

2010/1/2 Abstract: Critical geopolitics. On the new concept of political geography in Postmodernism

Critical geopolitics

On the new concept of political geography in Postmodernism

Heinz Nissel

More than 20 years already have passed since the term critical geopolitics was used in the Anglo-American language for the first time in order to circumscribe a critical approach to the fields of geopolitics. This new approach has broadened the horizon of modern geography enormously, especially that of political geography, because an irreversible opening towards the theories and methods of social and cultural sciences began with it. In German usage this adoption happened with a delay of one decade (approximately in 2000), but it has also been part of the foundation of research and doctrine for several years. The adoption of the approach of critical geography also stands for a constructivistic change, which can already be considered successful, if not established, today. The reasons for this are of both a theoretical and an empirical nature. Theoretical as a counterbalance to the realpolitik view of (classical) geopolitics by interpreting social phenomena as a combination of power and knowledge. Empirical because this approach permits a high degree of practical orientation (founded on a protagonist-oriented interpretation of the term discourse). Often a moral impetus, concerning a better world as a political-moral demand, goes right through critical geopolitics implicitly or explicitly. This fluctuation within scientific demand between political engagement and radical deconstruction still remains an unsolved cardinal problem. One possibility to conquer it could be by precisely disclosing the decision criteria for the import of theories, another in a new concept of the master term "discourse" in language and practice. Thus the two main strands of Post-modern political geography, critical geography and action-oriented conflict research, have reconciled recently, and this is the reason why the preference given to "empirical contact capability" of the subject and not to "terminological focus" seems to have come to an end. Three conceptual ways of further development are suggested instead: the way of post-structuralism with a new assessment of the relation between protagonist and subject, that of post-colonialism (feministic and neo-Marxist positions included), and, thirdly, an increased installation of system theory, which is supposed to take over the function of spatial semantics when inconsistencies in the theory edifice are to be overcome.

