GEOPOLITICAL AXES IN IOANNIS MAZIS'S SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PROGRAMME

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Abstract
Ioannis Mazis, Professor of Economic Geography and Geopolitics at the Faculty of Turkish Studies and Modern Asian Studies of the University of Athens, is the creator of Modern Systemic Geopolitical Analysis in international bibliography. The academic publications included in the volume Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae (Papazisi, Athens 2015) examine various aspects of International Relations. In this paper we examine the spatial geopolitical orientation of states/empires and the definition of main axes of geopolitical influence in Ioannis Mazis’s Scientific Research Programme, as this is manifested in his academic articles, published in English, French and Italian.

Keywords: Ioannis Mazis, geopolitical axis, Scientific Research Programme, Modern Systemic Geopolitical Analysis, vertical axis, rectilinear axis, power projection

JEL classification:

1. Introductory Remarks

Ioannis Th. Mazis is Professor of Economic Geography and Geopolitics at the Faculty of Turkish Studies and Modern Asian Studies, School of Economic and Political Sciences, of the University of Athens. Mazis, the doyen of the Greek Geopolitical School, is the creator of Modern Systemic Geopolitical Analysis in international bibliography, a coherent neo-positivist approach to the study of International Relations. The academic publications included in the recently published volume Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae (Papazisi, Athens 2015) examine various aspects of International Relations: International Relations Theory, Islamism, Turkish and Greek geopolitics and relations, power equilibrium in the Eastern Mediterranean, rivalries between state actors in the historical long run—with an emphasis on the region of Eastern Mediterranean, an area which constitutes the historical space of the Greek state.

Enrichment of geopolitical theory with comparative history is an instrumental improvement of the neo-positivist research Programme by regarding historical facts as case studies. The comparative approach in historiography rests on comparing historical data in order to identify structural similarities between identical fields of study and in order to deduce verifiable patterns and causal factors. The use of historical data is actually a comparison in


2 I.Th. Mazis, Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae varii generis linguis occidentalibus editae cum introduction cura Ioannis E. Kotoulas, Papazisi, Athènes 2015. All references thereafter concerning individual articles are made to this volume.

the dimension of time and an application of the logic of experiment –prevalent in the positive sciences– to the field of historiography.\(^4\)

In this paper and with the aid of comparative history and the notion of longue durée of a macro-historical outlook we shall examine two specific cases of theoretical formulations in Ioannis Mazis’s scientific work:

i. the spatial geopolitical orientation of states/empires

ii. the definition of main axes of geopolitical influence.

i. The spatial geopolitical orientation of states/empires

In his work, Mazis repeatedly emphasises the methodological distinction between the vertical and the horizontal orientation of the major geopolitical powers. Thus he distinguishes various zones of influence which are articulated based on the military, economic, political and cultural pylons. In the case of state actors wielding great influence in an extended spatial unity, the zones of influence can occur in more than one axis. This typological distinction made in Mazis’s work holds great hermeneutic value, as it can be applied not only in the field of current international relations, but it can also be used to interpret data of the historical past.

i.1 The horizontal geopolitical axis

In his essay The Principles of Geopolitics and the Case of the Greek Space in South-Eastern Mediterranean (Dissertatio V) the writer uses as his example the horizontal geopolitical orientation of Anglo-Saxon sea powers (British Empire/Great Britain and USA), which is opposed to the vertical geopolitical orientation of the continental powers (Germany in the years 1871-1945 and Russia/USSR during the Cold War): "On the contrary, the Anglo-Saxon theorists (Mahan, Mackinder, Spykman) developed a “horizontal” geopolitical conception in relation to the above mentioned “vertical” German one. The Anglo-Saxon analysts of Geopolitics laid emphasis on the naval powers and on the so-called “base of operations” which are localized on the so-called “ring of underdevelopment” and on the “Australian ring of Development”. Emphasis on these notions was crucial for the capability of the Naval Powers (USA, Britain, W. Europe) to exert counterbalancing tendencies against the geopolitical block of Eurasia (Heartland according to Mackinder), namely against the geographical zone comprising the unified Germany and the former Eastern Bloc."

The horizontal geopolitical orientation of the state actor of the British Empire/Great Britain/United Kingdom and of Anglo-Saxon interests in general has been analyzed by Mazis in several of his publications.\(^6\) The most comprehensive presentation and definition of the said geopolitical axis is found in his essay Greece’s New Defence Doctrine: A Framework Proposal (Dissertatio XXI): "i. An horizontal zone of Anglo-Saxon geopolitical influence, between the 36th and the 30th parallel, which is defined by points of established Anglo-Saxon strategic power, in the form of military facilities such as:

- (1) The pre-existing flight prohibition zones, in Northern and Southern Iraq (above the 36th and below the 32nd parallel, respectively), the memory of which is nowadays quite revealing when considering the aims of the Anglo-Saxon, but also of the French, factors in the region.
- (2) The American-Turkish base of Lefkoniko in the occupied Northern part of Cyprus […]
- (3) The British military bases in Dekelia and Akrotiri, located in the free Southern part of Cyprus.
- (4) The US and NATO military bases in Crete.


\(^5\) I.Th. Mazis, Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae, op.cit., 140.

(5) Malta; and
(6) The British military bases in Gibraltar.

This Anglo-American zone of geopolitical influence, which divides the Mediterranean basin into a Northern and a Southern part, can exercise strategic control at a nuclear-war level, as well as at an electronic-warfare and electronic intelligence level, within a region developing from the zone of Maghreb and up to the zone of Crimea, in terms of nuclear ballistic defence. Also, it can complement the services of the American-British universal Echelon network. [...] These zones are characterized by the transport of hydrocarbons and are fully controlled by NATO and more in particular the Anglo-Saxon, defence mechanisms”.

Mazis's observations concerning the existence of a horizontal geopolitical axis in the Mediterranean Sea are confirmed by the foreign policy of the actor in control of this axis for a long period, i.e. of Great Britain. British foreign policy during the 19th and 20th centuries was based on effective control of the horizontal geopolitical axis linking the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through the Straits of Gibraltar, an axis leading to imperial dominion of the Indian Peninsula through the Middle East.

From a macro-historical point of view British geopolitical influence was initially developed with the North Atlantic as its focal point; the British victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 facilitated British domination of the North Sea and control of the sea routes towards the northern part of the American continent, thereby facilitating the Anglo-Saxon colonization of North America and the gradual subversion of the vast Spanish Empire in the New World. Thus the British geopolitical actor obtained a significant strategic depth of westward orientation; this strategic depth included the whole North Atlantic and the east coast of North America.7 Consolidation of this horizontal geopolitical axis of Anglo-Saxon interests in the region of the Mediterranean was attempted for the first time in the early 18th century through the occupation of the strategic focal point of the Straits of Gibraltar in 1704, an act ratified by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. The failure of the French military expedition in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801) and the British occupation of Malta (1814) solidified British strategic interests in the Mediterranean Sea. In the following decades the establishment of the Greek state (1830) and its final inclusion in the British zone of interests after 1862 led to control of the Aegean Sea and to the possibility of a British or British/Greek power projection towards the Black Sea.

The zone of Crimea –to which Mazis refers in the aforementioned passage as belonging to the horizontal geopolitical axis of Anglo-Saxon interests–, was a focal point of geopolitical tension in two distinct but parallel historical cases in the 19th and the 20th century: the Crimean War and the Western military intervention in Ukraine during the period 1918-1920. The Crimean War (October 1853-February 1856) signalled the successful collective effort of joint Anglo-French forces to avert the expansion of Russian influence in the Black Sea region and to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the latter being perceived as a containment factor regarding Russian geopolitical influence towards the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, where Russia presented itself as a protector of the Christian minority populations. The pro-Russian stance of the Greek state resulted in a military intervention by the Anglo-French forces and to the eviction of King Otto a few years later. From then onwards the Greek state, the only Western-type state in the Eastern Mediterranean and based on naval power, was part of the British zone of influence.

The military intervention of the Western allied powers in Ukraine during 1918-1920 was on the one hand (until 1918) actually a continuation of the war effort made by the Allies to preserve the Eastern Front against the German and Austro-Hungarian forces and on the other hand (after 1918) an attempt to contain the spread of the trans-state ideological current of Communism in Europe. Still, this intervention is related to the same Western geopolitical strategy of control over the horizontal geopolitical axis which links the Straits of Gibraltar

7 I.Th. Mazis, Dissertations academicae geopoliticae, op.cit., 422-3,
with the Allied-controlled Bosporus Straits and the shores of Ukraine, i.e. the southernmost part of spatial expansion of Russian influence.

The commitment of Greek military forces in the Western allied corps in 1919 was based on calculations made by the Greek side that it would gain Allied backing for its claims in the western part of Asia Minor, an area belonging to the historical Greek space and populated at that time by hundreds of thousands of Greeks. Still, this aspiration was not the only concern of the Greek side, as it is often thought in bibliography; Greek geopolitical planning actually upheld a much more ambitious plan which included the re-institution of Greek geopolitical influence in the Black Sea.\(^9\) Greek geopolitical influence in the Black Sea in the long historical run was manifested through the foundation of colonies which controlled the trade routes from the hinterland of the Dniester, Dnieper and Tanais (Don) rivers towards the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. This same geopolitical function continued in the Eastern Roman Empire—a state controlled by the Greek population—through the theme of Cherson (839-1204).\(^10\) After the dissolution of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453, Greek influence in this geographical area was of economic nature, as Greek merchants controlled trade flows connecting the Aegean and the Black Sea. Finally, the recent (2014) annexation of Crimea by Russia, a consequence of the diplomatic crisis between Russia and Ukraine, but also between Russia and the Western European powers, can be thought of as belonging to the same framework of geopolitical interpretation concerning the horizontal geopolitical axis ending in the upper part of the Black Sea.

### 1.2 The horizontal geopolitical axis

In his work, Mazis refers also to the existence of a vertical geopolitical axis, also of paramount importance. This is a rectilinear commercial axis connecting the port of Rotterdam in the North Sea—a major oil trade centre in the North Sea—with Skopje in FYROM and Port-Said in Egypt, the main centre of oil trade in the Mediterranean. This commercial axis is crucial for understanding the geopolitical structure of the Balkan Peninsula and of the Eastern Mediterranean. The axis is identified by Mazis in his essay *Greece’s New Defence Doctrine: A Framework Proposal* (Dissertatio XXI) as thus: "ii. A zone extending vertically in relation to zone (i) and joining these two points: (1) Port Said, in the Suez Canal (the transit point of around 40 percent of the crude oil quantities transported from the M. East to the markets of Northern and Western Europe and the corresponding transatlantic markets, through Gibraltar). (2) The port of Thessaloniki and its extension to the port of Rotterdam, the world’s biggest market for spot oil".\(^11\)

Mazis’s observations on the existence of a vertical geopolitical axis are verified if one observes the macro-historical tendencies and the spatial geopolitical orientation of Germany,

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\(^9\) GGS/DMH (ed.), *To elliniko ekstrateftiko soma stin Mesimvriini Rosia* [The Greek Expeditionary Corps in South Russia], Athens 1955.


\(^11\) I.Th. Mazis, Dissertations academicae geopoliticae, op.cit., 423. Cf. Mazis’s observations in The Principles of Geopolitics and the Case of the Greek Space in South-Eastern Mediterranean (Dissertatio V): "[…] if we draw a line starting from Amsterdam, the seaport of the free oil market of Rotterdam and ending at Port Said, the transit point of approximately 40% of oil of Middle East, this will be a straight line which crosses Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia –the fabrication of Holbrooke-Kosovo, Skopje, the middle foot of Khalkidhiki -which the Skopje maps present as part of the unredeemed Macedonia of the Aegean Sea- and Dodecanese. The distance on this straight line between Rotterdam-Skopje is about 1500 km, while the distance between Skopje-Port Said, on the same line, is approximately 1650 km; that is, the capital of this four-nation State lies in the middle of the commercial route connecting the most important oil-exporting point with the most important point of its free market" (Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae, op.cit., 142). See also in the same volume Geopolitical Analysis of the Commercial Sea Channel Dardanelles-Aegean Sea (Dissertatio VI), Analisi geopolitica del canale marittimo commerciale Dardanelli-Egeo (Dissertatio XII) and The Mediterranean Geopolitical Structure and the Matter of Resolving the Cyprus Issue in Accordance with the Annan Plan (Dissertatio XIX).
one of the fundamental continental powers of Europe. Already from the 19th century, German geopolitical orientation was based on central Europe as its starting point and the Eastern Mediterranean/Persian Gulf as its final point of power projection. In the 19th century Prussian foreign policy aspired to create a corridor of power projection from Prussia and through the German-controlled Austro-Hungarian Empire reaching the Ottoman Empire.

The Prussian field marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800-1891) organized the Ottoman army according to the Prussian model in 1836, after having been invited to do so by the Sultan (1808-1839) Mahmud II (1789-1839). Moltke was also military advisor during the Ottoman campaign against the Egyptian wāli (1805-1848) Muhammad Ali (1770-1849). German military bureaucracy realized the elevated strategic importance of an axis linking Berlin with the Ottoman Empire and especially with the region of Mesopotamia. After the German unification of 1871 and especially after the formulation in the 1890s of an imperialist structure which included the Middle East, many German scholars focused on German power projection towards Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The geographer and Orientalist Hugo Grothe (1869-1954) had identified the area of German geopolitical influence as lying between 34° and 41° eastern longitude and to the south between 36° and 39° latitude.

The proto-geopolitical formulations of Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922) are connected to the German notion of a vertical geopolitical axis, as this was manifested in WWI. Kjellén, a Swedish political scientist strongly influenced by the texts of the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), refers to a similar spatial organization of the German zone of interests during the early 20th century. In his work Kjellén identifies the geophysical data which according to his view dictated the vertical geopolitical orientation of the German state during WWI: "The southeastern orientation was the most suited for the fulfillment of the idea of Germany's territorial expansion, a fact indicated by geography itself. As long as the Slavic and Romanic walls surround Germany from the West and from the East and since it is impossible to expand towards the North over Scandinavia, the only exit of German advance was the southeastern one. Germany had to turn to the south in order to relieve itself from geographical pressure. This advance took on a world-wide significance […]".

In another part of his book Kjellén makes mention of an axis of German strategic interests which comprises as its focal points the port of Antwerp in the North Sea and the port of Basra in the Persian Gulf: "The incompatibility of English and German future plans is obvious from a geographical point of view. England cannot tolerate the Eastern German Programme. This is evident if one agrees with Jäckh (in his book Deutsch-türkische Waffenbrüderschaft, 1915) on identifying the motto Antwerpen-Basra as the essence of the German Programme, a Programme aiming against London and against Bombay at the same time".

This observation by Kjellén concerning the Antwerp-Basra axis coincides in a large part with Mazis's geopolitical notion of the rectilinear commercial axis linking Rotterdam-Port Said, as

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12 H. Graf von Moltke, Briefe über Zustände und Begebenheiten in der Türkei aus den Jahren 1835 bis 1839, Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1841.
15 Concerning Ratzel see I.Th. Mazis, O zotikos choros tou Freiderikou Ratzel [Freidrich Ratzel's Lebensraum], Herodotos, Athens 2014. See also in the volume Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae the essays Die Boden-Staat Relation in Friedrich Ratzels politisch-geographischer Lehre (Dissertatio XXXVII), Der Staat als Erscheinung des neuartigen sozialen Lebens in Friedrich Ratzels politisch-geographischer Analytik (Dissertatio XXXVIII) and Die Förderung der Idee eines interdisziplinären Beitrags zur geographischen analytischen Methode der Geopolitik vom Geographen Friedrich Ratzel (Dissertatio XLIV).
17 R. Kjellen, Ta aitia tou pagkosmiou polemou, op.cit..
mentioned above. The ports of the Low Countries in the North Sea function as a starting focal point for the German attempt to project its geopolitical power from the northern European space towards Egypt and the Persian Gulf.

**ii. The definition of main axes of geopolitical influence**

Adopting Mazzis’s observations as our hermeneutic model—as those were demonstrated above in point (i)—and using as a model our own observations concerning the British zone of vital interests, it is possible to distinguish the following zones of vital interests and to identify the geopolitical orientation of some of the major state actors during modern times:

1. *The American zone of vital interests*

   The American zone developed in the American continent according to a North-South axis for a period of a century, beginning with the Monroe Doctrine (1823) and culminating with the American military intervention (1917) in the European continent during WWI. After 1945 the American zone engulfed also the East-West axis, which was manifested through the Marshall Plan in Western Europe and cooperation with the Far East, i.e. the geographical complex of Japan and South Korea. It is interesting to note that both these geographical areas lie in the same latitude with the US and share similar geophysical qualities (Japan has often been compared to England concerning both its spatial juxtaposition towards a large continental area and its imperial polity). These tendencies of spatial organization of the international system contributed to the formulation of a broad geopolitical unity in the Northern Hemisphere under Anglo-Saxon American control, a unity interrupted by the Eurasian landmass, which was under Russian/Soviet control.

2. *The German zone of vital interests*

   The German zone was crystallized in the European continent after the political unification of various German polities in 1871 and the creation of the Second Reich. It followed a North-South axis extending from the North Sea to the Adriatic and from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, including also the allied Austro-Hungarian Empire, controlled by the German-Speaking Austrians. The Second Industrial Revolution in the late 19th century allowed Germany to rise prominently in power and to project its zone of vital interests to a greater area and through the territory of the Ottoman Empire till the Persian Gulf.

   At the same time the existence of German-speaking populations in Central and Eastern Europe—populations living in the territories of the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empire—created a second axis of German power projection, this time in the East-West direction. This axis was connected with the emission of population surplus of the German state and the colonization of Eastern Europe. This horizontal geopolitical orientation of the German state was maintained after 1918 and took on a radical form under the National-Socialist regime. During the period of the Third Reich, the end of German power projection to the east was considered to be the Ural Mountains, as the Russian Campaign (1941-5) demonstrated. During the post-war period the East-West axis was maintained, this time under the form of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990), a state allied with the Soviet/Russian actor, and after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc through extensive Russo-German collaboration during the last decades.

3. *The Russian zone of vital interests*

   The Russian zone evolved for the first time in the 16th century on the basis of an East-West axis, through the colonisation of the great geographical region of Siberia by the European Russian population. Millions of European settlers—mainly Russians and Ukrainians—spread throughout Siberia. It is estimated that during the period of 1840-1940 approximately 51 million of Slavic ethnic identity settlers colonized areas lying in the greater geophysical complex of Siberia and Central Asia widening the front of European expansion till the Pacific Ocean.\(^1\)

   The expansion of the Russian zone of vital interests according to an East-West axis was manifested in the temporary rule of the Russian state actor in the eastern part of Scandinavia,

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Finland (1809-1918), the Baltic countries (1940-1991) and in Eastern and Central Europe during the post-war period (1945-1989). This expansion was successful from a strategic point of view to a large degree, considering that the creation of the Eastern Bloc offered Soviet Union/Russia an extensive buffer zone covering the routes of military infiltration towards the Russian core, as the latter is unprotected from a geophysical point of view.

The expansion of the Russian zone of vital interests according to a North-South axis, manifested in the Black Sea region and in Central Asia, met with failure. This orientation is connected to the attempt of the continental power of Russia –dominant in the geographical complex of Eurasia- to obtain access to the warm Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The most characteristic manifestation of this failure to expand according to a North-South axis was the defeat of Soviet forces in the Afghanistan War (1979-1989).19

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