

Šárka Waisová et al.

*Atlas mezinárodních vztahů. Prostor
a politika po skončení studené války.*

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International relations in the period after the end of the Cold War went through many changes so that orientation in the complex processes and in the dynamic development of international activities has become increasingly difficult. The Atlas of Interpretation of International Relations, published this year by a team of authors from the Western Bohemian university in Pilsen, is therefore a great contribution to this field and it will certainly be appreciated by a wide readership in the Czech Republic. Books of this kind have so far been absent from the Czech book market because territorial and geographical aspects of (international) politics have unfortunately been rather ignored in this country. The team of specialists, headed by Šárka Waisová, decided to contribute to an improvement in this situation by 'visualizing some major processes taking place in the contemporary international system and think about the transformation of the relations between

space, policy, economy, culture, and security after the termination of the bipolar confrontation' (pp. 12).

It should be emphasized that this is the first attempt at a complex presentation and transfer onto a map of the principal phenomena that influence and co-produce the present-day form of international relations. The authors know of the pitfalls faced by the visualization of the relations between politics and space in the form of a map. It is mainly the static character of the map and its dependence on territorialisation in the form of sovereign states that continue to represent the principal territorial units with clearly defined boundaries. The fact that a map, and in particular a political map, cannot register the dynamic character of each process and register the non-state agents, is, however, a limitation that is hard to overcome. This deficiency is at least partly compensated for by the accompanying text attached to each map

and explaining in some detail the particular phenomenon and its impact on international politics.

The book is comprised of 25 short chapters (from two to eight pages). Each deals with a specific problem, which is visualized on the map or presented in more specific terms by means of graphs and tables. The order of the chapters is more or less accidental, though in some places a sort of logical procedure is to be detected. The clarity of the atlas, however, does not suffer by this absence of a logical sequence. The first chapter introduces the reader to the methodology that was used in this atlas and provides some fundamental information from the theory of mathematical cartography. The next part contains an analysis of the phenomenon of borders and frontiers (including the border conflicts), of geographical aspects of the state, and of the information value of the political map of the world, with specialization to the African continent. Of great interest is Chapter 6 pointing out the subjective perception and the manner of 'reading the map', depending on the cartographical imaging, the scale, symbols and colours used, the placing of the centre of the map and its orientation, etc. This fact naturally makes each map a powerful instrument, which in the past was often exploited for 'manipulation with man's idea of the relation between space, security and politics' (pp. 40), and thus makes doubtful the role of geography as a neutral science.

Worth mentioning are also the chapters dealing with geographical aspects of the 'spheres of civilization', discussed by S. P. Huntington. Also included are an account of classical geopolitical conceptions of H. J. Mackinder, K. Haushofer, and S. B. Cohen,

and the latest trends in astropolitics. We can also read about the geopolitical importance of the seas and oceans, among which the Indian Ocean takes a special place, and in it the island of Diego Garcia as an example of one of the most strategic places in the world, both from the military viewpoint and from the aspect of foreign politics. Among the other phenomena and processes included in the atlas are the issues of migration and the refugees, the violation of human rights, the role of international organizations, armaments, natural disasters and the spread of epidemic diseases. The final chapters analyze economic factors affecting international politics in some vital way. Most important are the issues of poverty, debts, access to natural resources, (non) effectiveness of assistance to developing countries, etc. Of considerable informational value are also the structure of the creation of the GNP, the structure of employment of a population and the index of economic freedom, which registers the degree of corruption in the public sector, non-customs barriers to trade, the fiscal burden, regulatory elements in the economic and public spheres, etc.

The book achieves a high standard both in its contents and form. The only criticism relates to a minor inaccuracy in the translation of some names, e.g., Polisario, the movement demanding independence of the Western Sahara, is commonly translated as the 'Popular Front of Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Río de Oro' (pp. 9), MERCOSUR is 'Common South-American Market' or 'South American Common Market' (pp. 9), etc. The orientation in the atlas would be quicker if page numbers were also given in the list of pictures, graphs, tables and maps. From the

list of abbreviations, some abbreviations that were used are missing, e.g., ALADI, CEFTA, CENTO, LAFTA, SEATO, etc. Somewhat misleading are the data on Latin American integration groupings. Chapter 19 mentions the foundation of the South American Community of Nations (UNASUR) scheduled for the year 2007 (pp. 118). The founding declaration of this regional organization, which associates the member countries of the MERCOSUR and the Community of the Andes, was, however, already signed in 2004 at Cuzco in Peru. The text describing the border conflicts might mislead the reader into believing that the dispute between Algeria and the Saharawin Polisario takes the form of an armed conflict (pp. 29). So far, however, both sides stand united against Morocco. Violent controversies about delimitation could take place only if Western Sahara achieved independence. Disputable is also the claim that Turkey within the Cyprus conflict regards the northern part of the island as part of its state (pp. 30). Although the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is fully dependent on Turkey, both politically and economically, Turkey is the only country in the world that officially 'only' recognizes its existence and sovereignty. Finally, a few critical remarks on some maps. Of lower

information value is, e.g., the map presenting the typology of governmental forms in democratic countries, where one would expect coloured differentiation of the states with the parliamentary, semi-presidential and presidential regimes. In the majority of African and Asian countries, however, we are not told anything about their forms of government because they are included under the vague category of 'systems of democratic illusion, quite non-democratic systems, and totalitarian systems' (pp. 84). In the map of religions (pp. 62–63), Algeria is incorrectly presented as the only country where Islam is a state religion. There are of course many other countries with a state religion, and not only within Islam.

In spite of these reservations, the Atlas of International Relations is indisputably an outstanding feat and specialists and laymen alike will appreciate its quality and practical application. The book can be recommended to anyone who is interested in contemporary international events and wants to obtain the necessary and relevant information, which will make it possible for him to better understand the structure and operation of the international system and get an insight into its development and creation.