

**GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY  
TOWARDS A HISTORICAL MATERIALIST  
FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS**

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of foreign policy has long been recognised as an important sub-field of International Relations (IR). In spite of recurrent criticisms, it remains so today. In fact, it arguably is undergoing some kind of revival – as e.g. testified by the launching of a new journal *Foreign Policy Analysis* in 2005 and the publication of several new textbooks as well as a forthcoming 4-volume anthology (Carlsnaes and Guzzini forthcoming 2011). Before this (limited) renaissance, the study of foreign policy within IR led a rather lacklustre existence, with a decreasing number of IR scholars identifying themselves as foreign policy analysts. What in the '50s and '60s had begun as a conscious attempt to develop 'middle-range theories' of the *process* of foreign policy-making and thus move beyond the more systemic focus of much IR on inter-state dynamics, was increasingly seen as being hampered by methodological inconsistencies (especially given the large number of contextual variables relevant from such a perspective, Hudson 2007: 27-30) and suffering from eclecticism (Carlsnaes 2002: 331; see also Smith 1987). For some this has sparked the need for better integrating the often micro-focus of foreign policy analysis with the more macro-focus of IR, and thus also return more explicitly to the latter's various 'grand theories (Smith et al 2008.; cf. Hudson 2007: ch. 6).

Conspicuously absent from these debates on *theories* of foreign policy are discussions of Marxist or historical materialist perspectives. Thus in the aforementioned anthology not a single contribution in over 1600 pages has been included that could be reasonably identified as historical materialist.<sup>2</sup> This absence is less the result of a conscious marginalisation on the part of the non-Marxist mainstream as a testimony to the fact that very few historical materialist IR scholars do 'foreign policy analysis', even if broadly defined. Most historical materialist scholars identify with the sub-field of **International Political Economy (IPE)** and do research on the larger structures and processes of global capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Although there is of course an impressive (and recently revived) (neo-)Marxist literature on (especially US

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of a larger project, undertaken with Naná de Graaff on post Cold War varieties of US imperialism (see De Graaff and Van Apeldoorn forthcoming), and specifically seeks to flesh out in some more detail the theoretical arguments underlying that project. I thank Naná for the many inspiring discussion we have had on the themes elaborated in this paper. Although the responsibility of this particular paper, and all its errors, is wholly mine it is thus part of what is very much a joint effort.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in a recent standard textbook (Smith et al 2008) we find chapters on the usual suspects of realism, liberalism and constructivism but no chapter on Marxism. In contrast, in most, at least European (UK) textbooks, Marxism, sometimes labelled, structuralism or radicalism is still amongst the main theoretical perspectives included in the discussion of IR theory.

<sup>3</sup> Next to the substantive affinity between Marxism and IPE we may also speculate that, given their holistic approach, many historical materialists would tend to see 'foreign policy analysis' (FPA) as not warranting any separate sub-field inasmuch as this would imply an abstracting from wider social structures. I agree but although this might explain why not many, if any, scholars within the historical materialist traditions identify themselves as within the field of FPA, the problem, I suggest, thus runs deeper in as much as beyond shunning the label there is not just that much historical materialist foreign policy around as to justify an inclusion in the aforementioned texts. Of course there is also simply a problem of numbers here. Since historical materialist scholars, even if broadly defined are still and are very likely to remain a small minority within the IR community they can hardly be expected to have a strong presence in all sub-fields.

imperialism, much of this is often of a more theoretical nature, with empirical references serving more as illustrations of more general and abstract arguments. We in any case find little in the way of systematic empirical analysis of concrete processes of foreign policy formation and their social and political determinants. This relative neglect of foreign policy as such persists in spite of a recent 'geopolitical turn' in which historical materialist scholars within IR have come to debate and analyse the (internal) relations between global capitalism on the one hand and geopolitics on the other (e.g., Teschke 2002; 2003, Callinicos 2007; Teschke and Lacher 2007, Rosenberg and Callinicos 2009; see also Van der Pijl 2006, 2007a, b).

Although very important in a theoretical sense, in as far as recent **historical materialist work on geopolitics** has also made substantive empirical contributions these **have largely been historical, offering no analysis of contemporary foreign policy.** More fundamentally, although we cannot make sense of foreign policy agency without such accounts of historical structures – which is why I will discuss a large part of this literature later on – structures themselves are indeterminate and therefore cannot fully account of actual foreign policy agency. There is thus a need to develop a conceptual and analytical framework that links structural-historical accounts with the analysis of concrete foreign policy practices. This paper represents a first (and still rather incomplete!) attempt to develop such a framework, and more generally an attempt to demonstrate the relevance of a historical materialist perspective for making sense of foreign policy (formation) of capitalist states within the contemporary global political economy.<sup>4</sup> Having been written out of a desire to fill this lacuna in the current theory development on foreign policy analysis I attempt to show how a historical materialist perspective is needed to reveal the social origins of foreign policy that otherwise remain hidden from view.

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<sup>4</sup> The framework this paper thus seeks to develop is indented to analyse foreign policy formation in (advanced) capitalist societies. This is not to say that none of what follows is relevant for the analysis of 'foreign policy practices' in pre-capitalist social formations, but in order to make it more generally applicable in this way would require a higher level of abstraction than is deemed desirable here (since I am primarily interested, like 'FPA' in the modern states-system). Of course, another question is which states in the contemporary global economy can be considered fully capitalist. For the purposes of this paper I would define the latter as those societies in which the capitalist class, that is, a class that owns and controls the means of production and on this basis extracts (and privately appropriates) surplus value out of wage labour, can be considered the ruling class: a class that is hegemonic vis-à-vis subordinate classes and whose hegemony within society is also expressed by and effectuated through a particular state form. In the capitalist state form, the rule of capital as a sovereign force is also reflected and inscribed into the political rule of the state. Given this general definition, we can certainly consider all 'developed' or 'core' states in the global political economy as capitalist (let us say all OECD countries). The question becomes more difficult when it comes to some developing states. Thus the question whether China, now having a flourishing capitalist class next to a still considerable state sector, can be considered a fully capitalist state-society complex, is an equally important as a difficult one, and cannot be answered within the scope of this paper. Yet, as with pre-capitalist social relations of past historical epochs, here too, I would submit, what follows below, would not be irrelevant for the analysis of Chinese foreign policy formation, which equally would have to start with an understanding of the dominant social forces and their relations within Chinese society and how they relate to the Chinese state. The concept of 'hegemonic projects' that I introduce below might equally be applicable though arguably in the case of China it should be much more understood as a *state (class) project*, rather than as a project of an autonomous bourgeoisie.

From within IR, historical materialism seeks to uncover how **the political relations between and across states, conceived** not as rational unitary actors but **as state-society complexes** (Cox 1981), **are internally related, within a contradictory totality, to the social relations of production.** Historical materialism is premised on the notion that production – involving the transformation (and exploitation) of nature - is the necessary starting point of social life, and **that production and power are fundamentally intertwined.** The task of **political economy is to analyse this co-constitution of power and production broadly conceived** (see Van Apeldoorn et al forthcoming; also Cox 1987). **Applying Marx's method of abstraction historical materialists see 'the political', including the international, even if ideologically and institutionally separated in capitalism (Wood 1995), as in their substance inextricably bound up with the way the 'economic', that is with the way the production, extraction and distribution of (surplus) value is organised in a society.** This is less determined by 'objective' forces of production as by historically 'constructed' social (property) relations that from the very beginning also implicate 'the political' and indeed the state. A focus on social relations (of production), implies in particular a focus on class, class conflict, and class strategy.

This paper is organised as follows. In the first section I will more clearly outline what I mean by foreign policy analysis, and in particular define its main *explanandum*, which for the purposes of this paper I take to be **geopolitical strategy**. In this section I will also argue, from a meta-theoretical perspective grounded in Critical Realism that any such analysis has to integrate both structure and agency. Having thus laid the groundwork I will then review some conventional approaches to explaining the formation of geopolitical strategies, in particular neo-realism and neo-classical realism. The second section then both seeks to build upon and offer a critique of recent historical materialist contributions to the theorisation of geopolitics, in particular in relation to global capitalism. This section will argue that although most of this literature is useful in understanding the structures that underlie capitalist imperialism and capitalist geopolitical strategy more generally, it is in fact of limited use in analysing foreign policy formation inasmuch as it tends to ignore the importance of agency, in particular class agency. Taking this as my key explanatory variable, the third and final section will lay out my own conceptual and analytical framework underpinning a historical materialist analysis of foreign policy.

## **OPENING THE BLACK BOX: FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND THE THEORISATION OF 'GRAND STRATEGY-MAKING'**

Foreign policy analysis has both a broader and a narrower meaning. The broader meaning just refers to it as a sub-field of IR defined by a particular object of study, that is, foreign policy. Defined thus we can find foreign policy analysts of all theoretical stripes, including for instance neo-realists (though with the notable exception of Waltz). In the second, more

restricted meaning, Foreign Policy Analysis, written with capital letters and usually abbreviated to FPA, implies though not necessarily a particular theory something of a shared approach, premised above all on the assumption that in order to understand the formation of foreign policy we need to go beyond the neo-realist unitary actor model and break open the black box of the national state.<sup>5</sup> This paper refers to foreign policy analysis in both senses and although agreeing with Smith *et al* (2008: 3) who write in a recent textbook on foreign policy that it 'ought not to be regarded as an independent intellectual domain' (nor from a historical materialist perspective should for instance International Relations be taken to be such!), I do agree that we need to break open the black box.

However, unlike most FPA, I will argue from a historical materialist perspective that once broken open the box will under deeper examination reveal to contain more than governmental leaders, bureaucrats, and, less frequently, pluralistically conceived interests groups and political opinion, to name a few of the 'domestic' actors / variables that FPA usually focuses upon (e.g., Breuning 2007; Hudson 2007). Although breaking open the black box, most FPA does not probe that deep and is usually not very strong in theorising and empirically analysing how the state is related and embedded in society. Implicitly, however, inasmuch as the role of 'societal groups' (Hudson 2005: 19) is analysed, this is premised on a pluralist conception of politics. Instead, from a historical materialist perspective the point of departure is that capitalist societies are class societies constituted by deeply asymmetrical social (power) relations. From this perspective we thus seek to analyse how different concrete forms of political agency are rooted in the agency of social forces and their underlying social structures, in particular class agency and class relations.

In terms of its *explanandum* the field of FPA has been dominated by studies focused on individual or group foreign policy *decision-making* (Hudson 2005; 2007; Snyder, Brook and Sapin 2002), that is, on explaining why individual or group *x* took particular decision *y*, for instance within the context of a particular foreign policy crisis (Allison 1971). As such FPA has been defined as an 'actor-oriented' as well as an 'actor-specific' approach (Hudson 2005). Rather than focussing on (a series of) individual decisions taken by individual actors, the kind of foreign policy that this paper argues can be fruitfully analysed from a historical materialist perspective is at a much higher level of generality and concerns the overall foreign policy or geopolitical *strategy* (which arguably constitutes the context in which those individual, single decisions are taken). More specifically I am interested in what much US literature calls 'grand strategy', which should be taken as the 'highest' level of foreign policy representing a comprehensive vision of the state's critical 'interests' and how best to promote them, and thus about the state's role and position in the world (Layne 2006: 13). It

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<sup>5</sup> The second meaning – FPA – is sometimes even more narrowly identified with some outdated 'middle range theories' that developed the 50s, 60s and early 70s. Thus in their introduction to a key textbook on foreign policy, Smith *et al* (2008: 3-4) identify FPA with respectively a focus on foreign policy decision-making (e.g. Allison 1971); political psychology, and a theory of comparative foreign policy (see also Hudson 2007, 2008). In my view this is an overly restrictive definition of FPA, and it is more useful to see it as sub-field sharing a commitment to go beyond what neo-realist call systemic variables and analyse one way or the other what is going on inside the state in order to make sense of foreign policy formation.

is thus about key foreign policy objectives and the means to achieve them. Although arguably not all states at all times can be seen as pursuing such a grand strategy, I submit that much foreign policy-making, also of so-called minor states, is to a significant extent informed by a set of more general (if sometimes only tacit) notions of the so-called 'national interest' and how to best pursue it. In this paper, taking a historical materialist perspective that emphasises the centrality of class agency I argue moreover that such a strategy within contemporary capitalist states is often critically shaped, in fact, must be seen as part of, an even more comprehensive capitalist class strategy. Such a general geopolitical (and class) strategy is of course the product of human agency – involving many specific human beings – yet cannot be reduced to a series of decision taken by individual actors (cf. Hudson 2007: 6). This then brings us to the important meta-theoretical problem of how to theorise the relationship between structure and agency in foreign policy analysis (cf. Carlsnaes 1992).

A point of departure for much foreign policy analysis is not only that as international structures ('systemic variables') alone do not fully explain foreign policy we need to take domestic structures into account as well, but also that at this 'level' we must analyse the actual agency of relevant actors in the policy formation process. Indeed, it could be argued that there is no point in engaging in foreign policy *analysis* if foreign policy was structurally determined (it would suffice to describe its structural determinants). Seeking to develop a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis – rather than let us say international relations in general – is thus to be taken as a recognition of the importance of agency, not just as a 'dependent variable', but as a medium through which extant geopolitical relations are reproduced or transformed. Inasmuch as we focus on foreign policy at the higher 'level' of the pursuit of general geopolitical strategy, the point of departure is that we need to analyse the *process* through which this strategy is constructed and pursued (see also Hudson 2007: 17).

Although like much FPA, the approach developed in this paper thus rejects the (quasi-) structuralism of some IR theorising, and seeks to take agency seriously, it is always stressed that we need to integrate this with an account of (social) structures in which human agents are embedded and that shape who they are and what they do. The proposed link to class agency, not only already implies the importance of collective rather than mere individual agency, but also that of wider social structures. For any social actor, structures - although human-made - at any given moment in time are always already given, they are transmitted from the past in Marx's famous phrase. Agency then is never pre-social but always operating within the bounds of given social structures while the latter are at the same time dependent upon (individual, collective, strategic or less strategic) human agency for their reproduction or transformation (Bhaskar 1979).

As indicated, FPA as a field of studies is above all the domain of those who find so-called systemic theories of international politics – mainly neo-realism and neo-liberalism – wanting and unable to account for the actual diachronic and geographical variation in actual foreign policy (-making). Below, however, I will first briefly look at neo-realism *as* a theory of

foreign policy (behaviour) and conclude that its inability to explain this variation inheres in its (meta-)theoretical assumptions, above all the way they abstract 'the state' from society. After that, and without pretending to provide anything like a comprehensive overview of foreign policy theories, I will review several attempts to go beyond this conception, focusing in particular on various attempt to theorise 'grand strategy' formation. I will conclude that all of these approaches fail to come up with any theorisation of the *social* origins of state power. [For lack of time and space I this version only discuss neo-classical realism, for a later draft I need to decide what to add, e.g., constructivism].

### *Neo-realism: foreign policy as systemic rationality of individual states*

Waltz notoriously claimed that IR is not about foreign policy as the domain of IR is restricted to the anarchic international *system* as such (allegedly determined by its distribution of power), and should hence not concern itself with the behaviour of its individual units, which, even if shaped by international structures is also influenced by a host of other factors that simply fall outside the scope of the discipline (Waltz 1996, also 1979). Others, however, disagree and not unreasonably suggest that there is little point to the whole enterprise if neo-realism does not have anything to say about foreign policy (Mearsheimer 2001). Thus in Mearsheimer's offensive realism a parsimonious theory is unfolded in which the distribution of power (*polarity*) explains which of the several strategies at their disposal (mainly war, balancing and 'buckpassing') states are likely to adopt in order to maximise their power (Mearsheimer 2001: esp. chs. 5, 8 and 9). Of course, such a parsimonious theory, leaves, as Mearsheimer (*ibid.*: 10) admits, quite a few 'anomalies', not least amongst which (aspects of) US foreign policy. These anomalies are then just seen as exceptions to the rule or explained by ad hoc, and rather non-realist, hypotheses such as alleged domestic factors like the 'Israel Lobby' (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006, though cf. neo-classical realism discussed below).

Although having to admit that in practice these (sometimes) do play a role, incorporating the role of 'domestic' / societal variables theoretically is beyond neo-realism as it lacks any conceptualisation of state-society relations– instead treating the state as a rational unitary actor acting autonomously from any social forces. Bereft of any social content, variables like 'the state', 'anarchy' and 'power' indeed become meaningless (for a systematic Marxist critique of realism in this respect see Rosenberg 1994; also Teschke 2003; cf. Wendt 1999). It is this abstraction of the state from society, taking it as somehow ontologically prior to wider social relations, that has fundamentally hampered its ability to (in theoretically coherent way) account for observed foreign policy practices, which quite often deviate from the realist 'ideal'. The inability of neo-realism to account for the variation

of US grand strategy after the end of the Cold War, and indeed its inability to account for the important continuities (cf. Layne 2006) is a case in point.<sup>6</sup>

Given this neo-realist deadlock, analysts of foreign policy have since long recognised the need to break open the proverbial black box. But whereas much FPA focuses on foreign policy decision-making as shaped by micro-level variables, and hence has usually little to say about (grand) geopolitical strategies (and therefore will be excluded from my review), there is one approach that is interested in precisely this higher-level foreign policy-making and explicitly seeks to combine 'realist' systemic factors with domestic variables, and this is neo-classical realism.

### *Neo-classical realism: adding domestic factors without explaining them*

Neo-classical realism is realist inasmuch as it sticks to a state-centric conception of world politics in which the foreign policy behaviour of states is conditioned to a significant degree by the purported systemic pressures emanating from anarchy. Yet it also significantly opens the black box by arguing that these systemic pressures – the distribution of power within the international system – combine with unit-level (economic, political and ideological) factors (Rose 1998; Layne 2006: 8; Rathbun 2008). Although critics may rightly have pointed out that this strategy leads to *ad hoc* and *post hoc* adding of variables underlining the degenerative nature of the realist research programme (Legro and Moravcsik 1999; cf. Rathbun 2008), neo-classical realism as applied by some does produce much richer and more convincing accounts of foreign policy than the ultra-parsimonious neo-realism.

A good example of such an insightful neo-classical realist analysis is Christopher Layne's study of post-war US grand strategy (Layne 2006). Layne maintains that domestic variables become more important to the extent that, for geographical reasons, systemic pressures are significantly attenuated (*ibid.* 10). Specifically, Layne argues that the US – because of its distance from other (potential) great powers – is one of the most secure states in the world *yet* since 1940 it has consistently and aggressively pursued a strategy of 'extra-regional', perceiving its security to be potentially threatened around the globe (*ibid.*). This confounds neo-realist predictions which in both their defensive and offensive varieties would predict (and prescribe) that the US will pursue a strategy of offshore balancing instead (Layne 2006: 19, 23). For Layne the puzzle is solved by arguing how next to systemic variables US grand strategy has been driven by what (following Williams 2009) he calls the *Open Door*, that is, a set of economic interests as well as a 'vision' that defines US national interest as lying first and foremost in creating a world 'open to U.S. economic penetration'

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<sup>6</sup> A notable exception here is Miller who – while staying largely within the confines of a neo-realist understanding of foreign policy as shaped by the competitive pressures of the anarchic system – does propose a theory with the explicit aim to explain variations in US grand strategy. In Miller's model it is the systemic variables 'distribution of power' and 'degree of external' threat that act as 'the selector' of pre-existing sets of ideas or ideal-typical grand strategies (Miller 2010: 29) and thus explain the shift from one strategy to another. The problem with this variety of systemic theory is that it takes as given that what needs to be explained.



(Layne 2006: 30). Layne explains the interplay of international and domestic variables thus: '[s]ystemic factors constitute the permissive conditions for the U.S. expansion. Domestic factors – Open Door economic and ideological expansion – explain the motives underlying American grand strategy, *why* the United States has behaved as it has' (ibid. 28).

But inasmuch as his analysis ultimately remains wedded to a realist paradigm that, as indicated, lacks any framework for understanding state-society relations, Layne's neo-classical realism remains unable to *explain* what it identifies as the driving forces of in this case US foreign policy. Layne may succeed in explaining that the US has sought global hegemony (contrary its interests as defined from a realist perspective) *because* of the Open Door world view of its policy-makers, but he does not explain *why* the latter has become so dominant (or indeed, hegemonic), that is, why, as Layne carefully documents, US policy-makers have consistently since 1940 come to define US national (security) interests from this perspective. Although Layne refers to 'economic interests' as the 'catalyst' for US hegemonic expansion since 1940 (Layne 2006: 33, also: 72-80; 95; 125-6; 196), nowhere throughout his historical narrative are these interests specified beyond observing (correctly) that US policy-makers '*believed* that America's prosperity was tied to its access to export markets' (ibid.: 72, his emphasis).<sup>7</sup>

Needless to say Layne's analysis begs the question of why US policy-makers came to this belief. Especially given Layne's quite plausible argument that the US strategy of extra-regional hegemony in fact in the long run tends to undermine US national (ibid.: 134-58), how can it be that US grand strategists have so long hold on to an apparently irrational strategy? Layne himself gives the answer towards the very end of his book: US policy-makers were not 'foolish' but stayed the course of global hegemony 'because that grand strategy has served the interests of the dominant elites that have formed the core of the U.S. foreign policy establishment since at least the 1930s' (ibid.: 200-1). At the core of the elite coalition we find, so claims Layne, 'large capital-intensive corporations that looked to overseas markets and outward-looking investment banks' (ibid.). This very insightful conclusion, however, follows upon a long historical narrative without as much as a single reference to any of these elites and their corporate interests. In the end, Layne does not probe much beyond the state and its personnel narrowly conceived.

Ultimately what Layne's analysis boils down to, and what it shares with other neo-classical foreign policy analysis (e.g., REFS), is that 'domestic' and 'ideational' variables are added, but primarily to explain deviations from the putative neo-realist 'optimal' policy (for Layne in the case of the US 'offshore balancing'). As Rathbun argues in defence of the approach, this way neo-classical realism must be seen as a 'logical extension' of neo-realism, one in which domestic politics and ideas explain those outcomes in which 'states do not respond ideally to their structural situations' as their foreign policies are 'distorted' by these 'interfering' unit-level variables (Rathbun 2008: 296). According to Rathbun, the realist logic

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, by time and again emphasising that it was about a belief-system of US policy-makers, they *believed* it to be in the US national interest (e.g., ibid.: 32, 72, 75, 92, 216), Layne inadvertently reduces these interest like a true constructivist to ideas that policy actors happen to have.

still applies here inasmuch as states are subsequently punished for this foolish behaviour. In this way we are presented with a rather bifurcated ontology where on the one hand we have an 'objective reality', which is the international system that apparently exists beyond and prior to any (historical) human agency and outside the realm of ideas, and on the other hand policy-makers who are sometimes guided by 'subjective ideas' or 'parochial interests' (ibid.). Where this god-like objective system originates from and what would happen to it if all states would not 'properly adapt' to it and hence follow an apparently irrational strategy, remains unexplained.<sup>8</sup>

The broader point to make is that, contra Layne, it is of course not only when alleged 'systemic pressures' are significantly mitigated that the 'sparse world of neorealist theory' (Walt cited in Layne 2006: 10) cannot explain foreign policy outcomes. From the perspective adopted here, foreign policy strategy – whether of major or of minor powers – is always mediated by social (class) forces, which moreover are not necessarily to be conceived of as 'domestic' or unit-level. For instance taking two very minor powers (thus supposedly facing strong structural constraints), the Netherlands and Belgium: how on the basis of any power competition logic (given anarchy) can we explain why the former was actively supportive of the US invasion of Iraq whereas the latter actively opposed it?

In contrast, then, to both neo-realism and neo-classical realism, in which state power is narrowly conceived as the accumulated material capabilities of the 'state-as-actor', historical materialism seeks to examine the *social* origins of that power. I will now review and seek to build up some recent historical materialist interventions in IR in order to see how these social origins can be further theorised and can help to inform a historical materialist theory of foreign policy.

## THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF GEOPOLITICS: GROUNDING FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS IN HISTORICAL MATERIALIST IR

As indicated in the introduction, a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis shares the concerns of most FPA scholars with the role of agency while arguing that in order to make sense of that agency we need to analyse how it is linked to the structures inherent in capitalist social relations. It thus remains pertinent to understand the *structures* in which any social actor is necessarily embedded and without which it cannot perform even the simplest of acts. In this section I will critically review some recent historical materialist

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<sup>8</sup> Clearly such an incoherent ontology is wholly untenable, but it also implies that any case for the 'optimal policy', which are obviously policies that only reproduce the anarchic system as conceived by realists, can *pace* claims about the objective system only be normative. Notwithstanding the sophistication of his historical analysis, such is also the case with Layne, who like Mearsheimer, tends to identify liberal ideology as the culprit with respect to the US pursuing an unwise geopolitical strategy.

contributions to understanding geopolitics in order to analyse how they have made sense of these structural underpinnings. It will turn out that there exists among historical materialist scholars a variety of often contradictory views in this respect. But what unites these various efforts, however, is precisely their emphasis on structural determination of geopolitics *cum* their relative lack of attention to agency. Nevertheless, discussing these various concepts and insights, most of which concern the theorisation of capitalist imperialism, will allow me to clarify the role of structure in the approach elaborated in this paper, and in the next section offer an analytical framework within which we can link structure to (class) agency.<sup>9</sup>

Raising the question of a structural understanding of geopolitics from within the Marxist tradition brings us to the key *problématique* of the relationship between on the one hand capitalism as a global, transnational system of partly deterritorialised relations and practices, and, on the other hand, a modern states-system in which politics is organised in the form of sovereign polities engaging in horizontal (non-hierarchical) relations with each other. A key premise of any historical materialist approach should be that the relations and practices that make up contemporary 'geopolitics' are *internally* related to the relations and practices that constitute (global) capitalism (Rupert 1993: 84; see also Rosenberg 1994; Wood 2003; Van der Pijl 2007a). Indeed, going beyond (the historical specificity of) capitalism, what distinguishes historical materialism in this respect from other perspectives is that it seeks to uncover the inner connections between on the one hand the prevailing regime of surplus extraction as defined by the social relations of production or, more generally, exploitation (on the latter distinction see Teschke 2003: 55), and on the other hand different systems of rule, that is, different forms of state / polities (the seminal work here is Anderson 1974), including the relations and practices between those polities. As Rosenberg (1994: 39) has put it: 'Geopolitical systems are not constituted independently of, and cannot be understood in isolation from, the wider structures of production and reproduction of social life'.

The broadest and most ambitious 'historical materialist' theory in this respect is that of Kees van der Pijl (2007b) concerning 'modes of foreign relations' which he sees as 'an aspect of social relations in their own right' though they must be seen as connected to 'modes of production' through class relations emanating from the forces of production (*ibid.*: x, 19). Although the intellectual merits of this highly original project to expand the domain of IR are many, the scope of this theory is too wide for the more limited purpose of this paper. While analysing the set of 'complex determinations' – the 'real-concrete' that make up modes of foreign relations (and certainly describing this in much historical detail), the posited inner connections between the latter and modes of production remain at too high a level of abstraction – not specifying the causal mechanisms – for my purposes inasmuch as I

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, the need for incorporating agency depends on how constraining / determining we consider relevant structures to be. Inasmuch as they are so constraining as to leave little room for agency, there is in fact not much need for a detailed analysis of foreign policy formation and the specific actors involved. I will, however, argue that such a view would be mistaken and that much of the questions below can only be settled through historical and empirical research rather than at the level of abstract theorising.

am concerned less with (variations of ) foreign *relations* across history and more with concrete geopolitical *strategies* embedded within a particular 'mode of production', i.e., capitalism (Van der Pijl's work on transnational class formation and strategy within global capitalism bears much more directly upon our research problem and will be drawn upon in the final section of this paper).

Although focusing on geopolitics in the pre-capitalist era, arguably a more appropriate starting point for our discussion, and one of the most systematic attempts at theorising the relationship between geopolitics and social structures, is Benno Teschke's 'theory of social property relations' (Teschke 2003.: 7) that posits that geopolitical orders are 'governed by the character of their constitutive units, which in turn rests on the specific property relations prevailing within them' (Teschke 2003: 46). The social origins of geopolitics are thus traced back to the prevailing class relations *within* the units, with class conflicts and their historical resolutions seen as key in the transformation of geopolitical systems (ibid.: 248 and *passim*). It is thus that Teschke argues that the geopolitical order of both medieval and absolutist Europe was one in which geopolitical relations and strategies were determined by a logic of (geo-)political accumulation as rooted in pre-capitalist property relations: internal accumulation by extra-economic means was expressed externally in strategies of geopolitical (territorial) expansion (through war and marriage).

Next to this structural argument, Teschke does pay attention to the role of agency, which he sees as dialectically intertwined with structure (Teschke 2003: 56), but overall he presents a historical-structural account in which geopolitical strategy, via class strategy, is seen as *derived* from the given (though not unchanging) structure of social property relations. Class agency and class conflict here in practice tend to be rather simply 'read off' given social structures. Thus Teschke (2003: 218) writes that 'property relations define the ruling-class strategies that explain international conduct', with class strategies seen as rather unproblematically *translating* property structure into international behaviour (ibid.: 220; see also ibid.: 59-60). The problem in my view such an argument is that it tends to reduce strategy too much to structure rather than seeing how the two are dialectically intertwined (it is in the next section that I will further elaborate my own view here with respect to capitalist geopolitical strategies).<sup>10</sup>

As a result of this rather one-side approach to the dialectic of structure and agency, the theory of social property relations may accurately describe differences between (feudal, absolutist and capitalist) systems, but cannot properly account for variations *within* systems,

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of Teschke this reductionism is arguably unintended given Teschke's commitment to dialectics. Nevertheless, Teschke tends to see only an important role of agency in cases of systemic crises, when agency then comes in to play its transformative role : 'The property relations approach thus entails a theory of *systemic* transformation that insists on the centrality of class conflict for changes in the property regimes, forms of political authority, and international orders' (248, his emphasis). For the periods (centuries!) in between Teschke tends to limit the account of agency rather to strategies of reproduction only, strategies moreover determined by the underlying structures.

either synchronically or diachronically.<sup>11</sup> For this we must ultimately bring agency into our explanation and beyond a mere 'translation mechanism'. Before doing so, however, we should first go more deeply into the structures that make up the contemporary, capitalist geopolitical order by reviewing a number of recent interventions in the revived (historical materialist) debate on imperialism.

### *Capitalist geopolitics: theorising the structures of modern imperialism*

If our goal is to understand the processes through which geopolitical strategies are constructed and pursued within contemporary global capitalism, we should of course move beyond the historical sociology of pre-capitalist social and concomitant geopolitical orders and ask the question in which structures foreign policy-making in the modern (capitalist) era is embedded in. What really distinguishes capitalism from feudalism (and other pre-capitalist social formations) is that whereas in the latter 'the political' and 'the economic' are fused and personalised within the rule of the lord (and king within absolutism), the former is characterised by an (ideological and institutional) separation of the two (Anderson 1974; Wood 1995; 1999, 2003; Teschke 2003). Thus in capitalism we on the one hand have a public realm in which the state exercises 'political' power whereas the capitalist market economy constitutes a private realm in which exploitation takes place on the basis of economic coercion (as opposed to feudal political coercion), that is, by virtue of the dispossession of the direct producers from the means of production. The structural implications of this are, however, not immediately clear and subject to controversy within recent historical materialist debates on geopolitics. The question before us then is how to theorise the nature of capitalist geopolitics in terms of a relationship between two spheres that are separated in capitalism yet from a historical materialist perspective must be seen as internally related through the structuring effects of capitalist social relations.

#### *Stateless Empire or inter-imperialist rivalry?*

In order to sketch the debate and my own position within it, let us start with a recent view from which the question of the relationship between capitalism and geopolitics is in fact a non-problem, as the latter is not to be seen anymore as a relevant separate sphere as we have moved beyond the inter-state system altogether. Thus William Robinson (2004) well-known thesis is that with the rise of an integrated transnational capitalist class a transnational global state has been created, transcending the notion of any distinct national interests. This

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, whereas Teschke in describing the transition to a capitalist order emphasises the centrality of Britain and her geopolitical strategy of 'active balancing', this says little about the geopolitical behaviour of capitalist states in general, even of those states who according to some definitions occupy a hegemonic position. Thus the capitalist hegemon succeeding Britain clearly has pursued a different kind of geopolitical strategy.

also applies in a somewhat different and even more radical way to Hardt and Negri's (2000), whose *Empire* is fully decentred and deterritorialised, in effect a stateless imperialism. We have thus arrived in a world in which territorial power has dissolved altogether and geopolitics has become a relic of the past. Analysing grand strategy formation of capitalist states would therefore seem to become a rather pointless exercise: indeed, in such a world what would these grand strategies still be about?

As both Wood (2003) and Callinicos (2009) argue, albeit on different grounds, the world of global capitalism is and will most likely (Callinicos even rules out the possibility) remain politically divided into sovereign territorial units (cf. Lacher 2005; Teschke and Lacher 2007). According to Wood, the 'political form of globalization' is and will remain the existence of multiple national states as '[n]o conceivable form of "global governance" could perform the kind of daily coercive functions that states perform and capital needs' (ibid.: 20). To this one may add the argument that for global capital the perils of world state, a 'world empire' as Wallerstein (1974) would call it, are likely to outweigh its potential benefits as it would lose a major part of its structural power, that is, the ability to move across national borders or to exit from national regimes not sufficiently accommodating.<sup>12</sup> The question that still needs to be answered, however, is to what extent the persistence of territoriality is also bound up to lead to conflicts and clashes between different (capitalist) states, that is, whether their application of territorial power leads or can still lead to significant geopolitical competition.

Here on the one hand we find those who tend to see, like Wood (2003), geopolitical competition, though not obsolete, at least significantly attenuated due to the nature of the contemporary US-centred capitalist imperialism (for a similar position see also Pantich and Gindin 2005). On the other hand there are those, especially Callinicos (2009), who see geopolitical rivalry as endemic and inherent to capitalism, viewing imperialism as by definition plural. What should concern us here is the underlying debate about the nature of geopolitics in capitalism. Inasmuch as we are interested in explaining capitalist geopolitical strategy we need to know about the structures that enable and constrain these strategies, structures that might be strategically selective to use Jessop's phrase in a somewhat different context (Jessop 1990).

For Wood a system dominated by capitalist states, in which 'all international relations are internal to capitalism and governed by capitalist imperatives' (Wood 2003: 127), geopolitics no longer involves geopolitical accumulation, that is, territorial aggrandisement, precisely *because capitalism is a system of rule that is based on the separation of 'the economic' from 'the political'* or what may be more appropriately termed 'the non-economic' (as not to imply that the economic is not political). As Wood writes, it is because of capitalism's unique capacity 'to detach economic from extra-economic power' that '[c]apitalist imperialism can exercise its rule by economic means' and has been able to extend 'the reach of imperial

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<sup>12</sup> Compare Wallerstein's (1974: 348) argument that '[c]apitalism has been able to flourish precisely because the world-economy has had within its bounds not one but a multiplicity of political systems.'

domination far beyond the capacities of direct political rule or colonial occupation' (Wood 2003: 5, 12, 21; see also Wood 2006).<sup>13</sup> . Similarly, Teschke maintains that with the arrival of capitalism geopolitical accumulation has – after the European revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – been replaced by a 'non-territorial logic of international surplus appropriation, based on non-political contracts between private citizens' (Teschke 2003: 263), i.e., inter-state rivalry within international anarchy has been substituted by inter-firm rivalry in the free market.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, while stressing the non-territorial logic of capitalist power, Wood also emphasises that 'economic power cannot exist without extra-economic force' and that the 'state is more essential than ever to capital' (ibid.: 5), not only to subordinate workers but equally to open up and keep open subordinate economies to imperialist exploitation (ibid.: 20-4). Although territorial expansion has become unimportant (and generally dysfunctional) the coercive power of *territorial* states thus remains crucial. Furthermore, given the political division of capitalism into multiple states, geopolitical rivalry between those states at least remains a possibility. At the same time, the latter is very much downplayed by Wood regarding the contemporary era as she tends to associate geopolitical competition more with pre-capitalist social formations (Wood 2003; for a critique see Callinicos 2009: 75-81). Territorial power still matters for Wood but above all in the form of the US state backing up the 'empire of capital' that it has created, US imperialism being the only show in town.

Wood's argument that capitalist imperialism – at least within the context in which all of international relations are internal to capitalism (see above) as capitalist social relations have in effect globalised – does *not* rely on territorial expansion makes theoretically much sense and seems empirically corroborated by the history of capitalism since 1945. Although the globalisation of capitalist social relations and hence the opening up – and the keeping open of – foreign territories to the penetration by 'imperial' capital does require the regular application of non-economic means, especially military force (including the occasional occupation or, as in the case of the US, maintaining military bases across the globe), colonisation as such is best avoided (REF). So although we are beyond 'geopolitical accumulation' we are not yet beyond the territorial power of the state, in part to facilitate and back up capitalist accumulation. The question is whether we are also beyond geopolitical, *inter-state*, conflict.

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<sup>13</sup> Teschke makes a similar argument, but in stronger terms such as to suggest that geopolitical competition is indeed something of the past. Thus he argues that geopolitical accumulation has with the arrival of capitalism – after the European revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – been replaced by a 'non-territorial logic of international surplus appropriation, based on non-political contracts between private citizens' (Teschke: 263) , i.e., inter-state rivalry within international anarchy has been substituted by inter-firm rivalry in the free market.

<sup>14</sup> Although Teschke and Lacher (2007: 568) concede that there are sometimes forms of geopolitical competition within global capitalism, they very much relativise its importance. Moreover, and in contrast to Wood, they maintain that there is no reason to assume that capitalism 'needs' the states-system, and although they find the notion of a global state 'hopelessly exaggerated' (ibid.: 566) they do not see any absolute structural barriers to the integration of states, referring to the example of the European Union (ibid.: 579; see also Lacher 2005; cf. Callinicos 2007, 2009: ch. 3).

The fact of the matter is that for now the world is still divided into formally independent national states and that some of these states command the economic, political and military resources that enable them to apply state power externally in a ways that at times are bound to clash with other states doing the same. The extent to which this will happen depends on the dialectical interplay of structure and agency. On the structural side, we may argue that it is less likely to the extent that not only a transnationalisation of capitalist production and finance has taken place but that this has also engendered a process of transnational class formation organically integrating national state-society complexes (Van der Pijl 1998). But as I argued elsewhere (Van Apeldoorn 2004: 166), even in the European Union where this process has gone so far as to produce a transnational state-society complex, and in which national sovereignty has been partly transcended, the national state and territorial politics continue to persist. Although having transcended a realist logic of security competition, in the economic realm competition between member-states is inherent in an asymmetric multi-level system in which states remain responsible for national welfare while having to compete in a supranational single market (see also Van Apeldoorn and Hager 2010). The current economic imbalance between the core and the periphery of Europe and of the Eurozone is only likely to further aggravate these centrifugal tendencies, as is for instance testified by the increasingly independent foreign policy stance of Berlin.<sup>15</sup>

The lack of economic convergence between for instance Greece and Germany is a regional example of the geographically uneven way in which capitalist development takes place. Both Callinicos (2008: 88-93), invoking the Trotskyan concept of 'combined and uneven development' and Harvey (2003), stressing how capital concentrates into regional complexes, are right in arguing that this spatial differentiation of capitalist development also at leads potentially leads to a geopolitical dynamic of inter-state competition. We should, however, be careful not to reify geopolitical competition, a tendency we find especially in the work of Callinicos. Drawing on the classical theories of imperialism of in particular Lenin and Bukharin Callinicos argues that capitalist imperialism must be seen as the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition (ibid.: 72): that is, on the one hand the horizontal competition between (national) 'capitals' (read: capitalist firms, and to be distinguished from the 'vertical' capitalist social relations between labour and capital), and the equally horizontal competition between sovereign states on the other. Although Callinicos theoretically might well see the two as internally related, the links between these two forms of competition does not become clear. Whereas in the classical imperialism theories the two tended to be seen as fused in the rivalry between blocs of monopoly capital integrated with national states (Bukharin quoted in Callinicos 2009: 51), Callinicos leaves us

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, this is no foregone conclusion, as what happened in the past could happen again, that is, that in order to save a project to which they are so committed, and spurred on by Europe's transnational capitalist class (see Van Apeldoorn 2002), Europe's national political leaders overcome their differences and move the project again forwards. Yet the economic, social and political unevenness of the enlarged Union, and the context of the current crisis, is making this an increasingly difficult task.



rather in the dark here. Instead we are time and again reminded of the relative autonomy of geopolitical competition in what Callinicos (2007: 542) himself has called a necessary 'realist moment in any Marxist analysis of international relations'. Although he professes not to want to, like neo-realists, abstract 'states from the social and economic relations in which they are embedded' (Callinicos 2009: 83) this precisely what he tends to end up doing. This is best illustrated by the way in which Callinicos tends to see the current world order, namely as a continuation of what is apparently an enduring competition between Great Powers (consistently written with capitals!), with 'advanced capitalism' divided into the 'competing power centres (...) of Western Europe, North America and East Asia' (ibid.: 17). What this completely overlooks is for instance the difference in the nature and historical trajectory of capitalist development and underlying social relations in for instance 'East Asia' (however defined) as compared to e.g. Western Europe. This way for instance it becomes also difficult to explain why the latter, in spite of all that is currently changing in the world order, is still much more geopolitically aligned with the US than some countries in East Asia. Indeed, in light of the empirical evidence the notion of for instance the EU and the USA being (even potential) geopolitical rivals is very hard to sustain (for an argument to the contrary see Cafruny and Ryner 2007). This, then, reveals an implicit tendency to reify geopolitics and analyse sliding, maybe inadvertently, into an 'asocial realism'.

### *Beyond the 'relative autonomy' of the geopolitical*

The root of the problem in this tendency to reify geopolitical conflict lies in my view the way Callinicos attempts to grant a degree of autonomy to the geopolitical (Callinicos 2009: 73), even to the point that the inner connections with capitalist social relations tend to get lost. A similar tendency can be found in David Harvey's by now well-known distinction (adapted from Arrighi 1994: 33-4) between 'capitalist logic' and a 'territorial logic' of power, where capitalist imperialism represents a 'contradictory' fusion between the two, or between "'the politics of state and empire" and "'the molecular process of capital accumulation in space and time"' (Harvey 2003: 27-7). Harvey insists that these logics should be seen as 'distinct from each other', frequently clashing yet also intertwined in contradictory ways, that is, *dialectically* (ibid: 29-30). Though having the advantage of squarely recognising the persistence of territorial politics, of *geopolitical* competition within a globalised capitalism, the drawback of both Harvey's and Callinicos' approach is that it fails to specify how these two logics are internally related.<sup>16</sup> The relationship is argued to be dialectical but no conceptual framework is offered that would help us to understand how out of this dialectic imperialist powers come to pursue imperialist foreign policies. In the end it appears as if these logics are only externally related, influencing each other but ontologically separate.

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<sup>16</sup> This critique of Harvey is not to distract from the great merits of his work for understanding modern capitalist imperialism, especially his theory of overaccumulation and his notion of accumulation by dispossession. A discussion of these, however, falls outside scope of this paper (for now....).

But, as Brenner (2006: 80-1) argues, the alleged autonomous territorial logic of power lacks a clear rationale : while capitalists indeed are forced by the dynamic of capitalist accumulation to keep on accumulating, it is unclear why states as such would be driven by 'the accumulation of control over territory as an end in itself' (Harvey 2003: 81). This indeed seems to come to very close to the kind reification of the sovereign state, attributing to it a *raison-d'être* of its own, separate from any social relations in which it is embedded.<sup>17</sup>

Concomitant to this, in line with a realist emphasis on state autonomy, state managers tend to be viewed as a separate class with their own 'motivations and interests', that is 'to sustain or augment the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states' (2003: 27: see also Callinicos 2009: 84-5). Again the problem of is that the mechanisms that would cause state managers to be thus motivated are not specified. A possible candidate could be the neo-realist logic of anarchy forcing states to pursue power in order to survive. However, as we have argued above, apart from the fact that neo-realists cannot agree amongst themselves whether this implies that states ought to maximise their power (Mearheimer 2001) or just maintain what they have (Waltz 1979), nor are often able to agree what the best means would be to achieve this allegedly overriding objective, the historical record shows such a variation in state strategies that it is unclear what if anything this 'systemic' logic can explain.

Clearly, historical materialism is not going to help us to better understand foreign policy formation if it brings us back to square one. In order to bring this social content back in then positing the existence of two logics and a concomitant opposition of interests between state managers and capitalists, is less helpful. Surely the state is not simply the agent of capital, but positing state managers as a separate group with their own interests tends to reduce the role of capital in shaping foreign policy to one of merely exercising structural constraints: that is, the state and its managers are motivated by their own logic of seeking to expand territorial power but they are constrained by the logic of capital accumulation upon which they are dependent (Callinicos 2009: 85-6). In Callinicos structuralist mix of Marxism and realism, class agency and class ideology only appear as an afterthought (Callinicos 2009: 93-100), with latter appearing as an additional variable for which the indeterminacy of the relationship between capitalism and geopolitics creates a space, but which as such is left unexplained! As I shall argue below, such structuralism ignores how structures do not reproduce themselves. Only human agents do so and when it comes to the structures of capitalist class hegemony, the capitalist class – or actors 'organically' linked to it - often needs to pro-actively ensure that these structures are thus so reproduced. The state is not a mere epiphenomenon, nor can what the state does be reduced to class. Yet the state is not independent from its societal base, in fact its form and content can only be explained in the context of the latter's class structure. It does not stand outside this structure but is itself constituted by it. Below, then, I will elaborate a historical materialist perspective, which, takes class and class agency as its crucial explanatory

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<sup>17</sup> As Brenner (2006: 83) also notes, though positing the two logics as independent and of equal importance, in Harvey's subsequent historical analysis of the 'new imperialism' the capitalist logic, and especially the drive of capital towards to geographical expansion, clearly dominates.

variable as it is class that forms the nexus between state and society, between the political and the economic, and between global capitalism and geopolitics.

Having reviewed recent Marxist literature on the nature and dynamics of geopolitics we have moved from a perspective – most clearly represented by Teschke – that puts the primacy squarely on *domestic* vertical class relations and sees horizontal geopolitical relations as above all an expression of the latter to a perspective on the other end – most clearly represented by Callinicos in which capitalism and geopolitics are not so much internally related but merely intersect, producing a complex and ‘indeterminate’ (Callinicos 2009: 15) dynamic, which nevertheless is supposedly characterised by an enduring great power rivalry. In order to uncover the internal relation between capitalist social relations and geopolitics, rather than substituting it with a an ill-defined ‘intersection’, I thus argue that we need to turn from an analysis of capitalist (economic) structures to capitalist class agency.

## **GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGIES AS HEGEMONIC PROJECTS: THE CLASS NEXUS**

Building upon work done within IPE on transnational class formation (Van der Pijl 1998; Van Apeldoorn 2004), class here is seen as the critical causal nexus connecting geopolitical strategy formation to the structures of (global) capitalist accumulation. Recognising, from such a perspective the class nature of capitalist society this means in particular analysing the extent to which, and how, the capitalist class as the ruling class actually succeeds in realising its rule. Here we need to move beyond the classical but misleading instrumentalism versus structuralism debate (REFS). For sure, the structuralists were right in arguing that the state is more than a mere instrument in the hands of the dominant class and in pointing at the structural power of capital, in particular the state’s dependence on successful capitalist accumulation. Yet structuralist arguments (as implicitly relied upon by e.g. Callinicos) on capitalist class rule err to the extent that they dispense with agency and assume that capitalist class rule reproduces itself without the capitalist class needing to spend any effort on it. In fact, history proves that time and again, that the capitalist class does (pro-)actively seeks to reproduce its rule and propagate its ideas and ensure that these are articulated within the realm of the state and translated into state policy (see on the importance of class agency also Van Apeldoorn 2002). That there is a need for this and that a mere reliance on the structural power of capital is not sufficient is in fact explicable from a (Marxian) relational view of class, which, unlike elitist theory, emphasises the potential social antagonism and concomitant dialectic inherent in the capitalist class structure, and thus the need for the capitalist class to spend time, energy and money on defending and promoting its interests, and indeed seeking to articulate it as the general interest, vis-à-vis subordinate classes who (potentially) resist its rule and potentially push for opposing interests.

It is hence that we need to integrate both structure and agency in our account of capitalist class rule as a key to understanding foreign policy formation in advanced capitalist states. Here I propose do so through the neo-Gramscian concept of hegemonic project. Following Gramsci (1971), Jessop (1990: 208) refers to a successful hegemonic project as involving 'the mobilization of support behind a concrete, national-popular program of action which asserts a general interest in the pursuit of objectives that explicitly or implicitly advance the long-term interests of the hegemonic class (fraction)'. It is thus that a successful hegemonic project in the longer run will have to be linked to a successful accumulation strategy, that is, a strategy for the realisation of 'a specific "growth model" complete with its various extra-economic preconditions' (Ibid.: 198). The rise of a new hegemonic project, however, does not necessarily have to coincide with the rise of a new accumulation strategy (Ibid.: 346). As Jessop points out, it is important to see that while 'they may overlap partially and / or mutually condition each other', accumulation strategy and hegemonic project are not identical:

While accumulation strategies are directly concerned with economic expansion on a national or international scale, hegemonic projects can be concerned principally with various non-economic objectives (even if economically conditioned and economically relevant). The latter might include military success, social reform, political stability or moral regeneration (Ibid.: 208).

In the short run, then, given 'specific conjunctures', there may well be a 'dissociation or inconsistency between them' (Ibid.). I argue that in understanding variations in geopolitical strategy, in particular 'grand strategy', we also need to examine those 'specific conjunctures' in which one hegemonic project may take the place of another without necessarily being linked to a concomitant change in accumulation strategy. However, in order to be successful hegemonic projects need to advance the interests of a dominant class fraction, and thus to be articulated to a successful accumulation strategy – whether old or new. Success is not guaranteed, but seeking to advance these interests is what a hegemonic project *is about*.

Although with the transnationalisation of capitalism and the process of transnational class formation alluded to above, hegemonic projects can also be operating in and be partly constituted within a transnational social space they also, given that the political is still organised into independent territorial units, always have to be articulated and effectuated within the context of a national state or states. This then potentially implies an important geopolitical dimension to any hegemonic project. As states are key in providing the preconditions for capitalist markets to develop and for capitalist accumulation to take place (Van Apeldoorn and Horn 2007), any national or transnational capitalist class is dependent upon the application of state power both nationally and internationally (e.g., Wood 2003). Hegemonic projects, as expressive of underlying class interests, will therefore have to articulate not just a vision with regard to how to establish control over subordinate social groups in a domestic context (i.e. a national-popular programme), but also with respect to

world order and the position of the respective state or states within it. This is not to imply that geopolitical strategy is in any way determined by objective class interests. On the contrary, these interests must be articulated politically and ideologically, and their possible translation into state policy must be viewed as a contingent outcome of social and political struggles. As argued in De Graaff and Van Apeldoorn (forthcoming), my claim, however, is that the content of these political and discursive practices is shaped by the social position of the actors engaging in it and by underlying social relations.<sup>18</sup>

In analysing geopolitical (grand) strategy in this way we should be aware that not all national ruling classes and national states are alike – rather there is a given power hierarchy between them which makes for a differentiation of interests and certainly of strategies. If there is one state in the system that is predominant (not necessarily hegemonic), the ruling class of that state will attach particular importance to, and have strong interests in, the strategy of that state vis-à-vis other states. Although for instance the ruling class of the biggest or most powerful state in the system may on the one hand be very cosmopolitan in its outlook and have the capital it controls well integrated into global circuits, it may at the same time also have a relatively acute sense of a distinct national interest within the larger transnational interest precisely because of the fact that it sits at the top of the international / global hierarchy, and is thus aware of the interest it has in maintaining the current system (and of what it has to lose if the system breaks down). Hegemonic projects formulated within the context of such a dominant and possibly hegemonic state will thus tend to express a strong geopolitical consciousness, and include a rather elaborate strategy with respect to how to exercise control over other states and their societies. Crucially, such a strategy, reflects not so much, as in neo-realism, the interests of the state as such, that is, as abstracted from society, but of the state as a ‘form-determined condensation of social forces’ (Jessop 1990), in which the dominant, that is, capitalist, social forces, have a large and direct stake in the international or global rule of ‘their’ state (see on this point also Brenner 2006: 82).

It is from such a perspective that I together with Nana de Graaff (De Graaff and Van Apeldoorn forthcoming) have interpreted US grand strategy and variations therein in terms of (successive) hegemonic projects for effectuating and reproducing the power of the US ruling class, that is, as seeking to serve the long-term interests of the (hegemonic fractions) of the US capitalist class. Concretely we analyse how what we identify as a neoconservative project and concomitant geopolitical grand strategy – which succeeded and transformed (while holding on to the same accumulation strategy) the neoliberal project of the 1990s – was constructed through a network of actors, whose practices were shaped by a) their own social positions and the related interests; and b) the broader global structural context to which their ideas about foreign policy were oriented. In order to determine the extent and nature of the class nexus involved in this network we employ the methodology of Social

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<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, given the substantial literature on the policy-making power of the US corporate community (e.g., Domhoff, 2009), there is only little empirical research on the links between capitalist class interests and US *foreign* policy-making, especially at the level of ‘grand strategy’.

Network Analysis in order map the network of neoconservative intellectuals and policy-advisers. This analysis reveals that the neoconservatives were indeed no free-floating intellectuals but were closely linked to the government *as well as* tied to, and supported by, dominant sections of US transnational capital. Indeed, the neoconservative project, we argue, can be interpreted as a particular response to the deepening contradictions of neoliberalism facing the US ruling class, and thus as a particular answer and related (geo-)political programme for seeking to reproduce its rule internally and externally. The neoconservative project thus offered an answer to the crucial question facing the US ruling class of how to prolong US global hegemony at a moment when the 'answer' of the neoliberal project no longer seemed that compelling anymore.

## IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: FROM NATIONAL SECURITY TO RULING CLASS SECURITY

Adopting a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis thus outlined – that is one that breaks open the black box of the national state but goes beyond conventional theories by focusing on the class structure of state-society relations, while at the same time going beyond structuralist Marxist accounts by taking class *agency* as the key explanans – allows us to uncover the social origins of geopolitical strategy as pursued by capitalist states. Whereas neo-realism sees foreign policy in terms of pursuing a rational strategy of maximising 'national security', and neo-classical realism only introduces 'domestic variables' in order to explain away deviations from this optimal strategy, the perspective argued for in this paper allows us deconstruct the realist concept of 'national security' and reconstruct it as 'ruling class security'. With this I mean is that if we uncover the social content and thereby the social origins of geopolitical strategies we may well find that these strategies are in fact shaped by underlying class strategies seeking to serve the long-term interests of the dominant class, i.e., the capitalist class, or more specifically, a specific fraction thereof. This is not to say that this is always the case, or has to be the case given a certain functionalist logic (class strategies may fail!), however, as long as the capitalist class in fact remains the ruling class then its rule should also at least most of the time be expressed in state(s)' geopolitical strategy (strategies) with at least a modicum of success.

It is therefore that so-called national security is often in fact about ruling class security, that is, the security of that class as the ruling class, and therefore the security of a particular socio-economic order. Note then that this is not to imply just the simple truism that at least in as far as we speak of national ruling classes the (physical) survival of those classes is bound up with the (physical) survival of its respective state. In this case national security in a realist sense and capitalist class security would simply coincide and a (neo-)realist logic and explanation of foreign policy behaviour might still suffice (with the state and 'its' ruling class facing the same security dilemma). There might be situations in which this is the case, i.e., when a state faces an existential external threat against which it defends itself, then the

defence of the state is *ipso facto* also the defence of its ruling class (assuming that the conquering state would not leave its rule intact , cf. Brenner 2006: 82). Most of the time, however, and *pace* neo-realism, the actual survival of a state is not at stake. One can even wonder to what extent this struggle for survival is at all (still) a core feature of international politics. Therefore what is meant instead is that the geopolitical strategy pursued serves a certain *social purpose*: is bound up with the interests of and maintaining their domestic (and where applicable international and transnational) system of rule. If this purpose is not effectively served then in the longer run the system itself might collapse. In other words, if the right strategy is not 'pursued' what might happen is not so much that a state then loses its (formal) independence or even just sees its security undermined, no, what might happen is that the social groups or class(es) that are currently on top loose (part) of their power or at least are forced to make compromises with subordinate classes that they would otherwise be unwilling to make. Thus Harvey (2003) in his account of US imperialism suggests that imperialism as a solution ('spatial fix) to the recurrent problem of overaccumulation (as an inherent crisis tendency of capitalism) from the perspective of the US ruling elite was naturally preferred to alternative 'domestic' and more progressive solutions, such as redistribution and other socio-economic reforms allowing the absorption of surplus capital. As this would necessarily involve class compromises and concessions limiting the power and privileges of the US ruling class, such a solution was politically unfeasible.

What here thus clearly comes to the fore, is how a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis allows us to fully reclaim the *political* nature of foreign policy, not (merely) the politics of states pitted against states abstracted from their societies but the politics of real (collective) human actors, of social groups and classes, their interests and aspirations.

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