

Regional Peripherals in International Politics

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ABSTRACT: The periphery space of the regional system and its development vector have changed due to the bipolar world destruction. The importance of regional centers has grown. Regional centers interact with each other in contact zones passing from equilibrium to nonequilibrium condition. The state of peripheral contact zones and the processes occurring in them are a consequence of both their internal situation and external influence.

Keywords: regional peripherals, peripheral contact zone, regional centers, actors, subregions.

INTRODUCTION

The structure and configuration of the global social space was formed evolutionarily in the course of internal and external factors of interaction including human migration, economic and cultural processes, activity of potestary organizations and empires. As a result, relatively stable regional communities, such as Eurasia and Eastern and Southeastern Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and Europe have formed. These communities are supersophisticated self-organizing systems constituting structural units of a global self-organizing system. Like any super-complex entity, a large regional community has a center, a periphery zone and subregions. Accordingly, the system's center is formed by states which serve as centers of power and poles determining vectors of world and regional policy development. The periphery depends on world and regional centers of power, but the center depends on the periphery.

Regional communities at various historical stages became an object of research in works of the following national and foreign researchers: Zadokhin A., Gamayunov S., Uemov A., Urmantsev Yu., Larsen St., Arutyunova-Fidanyan V., Kubbel L., Zagorovsky B., Savvaitova M., Nizovsky A., Rostovtsev M., Yartsev S., Aksenti M., Ritvin N. (Zadokhin, 1995; Gomayunov, 1994; Uemov, 1968; Uemov, 1978; Urmantsev, 2009; Larsen, 1995; Arutyunova-Fidanyan, 1994; Kubbel, 1988; Zagorovsky, 1969; Savvaitova, 1993; Zadokhin & Nizovsky, 2000; Rostovtsev, 1900; Yartsev, 2016; Aksenti, 2017; Ritvin, 2017). It is also worth highlighting the works characterizing the processes occurring in the regional systems; the idea of the periphery in international relations; the system-wide formats of relations between the center and the periphery (Besson, 1991; Conniters, 1997; Huntinton, 1996). We consider it is important to identify the necessity to determine external influences, internal processes, interaction actors and objects influencing the place and the role of regional peripheries in international politics.

METHODS

To achieve the objectives of the study we used general-purpose (institutional, historical, systemic, comparative, behavioral) and empirical methods.

Results Obtained

In the bipolar period, a geographically structured distribution of peripheral territories concerned the main actors of world politics, the USSR and the USA, where each peripheral region fell under the influence of one or the other center of power. In the post-bipolar period, we can see a radical change in the role of peripheral territories and subregions playing both the part of shock absorbers in relations between the leading actors of world and regional politics and the function of “cordon sanitary” between civilizations. It gives rise to the restructuring of the periphery zones in east and west and their geopolitical orientation faces a situation of uncertainty.

In this regard, efforts should be made to reconsider the possible prospects of the post-bipolar world (Uemov, 1968; Uemov, 1978; Urmantsev, 2009). If previously the “center-periphery” relations were determined by their location “within a broader structural “map” of geopolitical influence” (Larsen, 1995), that is, the global bipolar world, then at present periphery countries can focus on the power centers located in different regional systems and participate in the political life of different states favoring their support or deriving benefits from their conflict of interests. Thus, the periphery is not yet integrated into the modern global management system. Moreover, it includes many active and passive, primary and secondary, systemic and non-systemic actors, both rational and irrational reasoning. Regional systems come in touch with their peripheries. This creates a special geosocial contact space or contact zone. The contact zone is multilayered in time and has a complex nature. On a subconscious level it preserves in the memory of several generations the nature of relations with other peoples.

In this space, there is an intersection/interaction of various cultural, ideological, social and political systems represented by certain states, religions, ethnic groups with their indigenous livelihoods. Due to the contacts, certain groups of the population living in the contact zone were consistently involved in realities of various state entities with the subsequent change of religion, language, or had a mutual impact on each other. The process was accompanied by an endless series of different kinds of conflicts. The specific conditions of the habitat have determined the formation of the population’s special psychology, behavioral philosophy and view of life (Arutyunova-Fidanyan, 1994; Kubbel, 1988). Somewhere, subconsciously population of the peripheral zones keep in memory the whole series of early conflicts as well as behavioral stereotypes. They actualize in situations of regional community restructuring, a complex state collapse or a global catastrophe. Without a second thought, the contact zone people become aware of their “Enemies” and, based on the behavioral stereotype that has been preserved in their memory, they know how to treat them. An example of such a case took place when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia collapsed and the villagers who lived together for a long time killed each other without hesitation or mercy.

Neighboring regional communities form special contact zones. Their complex and multidimensional space implies existence of multiple conflicts in this zone. When contact zones go from equilibrium to nonequilibrium reality they are filled with special tension, energy, new cultural and political meanings, values and strategies for survival and safety.

Peripherals in the system of regional international relations often play the role of either a defense line or the so-called “notch strip”, for example, on the southern borders of the Moscow principality (Zagorovsky, 1969). Between the two neighboring states and empires, they created a “cordon sanitaire” or a geopolitical buffer. So, for example, was the situation after the First World War, when the multinational empires of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires collapsed, and the Entente powers created Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as geopolitical buffers (Savvaitova, 1993; Zadohin & Nizovsky, 2000).

After World War II, the function of a “geopolitical buffer” was performed by Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and Poland. Their geopolitical role was to neutralize direct contacts between the two military-political alliances – NATO and the Warsaw Pact – and prevent aggressive actions. In the narrow sense, a “peripheral contact zone” is that part of the periphery space where interaction of civilizations and political systems is carried out most intensively. In this segment of the communicative space we can observe an initial direct contact which can trigger conflict over natural resources or readiness to cooperate, mutual recognition of “friend or foe”, fundamental disagreement or, on the contrary, mutual understanding.

Moreover, the contact zone is a space of both direct and indirect intercultural contacts where relations of a value order are established. In this sense, there is a psychological dimension that expresses awareness of the present position of some particular state and its population as well as their future existence. The areas of direct contacts between peoples and states on the periphery of large regions are heterogeneous. The lower level of contacts is limited by specific pragmatic goals – obtaining advantages in relation to their neighbor, another people, and the state. The space of this contact does not include all the variety of alternatives and possible compromises of real interests. As a result, not only the essence of their relations and conflict, but also the real internal and external forces forming the opposing side’s reactions remain hidden for the subjects of the contact zone.

A buffer zone on the regional communities’ periphery can appear spontaneously as a result of geopolitical processes and power balance between regional power centers, but it can also be created consciously by two or more states to avoid conflict among themselves. A review of strategies of continental empires and colonial powers suggests that the buffer zone is created consciously in those cases when it acts as an obstacle to the competitor’s influence expanding as well as territorial expansion bearing in mind different cultures and civilization. M. I. Rostovtsev, a famous researcher of the ancient world, defined “the role of Bosphorus kingdom in Roman politics as a buffer state between civilization and barbarism” (Rostovtsev, 1900; Yartsev, 2016). In the West, starting from the Crimean Peninsula, the role of the buffer was played by romanized Dacia (Aksenti, 2017). Later Khazar Empire and the Bulgarian Khanate became buffers for Byzantium (Ritvin, 2017).

The buffer nature of contact zones, their conjugation with two or more geopolitical and civilization systems determine two or more vectors of their development with an orientation towards a particular regional system or international relations actor. Specifically, it meant that certain groups of the population living in the contact zone were consistently included in certain state formations, converted from one religion or belief to another, assimilated with other cultures either of their own free will or other nations imposition. These changes were accompanied by an endless series of different conflicts.

The contact zone also has an important communication and information function. It provides interaction and development of both regional systems (subsystems) and the global system as a whole. The balance of group interests and existence in contact zones of a supragroup cross-border value system contributes to stability and productivity of international relations development. Any violation of this balance as well as destruction of the general system of value orientation for any reason leads to destabilization of one or more regional systems.

The Balkans are the contact zone of three regions: Eurasia, (Western) Europe and the Middle East. The contact zone space can be created by one, two or more states. Therefore, in the international political context the contact zone is a point of conjugation of the neighboring states interests, which stem from a balance of regional systems' interests. Thus, a violation of the balance of interests in the contact zone of two or more states can destroy the balance of interests in the regional system or in the neighboring regional systems. In addition, in the context of the increasing global interdependence of regions, peoples and countries it is becoming apparent that conflicts in contact zones of global communication and economic importance can aggravate contradictions at a geopolitical level.

An example is the repeatedly materializing conflict situation in the Middle East. Researchers believe that threats to the regional community integrity or the appearance of "not one of us" can lead to a crisis of regional identity (Besson, 1991). Contact zones often turn into places of destabilization of regional systems and interstate relations (Conniters, 1997). Due to the peculiarities of their cultural and historical formation and under certain socio-political and cultural shifts the old contradictions "friend-or-foe" become more sensitive. Moreover, the conflict of real interests, as a rule, is accompanied by a conflict of values of the respective population groups representing various ethnic and religious cultures (Huntington, 1996).

The geopolitical position of the contact zone territories could determine their subordination to different regional centers of power. So, the fate of the peoples living in the contact zone was often determined by regional and great powers. During the latter half of the twentieth century the political activity of these peoples has increased dramatically as they strived to determine their place in regional and world politics themselves. Now the problem of the conjugating regional systems is being solved to a large extent depending on the level of political processes organization in the periphery contact zone. It depends mainly on how the peoples and states representing the contact zone can productively respond to external challenges or use their geopolitical position in their own interests.

In consideration of the borderline nature of the periphery, the inhabiting groups can focus on centers of power located in different regional systems, participate in the political life of different states and make appropriate use of their support or contradictions in their own interests. On the periphery, contact zones stick to two types of orientation. The first one represents the orientation inward the space of large regions, the other tends outside. That is, we are talking about centripetal and centrifugal processes. It can be related to both the zone as a whole and to its parts. For example, the East Baltic contact zone of the large Eurasian region historically focuses on the European region, and the southwestern Transdnestrria-Carpathian region, which conjugates mainly with Moldova, is oriented outside and inside Eurasia. The orientation could be determined by historical, cultural, ethnic and religious contacts of a particular population of the contact zone with internal and external spaces. Moreover, there is always a political

orientation to certain power centers. All of the above gives the zone an international status, which is especially evident in a situation of political destabilization in a particular regional community.

In peripheral contact zones interlink “the most diverse in content and nature social ties, both material and spiritual, including economic, political, moral and legal ones, which lie beyond logical analysis, rational comprehension and their expression in a logically conceptual form. But there are also such contacts and relationships which are difficult to understand in rational forms” (Irhin, 2017). The conflict situation in the contact zone of the periphery is a particular socio-political phenomenon. On the subconscious level, ethnic groups keep in their mind historical grudges, unrealized opportunities and expectations, territorial disputes and clashes. Should the intraregional management center becomes weaker than an ethnic group, under the banner of nationalism, focuses on uncompromising revenge strategy and ignores its actual interests.

Contact zones exist in all regions of the world and each of them has its own specific character, determined by the peculiarities of its formation and historical evolution. They are interrelated with geopolitics and relationships built by states in olden days and in modern times. In general, neighboring states strive to maintain a stable situation in peripheral contact zones. But another practice existed as well. So, having certain geopolitical goals, a particular state could pursue a policy of destabilization in the contact zone.

The restructuring of the post-bipolar world destabilizes the geopolitical situation and causes centrifugal processes in the contact zone. International and inter-ethnic conflicts arise evolving a number of states. For example, this happened in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina) in the process of Yugoslavia’s collapse under bipolar period conditions when the country played the role of a geopolitical buffer between the military and political blocks under the USSR (the Warsaw Pact countries) and the United States of America (NATO countries). Nowadays politology and politicians are searching for answers to the post-bipolar world challenges due to changes occurring in the deterrent system, which includes actors and centers of power, their forces balance, growth of differentiation of the participants’ strategic cultures and communication problems. The survival strategies of peoples and states of the peripheral zones change respectfully (Uemov, 1968; Uemov, 1978; Urmantsev, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The role of those peripheral territories which were, in fact, the buffers in relations between the world leading actors and regional politics, as well as “cordon sanitary” between civilizations, has changed in the post-bipolar period. Due to the restructuring of peripheral zones in East and West, a situation of uncertainty arises in their geopolitical orientation. One half of the population of these zones hold onto the previous geopolitical and ideological orientation, while the other one chooses a new direction. In this context, it is necessary to understand the possible prospects of the post-bipolar world (Uemov, 1968; Uemov, 1978; Urmantsev, 2009). As a rule, the “center – periphery” relationship of a certain regional community is determined by their location “within the wider structural “map” of geopolitical influence” [6], that is, of the global world. And peoples and states of the periphery can focus on the power centers located in different regional systems, participate in the political life of different states and use their support or contradictions in their interests respectfully.

Findings

At present the periphery space is not integrated into the modern global management / organization system. Moreover, it includes many active and passive, primary and secondary, systemic and non-systemic actors both rational and irrational. All of these things create chaos. For the formation of a stable regional system, there should be a consistent impact on the political space of the periphery in order to fully satisfy requirements in existence and development.

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