political milieu of the state). If such strains develop, it will be interesting to identify the circumstances that lead the way.

Wallensteen attempted to identify and relate the characteristics of the interstate systems as well as the frequency of war between them. Incompatibilities in the form of their respective basic characteristics, i.e., territorial claims, pursued military positions, economic growth trends and principles of legitimacy of governments, were perceived to lead towards confrontation and war between states. Wallensteen labeled these conditions as Geopolitik, Kapital politik and Ideal-politik. He concluded that ideological differences between countries are important factors that lead to war. In other words, relative strength of states was an indicator of war.

Wallensteen also introduced periodisation of the interstate systems. It was essentially a European-centred system for the nineteenth century that opened up to the rest of the World by recognising the U.S.A. and Japan, at the turn of the century, as powers of importance. This transitional system came to an end after the Second World War and was replaced by the institution of the global system dominated by the two superpowers. The number of wars increased from stage to stage and was maximum in the transitional system and decreased in the global system.

Again, a number of studies have also identified the importance of geographical factors in the explanation of wars. Russett found that 26% of all wars between 1945-65, were between neighbours and 63% of all warring parties shared boundaries. This did not mean that border disputes were the causes of war or that proximity was not a cause of war; instead, it made nations salient to each other and provided issues over which they confronted (if all capabilities were low) and with an opportunity, to have

their own power felt on each other's territory.

Spatial ordering of salience in degrees for different countries can also be taken up as an agenda for research by geographers. This is because the contribution of geographical propinquity to the explanation of war as a source of incompatible territorial claims which created opportunities to induct other incompatibilities to the forefront should be further clarified and explained. The involvement of possibilities of territorial claims can be taken as an example.

In addition, quite a number of studies have also highlighted the involvement of a number of differing parties within a single state system. This has become the most common form of violent conflict which has often attracted foreign intervention. This is common in the Third World Countries. The geographical distribution and the scale of involvement in these wars is not stable nor is their frequency over time and space. Predictable from 1945 onwards upto 1968, there was an increasing trend of these wars, but after 1968, it has shown a marked decline.

Of late, peaceful coexistence and realisation of some elements of detente have been accepted as an agenda for research. Yet, these studies did not explain the processes that were manifest in the Third World Countries. Despite this, it is possible from a geographical perspective to analyse the following:-

- i) What were the circumstances, that had relevance to the breakdown of the rule that held the monopoly of legitimate force?
- ii) In what niches of the interstate systems, do we condemn governments who are following genocide ?
- iii) Do territorial claims or specific pattern of spatially ordered resilience in terms of geopolitics operate in the Third World Countries? and how do these induce countries to interfere in the internal conflicts elsewhere ?
- iv) How did the extended version of the domino-theory adequately provide for the ways in which spatially ordered patterns of idealpolitik changed in the perception of decision-makers and how it affected the decisions?
- v) What were the circumstances that led to the recurrent tendency of war outbreaks to be concentrated in time and space?

Thus, these suggest that the distribution is isomorphous to sequences of innovation — diffusion also deserve a closer look by geographers.

Strategies of War Avoidance

It is clear that war avoidance need not necessarily be a goal of a government policy and that only it forms a part of the priorities of the state, and it competes with other aims and objectives primarily towards the maintenance of national independence. Under what conditions, then, do countries opt for non-aligned security policies or why do they get them imposed on themselves, be they of relatively high or low military postures. There is no doubt about the role of geography in the distribution of non and less — aligned countries.

States can also opt for collective forms of security policy. Apart from the world arrangements, any such setup, has specific internal and external functions for the countries involved in it. In such instances, the boundaries of the collective system become strategically important. Internally,

security may be achieved through subordination or creating a security community. Externally, war may be avoided by deterrence of detente policies.

In collective security arrangements where super powers participate, nuclear deterrence today has assumed new dimensions. All transgressions are consequentia. The boundaries, therefore, are a class by themselves. However, their precise delimitation is far from clear once treaty obligations are fulfilled and overcome.

Geographers can contribute effectively towards this practical task of design or evaluation of arms control, disarmament measures and construction of non-violent

defence-system. Current proposals for de-nuclearisation of zones can also be taken up for study. In addition, aspects like occupation and withdrawal of troops, dismantling of military installations, build-ups and so on are some of the important perspectives, with inherent risks, that can be taken as research agenda.

Besides these, geographers are aware that one can only very imperfectly separate the social systems from their territorial base. The question how territory should be taken into account when constructing a non-violent defence system or the non-violent part of the defence system is wide open.

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