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Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

GIUSEPPE DE RUVO (ED.),

Storia e filosofia della geopolitica. Un'antologia

Carocci, Roma 2024, pp. 218



Geopolitics is a discipline that has been much discussed in recent years, perhaps too much and too often inappropriately, because its origin, development, different branches and interpretations, objectives and contours are not known. Geopolitics is a largely unknown science whose boundaries are blurred with those of international relations (with which it is often confused) or, at best, political science. This book, edited by Giuseppe De Ruvo, comes at a time when too many improvised geopolitical analysts speak of this discipline without any real knowledge of its method and purpose. *Storia e filosofia della geopolitica*, published by Carocci in the Studi Superiori series, offers a profound, complex and crystalline overview of geopolitics, and for this reason it must be welcomed.

A doctoral candidate in moral philosophy at the Vita-Salute San Raffaele Uni-

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versity, where he is a member of the European Centre for Social Ethics, De Ruvo is also a contributor to Italy's best-known geopolitical journal, *Limes - Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, edited by Lucio Caracciolo. And it is Caracciolo who has written the preface to the work, which describes the text as 'very useful for the first approach to geopolitics of the younger generations and of all those who want to penetrate this tool to refine and deepen the dynamics of power in which we are immersed' (p. 12). This remark is quite correct: the first approach to geopolitics can only be knowledge of its history, method and purpose. The book therefore sketches out, without undue interference, a path that winds its way through the discipline's classic authors, the direct heirs of political geography. After a long and unavoidable introduction, De Ruvo proposes translations of the main texts of the discipline, from Ratzel to Haushofer, from Mackinder to Kennan and Kissinger, finally arriving at the new dimensions in which power is exercised, from the spatial (in the sense of the universe) to the digital, to artificial intelligence.

De Ruvo entitled his introduction *Governing Chaos. Geopolitics as an idea of order*. In this 46-page scholarly essay, a very precise orientation, a clear direction, a solid speculative structure emerges. Here De Ruvo does not simply provide a historical framework for the texts that make up the anthology itself, nor does he limit himself to explaining the reason for the work. Rather, he presents a detailed and concise definition of geopolitics, or rather "the dialectical and humanistic analysis of power conflicts and the practice of ordering that seeks to contain chaos" (p. 48). De Ruvo arrives at a similar definition not without first tracing the history of the discipline, which, born in 1899 (or at least the term "geopolitics" dates back to that year), was deliberately forgotten in the post-war period because of its presumed conceptual proximity to Nazi strategic and speculative thought (spatial and geographical determinism, justification of militarism, absolution of expansionist and genocidal policies, etc.). In fact, the thought of Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), who made life in general a real struggle for space, influenced Karl Ernst Haushofer (1869-1946), founder of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (1924), who, speaking of the *Lebensraum* of a state as something to be conquered by every people, ended up having a certain influence on Adolf Hitler and his expansionist policy (nevertheless, De Ruvo does not fail to problematise Haushofer's relationship with Nazism).

In the Anglo-Saxon world, geopolitics had a different destiny: it was immediately seen as strategic thinking applied to the sea, aimed at containing possible rivals to British power, and had one of its most brilliant interpreters in Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947). Control of the water, Mackinder argued, was fundamental

to the management of world trade and thus to the guarantee of economic supremacy. Nevertheless, a possible political unity of the heartland, i.e. the Eurasian mass stretching from Vladivostok to Germany, could have done without maritime trade and thus challenged Great Britain - in this sense, after the defeat of Nazi Germany, Mackinder's fears extended to the Soviet Union. Haushofer, the founder of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (1924), who spoke of the *Lebensraum* of a state as something to be conquered by every people, ended up having a certain influence on Adolf Hitler and his expansionist policy (although De Ruvo does not fail to problematise Haushofer's relationship with Nazism).

But the Cold War, writes De Ruvo, appears as a moment of ideological rather than geopolitical confrontation, both because of the oblivion into which geopolitics fell after Nazism and because of the lack of valorisation of the geographical dimension in favour of an ideological distinction. And yet, in those years, geopolitics, which had disappeared from academic debate and even from the radar of public debate, was practised by two particularly influential American figures, George Frost Kennan (1904-2005) and Henry Kissinger (1923-2023). In a decisive move, both of them placed the human factor at the centre of the geopolitical method that was to come to define it, completely overshadowing a simple analysis of the spatial dimension. In short, the study of the psychology, anthropology and history of one's adversaries - first the Russians, then the Chinese, and so on for all those who confront us - becomes indispensable for the practice of timely, prudent and considered diplomacy. The goal is no longer victory but equilibrium, or rather order, a regulative ideal in the Kantian sense. In Kissinger's case, this goal is based on a true philosophy of history, modelled on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant (see his thesis of 1954).

After the end of the unipolar moment (1991-2001), and especially in the current phase of the redefinition of the world balance according to new hegemonic arrangements, it is becoming increasingly important to deal not so much with spatial determinisms or with ideologies that are no longer tenable today, but rather with the human factor, which Giuseppe De Ruvo defines as "all those historical, cultural, psychological and anthropological connotations that characterise the way a geopolitical community thinks and acts", which Giuseppe De Ruvo defines as "all those historical, cultural, psychological and anthropological connotations that characterise the way a geopolitical community thinks and perceives itself in the international arena and in history" (p. 38). With this book, the author contributes to the definition of geopolitics according to these guidelines, writing: "It is necessary

once again to rethink the conceptual categories of geopolitics and to include in the equation the irrational, incalculable and specifically human factors that drive the actions of the great powers” (p. 36). According to what he calls “humanistic geopolitics” (ibidem), De Ruvo argues that it is impossible to elevate any single aspect to the status of a supreme explanatory factor (e.g. the economy or the form of government), and suggests instead that one should always keep in mind the complexity, totality and depth (historical and symbolic) of any conflict (latent or effective). And indeed, he adds, “every military, geographical or economic consideration has a different meaning and significance depending on the historical depth, the geopolitical representations and the attitude of the community under consideration” (p. 46). Hence, geopolitics today is “a multifocal discipline that also pays attention to irrational and non-formalisable factors and avoids any determinism” (pp. 47-48).

More importantly, such a humanist geopolitics, writes De Ruvo, also referring to the new emerging spatialities (the digital and the celestial, to which the entire second part, entitled *Governing the ungovernable: sea, economy, space, network, artificial intelligence*, is dedicated), must tend towards world order - which can even be expressed in conflicts, as long as the two or more antagonists understand and know each other intimately; otherwise, the international arena is transformed into an aggregate of silent actors who intend to blindly overwhelm each other. This is, tragically, the situation today. In short, starting from a historical and conceptual tracing of geopolitics, Giuseppe De Ruvo sketches the outlines of a discipline that has nothing to do with geographical determinism or with a supposedly rigid and immutable popular spirit, as one might even be tempted to think. Geopolitical forecasting is always uncertain, but it is linked to eminently humanistic factors (the history, myths, symbols, hopes, psychology of a given people) - factors that “can no longer be ignored by strategic thinking” (p. 163) and that defy any mathematical modelling, as Andrew W. Marshall recognised when, in order to better understand the Russian soul, he moved from the study of formulae derived from game theory to the reading of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky (see p. 52).

The *History and Philosophy of Geopolitics* is therefore an important and valuable work, far removed from the various instant books or superficial texts whose sole purpose is to monetise a popular subject. “[G]eopolitics is a discipline that, faced with the possibility of chaos, must try to *introduce order*” (p. 163). Well, De Ruvo has also tried to bring order to the very idea, identity and methods of geopolitics.

GIACOMO MARIA ARRIGO



William Balfour Ker (1877-1918), *Knights of Columbus*, 1917 / Poster showing a priest looking heavenward and raising a crucifix, blessing kneeling soldiers. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-10131
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