

# Maps in Decision Making: Why Almost Every Negotiation Starts and Ends With a Map?

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**Abstract.** Since ancient times Cartography has been used as a way which the political elites could understand their territorial possessions; therefore maps sometimes have been the only way to reach reality, as the policy makers normally are in distant places from where the actions are being taken. Through this thinking, who has more precise information about reality sees more opportunities during decision making process. This paper discusses how the International Relations' Constructivist Theory understands the relation between political decisions and maps. Within a modern epistemological perspective and a post-modern ontology, constructivism considers reality as existent, i.e., it exists as an object independently from human thinking although it gains sense and logic when it is interpreted by someone. People who look at the same piece of reality perceive it through their senses and construct their conclusions over the object of analysis; therefore it changes accordingly to their culture and social practices. Maps in politics means knowledge and almost every action, negotiation and discussion start by using a specific map, this article also brings historical and political examples in order to demonstrate how maps have shaped the international politics.

**Keywords:** International Relations, Constructivism, Map Perception

## 1. Introduction

War is considered the first subject in the Research History of International Relations, since Thucydides wrote the first document describing and analyzing the war process in the Peloponnesian War researchers have been trying to explain how war occurs in order to make it a predictable phenomenon (Morgenthau, 2003).

Considering strategy as an important piece in war decision, Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese general famous for his teachings about strategy, argues that political effectiveness comes from knowledge about the enemy (Mcneilly, 2003). Tzu says that you must know where your enemy is and what your enemy is in order to understand the situation. The results of this equation are better decisions and increased mobility because who knows the terrain knows how to cross it fast and how to strike the enemy better (Mcneilly, 2003).

In modern decision process, mobility has been an important variable which is only achieved by knowledge of where and how the actions are being taken (Mcneilly, 2003). Who has more of these variables has more advantage in the International System. Alexander the Great is considered one of the best generals since his strategy thinking and perception over the battlefield allowed him to take the best decisions over the battles (Mcneilly, 2003). His capacity in observing how the enemy phalanx is acting and how the territory conducts the soldier's actions permitted him to make a good use of his cavalry in order to break the front line from its sides. In this example it is possible to consider Alexander's mental resolve as a multiplier of the cavalry mobility and effectiveness (Mcneilly, 2003).

However, nowadays mobility is not only linked to security matters it is linked also to topics like: economy, immigration, international trade etc. For example, São Paulo's government has difficulties in doing political actions and responses to the Bolivian immigrants who started to settle in the city (Caciamalli, 2005). Nobody knows exactly which Bolivian cities they come from, what are their difficulties when starting their life in Brazil and where they are living; therefore, government does not know where to build new schools and nurseries as it also does not know which actions and where these actions (politics) should be taken. As a result Bolivian immigrants do not have proper Brazilian immigration documents, their children do not study because there are not enough vacancies in regular schools and they are not legalized workers because they do not know the Brazilian worker's rights (Caciamalli, 2005). São Paulo's government has almost no mobility because its knowledge about the Bolivian immigration is limited.

The next section of this paper (section two) presents how cartographic production is perceived and understood by International Relations and how it has been used in Decision Making. In section three it is exposed the importance of maps and how they increase the States' effectiveness in the International System. Researchers and policy makers consider war as an important analysis as every international negotiation has conflicts of interests which are solved by convincing the other of your point of view, therefore the main analysis of this paper takes as examples International Security, De-

fense theories and cases, although it does not mean that economic affairs and others fields of study could not be considered in the discussion.

## **2. International Politics and Maps**

### **2.1. Where is reality in decision making?**

In classical International Relations' theories (realism and liberalism) there are two ways of convincing others, the first consists in only using logical arguments which have no evidence but is based in theories and the second consists in showing reality evidences and proofs as the nature of the argument (Mearsheimer, 1995; Morgenthau, 2003). It is possible to compare this fact with the Cuban Missiles Crisis in 1962 because each side in the negotiation based their arguments on a distinct logic.

The crisis began when a North-American U-2 spy plane took some aerial photos of Cuban territory, on the photos it was possible so see some artifacts which were similar to nuclear warheads that were not supposed to be in Cuban territory accordingly to the United States' government (Kissinger, 1998). As a response the U.S Navy made a naval and an aerial blockade which quarantined Cuba from others nations. All the crisis was triggered by a piece of information interpreted by the United States' government which was made a natural proof, since we can consider that there is a piece reality on the photos. As a response to the blockade and the accusations Soviet Union presented a logic argument which stated that there were not any missiles in Cuban territory (Kissinger, 1998).

In the example above, the problem was presented through photos and maps created to show the Cuban missile range and how the blockade was being made (Figure 1 and Figure 2). What is important in this case is that everything started with aerial photos and maps expressing reality and ended with a map and a resolution which imposed some limits to the Cuban government (Kissinger, 1998). In this case the negotiations were conducted in the U.N. headquarter in New York and the delegates present in the Security Council did not visit Cuba in order to know what was happening there, as a result the maps and the photos presented the reality as the truth over it was constructed by the delegates during the negotiation.



In decision making reality is presented by someone through maps, theories, photos, videos etc. Almost always policy makers have no contact with the place in discussion.

## **2.2. How Cartographic Productions are Understood by the Constructivism Theory**

Constructivism states that the reality exists and who gives sense and logic to it is the human mind. In International Relations Constructivism it is understood that ontology resides in the person's culture which is a result of the experiences in the real world (Miyoshi, 2007). When a group of people share the same culture (history, view over religion, language, social practices etc) the result is what is called "identity" (Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002; Miyoshi, 2007). A State can hold different identities in its territory, in Brazil the Bolivian immigrants represent a unique culture with their own social practices which differ from the Brazilian practices.

Each identity can have its own perspective over reality since each mind is shaped by the individual's social practices. Constructivism receives its name because reality is socially constructed by who understands and observes it (Hopf, 1998). Aristotle states that we recognize a dog (and other beings) by a series of forms that make us understand different dog's breeds in the same group therefore everybody naturally recognizes "doggness" from reality; however constructivism states that the purpose of a dog is given by identity (Miyoshi, 2007). If dogs are evil or good, are supposed to be eaten or to take care of sheep depends of what our minds make of them.

For International Relations maps are products derived from human scientific work which is a representation of a piece of reality (Kissinger, 1998). If we get the identity concept exposed before it is possible to say that "The cartographic production is creation of the human mind therefore it is a product which is distorted by identity". The statement is half true because constructivism also consider that science can be descriptive once cartographers can seek precision in their creations, although when a map is distorted by identity it gains a political message behind it (Miyoshi, 2007).

When thinking about the reason which led the U.S. to go in a war with Iraq in 2003 researchers and analysts primarily stated that the main objective of the conflict resided in securing Iraq's oil resource under the "western influence". Later this statement as changed due to a geopolitical research (Kaplan, 2012). Observing the Eurasia map, researchers concluded that

Iraq is in a territorial position which is a frontier from the Chinese and Russian political and economical influence. Therefore, for these scholars Iraq is a territory which has more than an economic meaning (Kaplan, 2012).

In this example reality is expressed through maps, since they are scientific productions which seek precision, although what people realize from the cartographic production changes accordingly to interests and culture. It does not mean that people make of maps what they want, it means that naturally each person can have a different conclusion over it when a map is correlated to a specific situation. Therefore identity can change the conclusions made over a map observation. As an example of map perception, map knowledge and identity it is interesting to consider the constructivism threat analysis (Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002) as it explains better how the phenomena proceeds.

### **2.3. Map Perception and Knowledge in International Relations**

Threat exists as a perception over a piece of reality (Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002). Following the example of the Cuban missile crisis all the negotiations were about missiles and their purpose. It does not mean that these weapons have an offensive purpose however they were interpreted by the U.S. government as a threat due to the possibility of these nuclear warheads be launched into their territory. All this conclusion were made by simply interpretation over the photos taken by the U-2 spy plane since Soviet Union did not explained or said anything menacing about these weapons, therefore the U.S. made its own conclusions based on their perception in the case.

Perception resides in the human mind; even if there is nothing intentional happening, somebody could feel threatened (Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002). It is like a man who is afraid of a well socialized dog because in the past he was bitten by a furious hound. In this example, this person feels afraid as his culture condemns dogs and if more people have lived the same history a identity emerges, therefore in this society everybody would be afraid of dogs as they would be seen as violent animals.

A chart is perceived in the same way as the threat logic. Accordingly to a person's identity the results over the maps analysis could be very distinctive from other people as identity also creates interests and tends to direct the focus of the perceptions. Therefore, political knowledge derived from map analysis changes accordingly with the observer's culture (Miyoshi, 2007).

### **3. Examples of Maps' Political Effectiveness**

As exposed before maps are important in the political process due to all the information and knowledge they carry. In this section I'll list three historical examples of where charts were important in decision making and vital to the State effectiveness.

#### **3.1. Second World War - Operation Market Garden**

Operation Market Garden was a military operation which purpose was to break through German territory and disrupt the Siegfried line. The operation consisted in sending a massive amount of paratroopers into the German territory in order to disrupt the S.S. supply line which maintained the Siegfried Line stocked with ammunition, food, military personnel etc (Mcneilly, 2003).

The operation was unsuccessful because the German intelligence pointed the increase of the allied activity in the borders and the S.S. was able to recover some allied maps showing where the allied actions were going to happen (Mcneilly, 2003). In this case the maps recovered by the German army gave mobility and knowledge of how and where to strike the allied forces. Researchers believe that the allied force would have won the battle if the maps had not been discovered by the enemy (Mcneilly, 2003).

#### **3.2. Cold War Deterrence and Balance of Power**

Balance of Power and Deterrence in the Cold War were two politics which depended totally on intelligence reports. At first the reports of which weapon and where they were allocated came from the Soviet Union to the United States, then these reports where transformed into intelligence (processed information created to be presented to policy makers) (Kissinger, 1998).

The result was a set of maps and fact sheet which were supposed to shown with precision the enemy military power. This information helped the Unit-

ed States to choose which action should be taken in order to overcome the Soviet politics.

### **3.3. Chinese Military Modernization**

Since 2001 China has been increasing its military force through investment in technology. This phenomenon was discovered in 2005 when a U.S. Navy destroyer visually spotted a Chinese submarine which were not detected by the ship's radar. Later, intelligence reports on Chinese military showed that China developed a new type of plating which absorbs the radar's waves (Smith, 2009).

As other Chinese modern weapons were appearing the government of Japan, United States, Russia, South Korea, Australia, and England started to question the nature of these military equipments e.g. "if the modernization is an offensive politic which seeks to balance power with the U.S." (Khanna, 2008), "if these weapons will be used to reintegrate Taiwan to the Continental China" (Lavere, 2004) etc.

In response to the questioning, the Chinese government argued that China has never waged a war campaign outside its territory since the Peaceful Rise proclamation in 1972, when the communist leader Mao Zedong renounced all possibilities of China going to a war except in its own territorial defense (Smith, 2009). To reinforce this argument Chinese government presented sets of maps which evidenced all Russian and North American military bases in the world stating that unlike western powers, China has no military bases outside its territory, therefore Chinese army is not an international institution(Liqun, 2010).

In this case the Chinese maps demonstrated a perspective which other countries' perceptions cannot reach. As a result, there is no "real" argument against the Chinese Peaceful Rise.

## **4. Conclusion**

In the actual mainstream International Relations theories (Kissinger, 1998; Mearsheimer, 1995; Morgenthau, 2003; Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002) maps represent a piece of reality which is presented to policy makers in order to pass information or knowledge. In constructivism (Hopf, 1998; Farrel, 2002) the result of map interpretation and analysis comes from the identity

of each observer which shapes the perception over the chart. Considering the examples given in this paper it is possible to affirm that maps are an essential part in the decision making process since there is almost no contact between the policy makers and the place in discussion, so all the information are derived from photos, videos or cartographic production. Therefore, a negotiation starts with a map because the policy makers need to bring the reality to the table as it ends with other map which shapes the actions, plan and politics to be executed.

The benefits of maps usage during decision making is that through them it is possible to perceive different possibilities which were difficult or impossible to see without it. These new opportunities result in better decisions which take advantage of mobility; therefore actions are taken faster and faster maximizing the gains.

As Kissinger says on Kaplan's book (2012) "Geography has been the predominant factor in determining the fate of nations, from pharaonic Egypt to the Arab Spring.". In politics who has more precise maps does better decision and who does the right choices have more power.

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