

GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY AND CLASS HEGEMONY: TOWARDS A HISTORICAL MATERIALIST FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to lay the groundwork for a historical materialist foreign policy analysis. Although there is a huge Marxist literature on especially US imperialism, there is little in the way of systematic empirical research on foreign policy-making from this perspective. Most contributions in this tradition, including more recent ones in the debate on the “new imperialism” are often rather abstract exercises in grand theory - important and insightful but not necessarily directly amenable to empirical research. On the other hand, the radical empirical studies of (US) foreign policy-making that we do have often tend to suffer from a lack of adequate theorization. Seeking to bridge this gap this article first critically reviews the current (and expanding) historical materialist literature on geopolitics (and its link to global capitalism) and then seeks to move beyond that by offering an analytical framework that can be applied to actual empirical research. A theoretical point of departure is that what Harvey identifies as the territorial and capitalist logics of powers are dialectically and hence internally related. But whereas many historical materialists would agree on this abstract notion, the question, however, is not only why but also how (in practice) they are thus related, and how we can thus study the effects of this internal relation. For this, I argue, we need to go beyond positing any abstract logic(s), and analyse the concrete agency of social forces constituting the link between state and capital. I argue that class is the crucial mediating force here and the missing link in much of the literature. A focus on class and class strategy provides us with a basis for a systematic empirical analysis of the concrete processes through which geopolitical strategies of (major) capitalist states are formulated and implemented.

Keywords: Historical Materialist IR, Geopolitics and Social Structure, Capitalist Geopolitics, Class and Geopolitics, Ruling Class Security

The analysis of foreign policy - long recognised as an important sub-field of International Relations (IR) – 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 of 5-volume anthology.¹ While foreign policy analysis within IR has often taken pride in working with “middle range theories”, some have suggested that these concerns need to be articulated with more traditional “grand theories” on the international political system as whole, thus moving the analysis of foreign policy more to the core of the IR discipline.² Although within that latter discipline “Marxism” is still – at least in Europe – recognised as one of the main “alternative” theories or approaches, 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.³ This absence is arguably less the result of a conscious attempt to marginalise Marxism 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, with many rather identifying with the sub-field of International Political Economy (IPE) and conducting research on the larger structures and processes of global capitalism – but without connecting these concrete processes of foreign policy formation. Although there is of course an impressive – and recently revived – (neo-)Marxist literature on (especially US) imperialism, much of this is often of a more theoretical nature, with empirical references serving as illustrations of more abstract arguments. This relative neglect of foreign policy as such has persisted 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.⁴ It is only recently that several historical materialist scholars have started to produce more systematic

¹ Walter Carlsnaes and Stefano Guzzini, *Foreign Policy Analysis-5 vols* (London: Sage, 2011).

² Steve Smith, Amalia Hadfield and Tim Dunne “Introduction”, in Steve Smith, Amalia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (eds) *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-8; Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), ch.6.

³ Similarly, in a recent standard textbook on foreign policy analysis (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.

⁴ Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Benno Teschke and Hannes Lacher, “The changing “Logics” of Capitalist Competition”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007), pp. 565-80; Alexander Anievas, *Marxism and World Politics: Contesting Capitalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Alex Callinicos and Justin Rosenberg, “Uneven and combined development: the social-relational substratum of the international? An exchange of letters”, *Cambridge Review of International Relations* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007), pp. 77-112; Hannes Lacher, “International transformation and the persistence of territoriality: toward a new political geography of capitalism”, *Review of International Political Economy* (Vol. 12, No. 1, 2005), pp. 26-52; Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009); Alex Callinicos, “Does capitalism need the state system?”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007), pp. 533-549; Kees Van der Pijl, *Global Rivalries: From Cold War to Iraq* (London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006); Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith, *Historical Materialism and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

empirical analysis of concrete processes of foreign policy formation and their social and political determinants.⁵

In fact, much historical materialist literature that does at least touch upon foreign policy tends to emphasise (historical and enduring) structures while not paying sufficient attention to the role of agency (in making the structures endure or changing them). 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.⁶ This article seeks to contribute to the development of such a framework, and more generally to demonstrate the relevance of a historical materialist perspective for making sense of foreign policy (formation) of advanced capitalist states within the contemporary global political economy. Seeking to contribute to the current theory development on foreign policy analysis I attempt to show how a historical materialist perspective is needed to reveal the social sources of foreign policy that otherwise remain hidden from view. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the first part I will both seek to build upon and offer a critique of recent historical materialist contributions to the theorisation of geopolitics in relation to global capitalism. Moving from an analysis of the structures of geopolitical relations to the analysis of the formation of geopolitical, i.e., foreign policy, *strategies*, the second part will then seek to outline an analytical framework for a historical materialist foreign policy analysis in which class (agency) is taken as the critical nexus.

Geopolitics and social structure : grounding foreign policy analysis in historical materialist IR

Traditionally, within the academic discipline of IR what is identified as the sub-field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) distinguishes itself from so-called systemic theories of international relations – in particular Neo-realism that takes states as autonomous and self-contained entities abstracted from society⁷ – by arguing that the black box of the state needs to be opened up. Next to its focus on what in IR jargon are called unit-level variables (i.e., what goes on inside the state), foreign policy analysts within IR tend to be “actor-oriented”.⁸ In fact, seeking to develop a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis is to be taken as a recognition of the importance of agency as a medium through

⁵ Sandra Halperin, “Anglo-American Political Economy and Global Restructuring: The Case of Iraq”, *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies* (Vol. 1, No.1, 2009), pp. 12- 32; Alexander Anievas, “The international political economy of appeasement: the social sources of British foreign policy during the 1930s”, *Review of International Studies* (Vol. 37, No. 2, 2011), pp. 601-29 and see the various contributions the Special Section in this issue.

⁶ This is not the first article to point out the need for this. Thus Pozo-Martin (2007: 552) has also advocated a Marxist concept of geopolitics that would pay due to attention to “agency and micro-foundations”. However, this remains an exception and this call has thus far produced little follow-up. While this article does not claim to offer a fully-fledged theory of such micro-foundations it does seek to further develop a historical materialist foreign policy analysis along these lines.

⁷ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hills, 1979).

⁸ Valerie Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* (Vol.1 No.1, 2005) pp. 1-30.

which extant geopolitical relations are reproduced or transformed. But whereas conventional FPA, in line with pluralist political science, focuses on governmental leaders, bureaucrats, and (though more rarely) competing “interest groups”⁹ as actors abstracted from any deeper social structures – a historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis would argue that we need to link foreign policy agency to the structures of capitalist social relations and the social forces engendered by it.

Geopolitics and global capitalism: the historical materialist problématique

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. 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.¹⁰ Indeed, going beyond (the historical specificity of) capitalism, what distinguishes historical materialism 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, and on the other hand different systems of rule (different forms of state), including the relations and practices between those polities.¹¹

The broadest and most ambitious historical materialist theory in this respect is Kees van der Pijl’s¹² project on “modes of foreign relations”, which he sees as “an aspect of social relations in their own right” – though they must be viewed as connected to “modes of production” through class relations emanating from the forces of production.¹³ 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” that makes up modes of foreign relations, the posited

⁹ Marijke Breuning, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Hudson, op.cit. in note 2.

¹⁰ Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London and New York: Verso, 1994); Mark Rupert, “Alienation, Capitalism, and the Inter-State System: Towards a Marxian / Gramscian Critique”, in Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 67-92; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London & New York: Verso, 2003); Kees Van der Pijl, “Capital and the state system: a class act”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007), pp. 619-637.

¹¹ A seminal work in this respect, analysing different systems of rule in the transition from feudalism to absolutism is Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974).

¹² Kees Van der Pijl, *Nomads and Empires* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. x, 19.

inner connections between these and modes of production remain at too high a level of abstraction if we are, as in this paper, 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.

One of the most systematic attempts at theorising the relationship between geopolitics and social structures, is Benno Teschke’s “theory of social property relations”¹⁴ 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”.¹⁵ While Teschke does pay attention to the role of agency, which he sees as dialectically intertwined with structure,¹⁶ he presents a historical-structural account in which geopolitical strategy is seen as *derived* from the given structure of social property (class) relations. Thus Teschke writes that “property relations define the ruling-class strategies that explain international conduct”,¹⁷ with class strategies seen as translating social (property) structures into international behaviour.¹⁸ As a result of this arguably one-sided 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, either synchronically or diachronically. For this we must bring agency more fully into our explanation. But first 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

As Political Marxism rightly stresses, what distinguishes capitalism from feudalism is that whereas in the latter “the political” and “the economic” are fused and personalised within the rule of the lord or king, the former is characterised by an ideological and institutional separation of the two.¹⁹ 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.

In order to sketch this 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 no longer seen as a

¹⁴ Teschke, op.cit. in note 4, p. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 220, 59-60.

¹⁹ Anderson, op.cit. in note 11; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Wood, op.cit. in note 10; Teschke, op.cit. in note 4.

relevant separate sphere as we have moved beyond the inter-state system altogether. Thus William Robinson's well-known thesis²⁰ is that with the rise of a globally integrated transnational capitalist class (TCC) we witness the emergence of a transnational global state that transcends the notion of any distinct "national" interests as national states, "captured by transnational capitalist forces" are "being transformed and increasingly absorbed functionally into a larger transnational institutional structure".²¹ In other words, global capital rules and it rules through a global state, hence there is little point in studying national geopolitical strategies other than as expressions of moments of global class rule (in which case they are no longer national – or geopolitical – strategies anymore as they all function to serve the same transnational capitalists interests). We have thus arrived in a world in which territorial power has dissolved altogether and geopolitics has become a relic of the past.

As both Wood²² and Callinicos²³ argue, albeit on different grounds, the world of global capitalism is and will (likely) remain politically divided into sovereign territorial units.²⁴ According to Wood, the "political form of globalization" is and will remain a plurality of national states as "[n]o conceivable form of "global governance" could perform the kind of daily coercive functions that states perform and capital needs".²⁵ To this one may add the argument that for global capital the perils of world state, a "world empire" as Wallerstein²⁶ 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.

Another matter is to what extent the persistence of territoriality is also bound to lead to rivalry between different capitalist states. Here positions clearly diverge. For Wood, in a system dominated by capitalist states, in which "all international relations are internal to capitalism and governed by capitalist imperatives"²⁷, geopolitics no longer involves "geopolitical accumulation" – that is,

²⁰ William Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Transnational Production, Transnational Capitalists, and the Transnational State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

²¹ William Robinson, "Beyond the Theory of Imperialism: Global Capitalism and the Transnational State", *Societies Without Borders* (No. 2, 2007) p. 17.

²² Wood, op.cit. in note 10.

²³ Callinicos, op.cit. in note 4.

²⁴ In fact, Robinson does not deny that the world is divided into nation-states and that those states are like to persist – he just argues that they are becoming institutional nodes of an incipient global state structure; Robinson, op.cit. in notes 20,21. In that case, however, the persistence of an inter-state system no longer carries the analytical significance that is suggested here. For a penetrating critique of Robinson see Alexander Anievas, "Theories of Global States: A Critique", *Historical Materialism* (No.16, 2008), pp. 190-206; Neil Davidson, "Many capitals, many states: Contingency, logic or mediation?", in Alexander Anievas (ed.), *Marxism and World Politics: Contesting Capitalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 77-93; Teschke and Lacher, op.cit. in note 4; Lacher, op.cit. in note 4.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, part I (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

²⁷ Wood, op.cit. in note 10, p. 127.

the territorial aggrandisement characteristic of pre-capitalist systems²⁸ – precisely because capitalism is a system of rule that is based on the separation of “the economic” from “the 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 domination far beyond the capacities of direct political rule or colonial occupation”.²⁹ Similarly, Teschke maintains that with the arrival of capitalism geopolitical accumulation has – after the European revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries – been replaced by a “non-territorial logic of international surplus appropriation, based on non-political contracts between private citizens”,³⁰ i.e., inter-state rivalry within international anarchy has been substituted by inter-firm rivalry in the free market.

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”,³¹ not only to subordinate workers but equally to open up and keep open subordinate economies to imperialist exploitation.³² Although territorial expansion has become obsolete (and generally dysfunctional) the coercive power of *territorial* states – above all the power of US backing up its “empire of capital” – thus remains crucial. But as US imperialism is the only show in town geopolitical competition is strongly attenuated.³³

In contrast, Callinicos views geopolitical rivalry as endemic to capitalism. He defines capitalist imperialism, or rather imperialisms as for him it is by definition a plural phenomenon, as the intersection of economic (between national capitals) and geopolitical (between national states) competition.³⁴ Although Callinicos might well see the two as internally related, within his theory the link between these two forms of competition, that is, how and why they become articulated in practice, does not become clear. Instead we are time and again reminded of the relative autonomy of geopolitical competition in what Callinicos³⁵ himself has called a necessary “realist moment in any Marxist analysis of international relations”.

The persistence of geopolitics in the age of transnationalisation

²⁸ Teschke, op.cit. in note 4.

²⁹ Wood, op.cit. in note 10, p. 5, 12, 21;); Ellen M. Wood, “Democracy as Ideology of Empire”, in Colin Mooers (ed.), *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), pp. 9-23

³⁰ Teschke, op.cit. in note, p. 263.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5.

³² Ibid., pp. 20-24.

³³ For a Critique Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), pp. 75-81.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁵ Alex Callinicos, “Does capitalism need the state system?”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007), p. 542.

Wood's argument that capitalist imperialism does *not* rely on territorial expansion makes theoretically much sense and seems empirically corroborated by the history of capitalism, and especially of US imperialism since 1945.³⁶ 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.

The fact of the matter is that for now the world is still divided into sovereign national states and that some of these states command the financial, political and military resources that enable them to apply state power externally in a ways that at times are bound to sometimes 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 these forms of geopolitical rivalry are 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, creating a transnational free space for capital.³⁷ In such a space competition between states arguably tends to be restricted to competing for FDI (rather than promote one's own national capitals), while such "competitiveness races" are unlikely to spill over into the security sphere as this would hurt the interests of globally integrated capital. Although this certainly describes an important aspect of the neoliberal capitalist world order of the past decades it is not the whole story.

Pace Robinson the formation of a TCC is neither complete nor necessarily irreversible, nor has it completely obliterated continuing national (class) identities and interests. Indeed, class continues to be constituted as a social actor also within different *national* contexts – whereby class agency thus becomes oriented to the national and national policies, including foreign policy. In fact, while Robinson³⁸ accuses authors as Wood, Callinicos and Harvey (see below) of reifying the nation-state, Robinson tends to reify the transnational capitalist class.

Although the phenomenon of transnational class formation, that is, the formation of class fractions with a particular transnational class consciousness and collective outlook, has been empirically substantiated at least within particular historical and geographically bounded contexts, such as in particular the post-war

³⁶ Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná De Graaff, "The Limits of the Open Door and the US State-Capital Nexus", *Globalizations*, (Vol. 9, No.4, 2012), pp. 539-608.

³⁷ Kees Van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

³⁸ William Robinson, "Beyond the Theory of Imperialism: Global Capitalism and the Transnational State", *Societies Without Borders* Vol. 5, No.2, 2007), pp. 5–26; William Robinson, "The Pitfalls of Realist Analysis of Global Capitalism: A Critique of Ellen Meiskins Wood's *Empire of Capital*", *Historical Materialism* (No. 15, 2007), pp. 71–93.

Atlantic context³⁹ and within the context of the European integration process where this formation of a transnational class for itself has been arguably the strongest (suppressed for review), empirical evidence does not point to the formation of a single integrated *global* TCC as Robinson claims.⁴⁰ Indeed research shows that the larger the scale the thinner these transnationalisation processes become. Thus Carroll⁴¹ shows that at the global level we do find emerging transnational class networks but they are superimposed on persisting national layers within which networks are generally still a lot denser. Concomitant to this transnational capitalist too continue to be embedded into specific national socio-political structures. This is not just ideologically or institutionally determined either as transnational capital often still has a strong national home base and market (especially when in residing in bigger states). National classes, as tied to transnationally oriented but still also partially nationally embedded capital, thus persist “underneath” incomplete and regionally configured (rather than truly global) processes of transnational class formation and these different national classes under certain conditions, and given the geographically uneven development alluded to above, may still have conflicting interests and outlooks that might also spill over into geopolitical competition.

Clearly such competition has continued throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century between the liberal (and expanding) West and non-liberal (and arguably not fully capitalist) contender states.⁴² But leaving this aside – as here our concern is with advanced capitalist states – even within the West, as Van der Pijl has argued⁴³, older historical rivalries have not been completely transcended as what he calls the Lockean heartland expanded over the past centuries. More generally processes of globalisation and transnationalisation are not necessarily irreversible and it would boil down to teleology to expect these processes to go on until the global capitalist Leviathan will have been created. The current Eurocrisis is a case in point. Furthermore, what causes the current centrifugal forces in Europe are, beyond a faulty design of EMU, the large and growing economic imbalances within the Eurozone – a clear regional example of the geographically uneven way in which capitalist development takes place. Whether or not we invoke the Trotskyan concept of “combined and uneven development”⁴⁴, or like Harvey stress how capital concentrates into regional complexes⁴⁵, it is clear that this spatial differentiation of capitalist development also at least potentially leads to a geopolitical dynamic of inter-state competition. But while avoiding the Charybdis of reifying “the transnational”, authors like

³⁹ Kees Van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* (London: Verso, 1984).

⁴⁰ Robinson, op.cit. in note 20.

⁴¹ William K. Carroll, *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the 21st Century* (London: Zed Books, 2010).

⁴² Van der Pijl, op.cit. in note 4.

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ Callinicos, op.cit. in note 33, pp. 88-93; Jamie C. Allison and Alexander Anievas, “Approaching “the international” Beyond Political Marxism”, in Alexander Anievas (ed.), *Marxism and World Politics: Contesting Capitalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 197-214.

⁴⁵ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Callinicos who stress the persistence of inter-imperialist rivalry, tend to come too close to the Scylla of reifying "the geopolitical". Although Callinicos professes not to, as neo-realists do, abstract "states from the social and economic relations in which they are embedded",⁴⁶ this is precisely what he tends to end up doing. This is illustrated by the way in which he views the current world order, namely as a continuation of what is apparently an enduring competition between "Great Powers", with "advanced capitalism" divided into the "competing power centres (...)" of Western Europe, North America and East Asia".⁴⁷ 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. There is also little empirical evidence to sustain the notion of the EU and the USA currently being geopolitical rivals.⁴⁸

Beyond the "relative autonomy" of the geopolitical

The root of the problem in this tendency to reify geopolitical conflict lies in my view in the way Callinicos attempts to grant a degree of autonomy to the geopolitical⁴⁹ 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 well-known distinction⁵⁰ between a "capitalist logic" and a "territorial logic" of power, where capitalist imperialism represents a "contradictory" fusion between the two.⁵¹ Harvey insists that these logics should be seen as "distinct from each other", frequently clashing yet also intertwined in contradictory ways, that is, *dialectically*⁵², but he fails to specify how out of this dialectic imperialist powers come to pursue imperialist foreign policies.⁵³ In the end it appears as if these logics are only externally related.⁵⁴ But, as Brenner⁵⁵ 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".⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Callinicos, op.c.t. In note 33, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁸ Cafruny and Rayner 2007.

⁴⁹ Callinicos, op.cit. in note 33, p. 73.

⁵⁰ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 33-34.

⁵¹ Harvey, op.cit. in note 45, pp. 27-7.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁵³ 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 accumulation by dispossession as an imperialist strategy in response to that.

⁵⁴ Robinson, op.cit. in note 38.

⁵⁵ Robert Brenner, "What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism?", *Historical Materialism* (Vol. 14, No. 4, 2006), pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶ Harvey, op.cit. in note 45, p. 81.

Concomitant to this, and in line with a realist emphasis on state autonomy, state managers tend to be viewed as a separate class or at least autonomous social group with their own "motivations and interests", that is "to sustain or augment the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states".⁵⁷ 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, apart from the fact that Neo-realists cannot agree amongst themselves whether this implies that states ought to maximise their power⁵⁸ or just maintain what they have⁵⁹, 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, i.e., a Realist logic of anarchy.⁶⁰ Surely the state is not simply the agent of capital, but positing state managers as a separate group with – by definition – 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.⁶¹ In Callinicos structuralist mix of Marxism and Realism, class agency and class ideology only appear as an afterthought⁶², with the 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.

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"⁶³ 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 argue below that we need to turn from an analysis of capitalist (economic) structures to capitalist class agency,

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 27; Callinicos, op.cit. in note 33, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Powers* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

⁵⁹ Waltz, op.cit. in note 7.

⁶⁰ Gonzalo Pozo-Martin, "Autonomous or materialist geopolitics?", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007), pp. 551- 63.

⁶¹ Callinicos, op.cit. in note 33, pp. 85-86.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 93-100.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 15.

class being the nexus between state and society, between the political and the economic, and between global capitalism and geopolitics.

Geopolitical strategies and the class nexus

The kind of historical materialist approach to foreign policy analysis that this paper seeks to develop moves beyond those historical materialist conceptions that tend to in almost Realist fashion abstract the state from society and conceive capital as a mere external constraint upon otherwise independently operating state managers. The independence of the latter in terms of "their own *distinctive interests*"⁶⁴ cannot be taken as given a priori, nor can we a priori assume that that the latter's structural dependence on capital will tend to ensure that capital's distinctive interests are nevertheless heeded. Rather than, postulating the interests of state managers theoretically, and on that basis derive expectations about what state managers tend to do (e.g. maximising state power), I would argue that we need to assess the latter empirically and subsequently explain the agency of state managers by analysing the social context in which they operate.⁶⁵ As Teschke and Lacher write: "[t]he question is never what state managers or capitalists ought to do or ought to have done according to an ideal-typified logic, but what they actually did."⁶⁶

From a historical materialist perspective this means linking state managers' agency to the wider social structures and social forces to which the state and state power are internally related. More concretely, we need to empirically examine how state managers are embedded within a wider field of forces, and are in particular related to the overall class structure, whereby the link between state and capital, going beyond a mere "structural interdependence"⁶⁷, must be viewed as internally related through processes of (capitalist) class formation. Although it cannot be excluded that state managers do have separate interests, these are theoretically not to be seen as a on a par with (capitalist) class interests. In fully-fledged capitalist state managers do not as such form a separate social class, that is, a group of people who share a common relationship to the means of production, and who on that structural basis tend to develop collective practices. Arguably state managers can form a separate "state class" in societies (such as possibly "state capitalist" China) where the social formation is not (fully) capitalist and "economic rule" is still very much subordinated to the political control exercised by state managers (see on this Van der Pijl forthcoming). In

⁶⁴ Anievas, op.cit. in note, p. 609.

⁶⁵ This then means that we must equally reject any a priori concept of an identity of interests between state managers and capitalists. Indeed a possible divergence of their interests can certainly not be excluded beforehand, Anievas, op.cit. in note 24, p. 199.

⁶⁶ Teschke and Lacher, op.cit. in note 4, p. 570.

⁶⁷ Anievas, op.cit. in note 5; Fred Block, *Revising State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

(Western) liberal or what Van der Pijl⁶⁸ calls “integral capitalism”, capital instead is fully emancipated from state tutelage and within society forms in effect the true sovereign. In these societies, then, it is the capitalist class – broadly defined as made up by those who own and/or control productive resources and derive the major part of their income as well as social status from this property relationship – that is to be taken as the ruling class. This then means that we must analyse the position and agency of state managers, for instance in formulating and pursuing a state’s geopolitical strategy, in relation to this ruling class and the practices through which it seeks to effectuate and reproduce its rule.

Class here then is seen as the causal nexus between the process of capital accumulation and concomitant interests on the one hand, and the geopolitical interests and strategies of the state on the other.⁶⁹ Here we need to move beyond the classical but misleading instrumentalism versus structuralism debate.⁷⁰ For sure, the structuralist argument is correct in pointing out 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 tend to 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 the capitalist class does (pro-)actively seek to reproduce its rule, to propagate its ideas and ensure that these are articulated within the realm of the state. 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 – and underlying class conflicts and political and ideological struggles through which this rule is reproduced – as a key to understanding foreign policy formation in advanced capitalist states. As indicated, classes may be to some extent transnational(ised), and hence we may come to analyse transnationally constituted national foreign policies. But given, as we argued, the incompleteness of transnationalisation and the geographical unevenness of transnational capitalism, these policies are still likely be more than just different nodes of the same global state.⁷¹ There thus

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁹ A similar point is made by Van der Pijl, op.cit. in note 10, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Bob Jessop, “Dialogue of the Deaf: Some Reflections on the Poulantzas- Miliband Debate”, in Paul Wetherly, Clyde W. Barrow and Peter Burnham (eds.), *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society: Essays on Ralph Miliband* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 132-57; Anievas, op.cit. in note 5, pp. 608-611.

⁷¹ Robinson, op.cit. in note 20.

continues to be a need for a historical materialist analysis of *national* foreign policies.

Let us now finally from such a perspective outline how we could go about seeking to explain actual outcomes in terms of a geopolitical strategy pursued by a particular capitalist state. Moving beyond the concern of conventional FPA with individual or group foreign policy *decision-making*⁷², that is, on explaining why individual or group *x* took particular decision *y*⁷³, a historical materialist approach, I contend, would be above all suitable to make sense of the overall foreign policy orientation and *strategy*, that is, what in the (realist) literature is called grand strategy, 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.⁷⁴ A first starting point would thus be to analyse the social and ideological content of such strategies, and the particular social purpose that they might serve. In next step we would then seek to explain this content, going beyond a constructivist analysis of ideas, by putting the state's geopolitical strategy-makers in their social context, that is, the context within which this strategy is produced.

Putting state managers in their social context: an analytical framework

To avoid any reification of the state we need to recognise that "state activity is always the activity of particular individuals acting *within particular social contexts*".⁷⁵ Thus if foreign policy formation is our explanandum it makes sense to start with the actors (formally) responsible for that policy formation and then uncover how their agency is enabled and conditioned by certain structures.

I would propose that we can analytically distinguish at least two structural dimensions here. The first refers to the social context, or social *position*, of the actors involved. More narrowly we can associate social position with a particular *role*, such as university professor or foreign secretary – with powers, rights, duties, and normative expectations attached to that role – but in order to gain a deeper understanding we need to conceptualise it more broadly as the set of social structures that defines the situation in which an actor finds herself and that as such are internal to her specific actorness.⁷⁶ Social position may thus be

⁷² Hudson, op.cit. in note 8.

⁷³ Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

⁷⁴ Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940s to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 13.

⁷⁵ Colin Wight, (2004) State agency and human activity, *Review of International Studies* (Vol. 30, No. 2, 2004), p. 279.

⁷⁶ Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 153; Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

seen as making the actor into what she is, constituting her particular identity, and engendering a set of interests and ideas or world view and shaping her practices accordingly. In addition, being positioned in a particular way means occupying a particular position within (often different but overlapping sets) of social power relations – defining the extent to which one is able to exercise power over others but also to what extent one is subject to either coercion or influence on the part of other actors. Defined thus, although not necessarily immutable, social position then is usually something more enduring.

The most basic social position from a historical materialist perspective is of course that of class, and thus how people relate to the most fundamental social structure of society – most fundamental because it more than anything else within capitalism shapes “the *distribution* of the structural conditions of action”.⁷⁷ Thus a capitalist has a particular social position as engendered by his position within the prevailing relations of production, and in virtue of occupying that position engages in certain practices (such as exploiting wage labour) and may also be seen as holding particular ideas or beliefs. Ideas here cannot be reduced to the social position an agent occupies, yet neither can they be understood as existing independently from that position, that is, from the social structure in which any ideational practice is embedded.

The next structural dimension we can analytically distinguish is more contingent and more external to the actor as well more tied to the particular role an actor is playing. We here specifically refer to that context or external environment to which one’s strategic conduct is oriented. Thus for instance for a capitalist this may be the particular market in which he competes (the nature and degree of competition he faces and hence the market power he has). If these market conditions change his social position as a capitalist does not necessarily change as well though of course in a limiting case the market may push him out of business which ultimately might make him cease to be a capitalist. It must also be noted that this is indeed an *analytical* distinction and that in reality the lines between these become blurred. For instance, distinguishing between different kinds of capitalists, we might argue that a monopoly capitalist has a different set of interests and outlook than one operating in fully competitive markets. Also, as the external environment changes this may affect one’s social position as well as the ideas that one holds. Nevertheless I would maintain that these interactive effects can be usefully distinguished from the initial social position that one had before facing a particular (changing) environment. Let us now see how this conceptualisation could be applied to a historical materialist foreign policy analysis.

With regard to social position it must of course be noted that emanating from the structures the state, the *role* of state officials responsible for the formulation of an overarching geopolitical strategy, is to define and propagate the

⁷⁷ Bhaskar, op.cit. in note 76, p. 54.

state's critical interests.⁷⁸ This truism, however, does not say anything about what those interests are. Rather than assuming, as in so-called Neo-realist IR theory that the national interest can be derived from a state's objective need for survival within an anarchic system, the point of departure here is that national interests are political constructs serving a particular social purpose. This then means analysing how policy-makers are operating with a wider field of social forces. These forces may be seen as adopting particular strategies towards the state in order to shape the application of state power, i.e., particular state policies. Within their particular role policy-makers may or may be more or less subject to such influences.

Here then we need to theorise not only the nature of the capitalist state in general, and the structural constraints acting upon state managers following from that but also empirically analyse the specific state form in the case at hand. It is here that for instance Jessop's concept of the *strategic selectivity* of the state is useful inasmuch as this refers to the fact that states may be more open towards some social forces than others, and as such select or favour certain strategies and interests over others. Given a particular strategic selectivity, which is itself a product of "past political strategies and struggles"⁷⁹ and hence a reflection of a (past) social balance of power, we may subsequently analyse how particular state officials, in this case foreign policy-makers, are in their practices shaped by the strategies of particular social forces seeking to transform or reproduce state policies. Although social forces is a term that is broader than just class forces I would nevertheless maintain, as indicated, that within capitalist societies, we need to analyse in particular capitalist class strategies seeking to reproduce capitalist class hegemony. Whether we see this in terms of the elaboration of "hegemonic projects"⁸⁰ or a "comprehensive concept of control"⁸¹, that is, as political programmes seeking to serve the long-term interests of an hegemonic class fraction, or conceptualise this in yet different ways, the point is that we always need to see how class strategies ultimately get effectuated, or not, in terms of state policies.

Again, while structural dependencies may be part of the explanation of why state managers seek to serve the needs of capital owners, empirical evidence in a variety of contexts show that capitalists in fact also seek to make sure that their preferences are actually known, rather than relying on their "structural

⁷⁸ Beyond this the so-called *bureaucratic politics* approach in FPA (building upon Allison's classic from 1971) stresses that officials occupying different positions within the executive tend assume different roles and have divergent interests. Beyond the fact that empirically this approach has produced at best ambiguous results, it makes little sense to regard geopolitical strategy (rather than individual decisions) as the outcome of bureaucratic politics.

⁷⁹ Bashkar, op.cit. in note 76, p. 261.

⁸⁰ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place* (Cambridge:Polity, 1990).

⁸¹ Henk Overbeek, "Transnational class formation and concepts of control: notes towards a genealogy of the Amsterdam Project in International Political Economy", *Journal of International Relations and Development* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2004), pp. 113-41

power” alone. Thus one relevant aspect of social position that I here distinguish is how foreign policy-makers – given a particular strategic selectivity of the state, and given the particular balance of class forces– are related to dominant capitalist class interests and how and to what extent their practices may thus come reflect particular capitalist class strategies. Of course we should be open to the possibility that state policies turn out not to be congruent with dominant class interests, in which case it is this divergence that we should explain.

We should thus analyse the extent to which and the ways in which state managers responsible for geopolitical strategy may be embedded within particular social networks through which the capitalist class exercises its power within civil and political society. One channel through which this may take place is that of direct personal ties between state managers and the capitalist class elite, for instance we may examine to what extent the former is recruited from the latter. This surely would be would then be a key aspect of the social position of relevant state managers and bound to shape their world view and outlook in significant ways. It also brings us to the thorny question of the class membership of state managers itself. One position here is that, since they live of surplus labour and are in control of the state whose function it is to defend the interests of the bourgeoisie, state managers are by definition part of the capitalist class.⁸² I find such a view less helpful as it implicitly turns all those who are not wage labourers into capitalists and does not allow us to make further distinctions which in my view are both analytically and politically necessary – actually as unhelpful as considering them as by definition belonging to a separate social class or at least autonomous social group. These questions should rather be solved empirically. Thus state managers may or may not have a capitalist class background, but to the extent that they do, the significance of that should not be dismissed even if this is not the only mechanism, or even necessarily the most important one, through which capitalist class rule is effectuated. Nevertheless, empirical research does show that it is important in the case of particular capitalist states, most notably the US. Thus Van Apeldoorn and De Graaff forthcoming argue that throughout the history of US foreign policy America’s foreign policy or grand strategy-makers have been closely linked to or indeed could themselves be regarded as members of America’s corporate elite, which helps to account for the fact the US has consistently pursued a geopolitical strategy broadly serving the interests of the transnationally oriented fraction of American capital that dominates these corporate elite networks.

The second structural dimension to which we can link the agency of geopolitical strategy-makers is the wider structural context in which they operate as policy-makers and to which their strategies are oriented. State officials involved in the making of an overall geopolitical or grand strategy are obviously faced by a given global and international context, i.e., the environment that state officials through their grand strategy seek to shape in pursuit of perceived “national” interests. Global context here cannot be conceived in Neo-realist terms as

⁸² Davidson, *op.cit.* in note 24, p. 84.

systemic pressures on states given their purported need to survive in anarchy. As indicated, no such *raison d'état* on the part of state managers can be assumed. Instead, as argued, we need to explain geopolitical strategy by analysing its *social* sources. Yet the global context does act as a set of structures providing both constraints and opportunities for a geopolitical strategy thus constructed.

The states system and the power relations within it as well as the capitalist world economy and its social relations constitute a global political economy in which given territorially defined independent political units, i.e., states, occupy a certain position. Clearly, Realists, as do World-system theorists, have a point that some states are more powerful than others. But the economic, financial, political and military power of a state cannot of course be simply taken as attributes of a state abstracted from society (as world-system theory recognises much better than does Realism) but must be also be related to the power of the capitals residing in it and the position they occupy within the world market and within global value chains. But how this is then crystallised into the power of a state vis-à-vis other states is an important structural condition shaping geopolitical strategy-making inasmuch as it determines to what extent a state (and its ruling) class can successfully shape its environment rather than just being shaped by it (even if thus reproducing it); whether it is able to set the rules of others or just has to follow them.

In sum, although the power balance as such cannot explain why particular strategies are preferred over others or account for the social purpose they serve, it does define the range of options that states have available. Even if foreign policy-makers may not always sufficiently recognise the constraints under which they operate, and are certainly unable to foresee all the possible consequences of their actions, the limits as imposed by the external environment are likely to affect geopolitical strategy-making if only because manifest contradictions and limits of a previous strategy (of for instance an outgoing government) may lead to attempts to adjust the strategy (even if of course there may also be strong structural reasons for keeping on repeating the same mistakes).

It must be pointed out, returning to our earlier discussion, that with such an analytical framework we have not said anything about the particular nature of interstate relations within global capitalism. The approach adopted here does not tell us a priori on whether this system of capitalist international relations is likely to be characterised by e.g. inter-imperialist rivalry, or rather by deep international cooperation and integration or by for instance an American superimperialism. These in fact are important questions but belong to a different realm, namely that of historical investigation. Global capitalism, as Teschke and Lacher⁸³ also argue can in fact co-exist with all of these and arguably more forms of inter-state relations. These historically and geographically variegated forms must be seen as

⁸³ Teschke and Lacher, op.cit. in note 4.

the outcomes of partially contingent processes of state practices and their interactive effects, practices internally related to evolving social relations of global capitalism and as such mediated by national and transnational class strategies. Historical materialist foreign policy analysis is not to be burdened by preconceived ideas in this regard, but should rather focus on explaining the formation of geopolitical strategies themselves. As they, and their interaction, in fact can be seen as instances of the agency through which the international system is reproduced and/or transformed, this will be an indispensable step to understanding of changing geopolitical relations themselves.

Conclusion: from national security to ruling class security

In this article I have tried to develop some conceptual guidelines and methodological starting points for analysing these foreign policy strategies from a historical materialist perspective. Although I have obviously not been able to discuss all relevant theoretical aspects of such an endeavour, and though some aspects that I have touched upon – such as the nature of the capitalist state, the position of state managers vis-à-vis capitalist society or the way the external (global) environment conditions their practices – need yet more thorough theorisation than I have been able to provide within the scope of this article, we should also bear in my mind that no amount of theorisation can ever substitute for equally necessary empirical research. Given the dearth of historical materialist foreign policy analysis much the real work thus still lies ahead.

Adopting the perspective outlined here such a research would enable us to uncover the otherwise hidden social sources of geopolitical strategy as pursued by capitalist states. Whereas for instance Neo-realism sees foreign policy in terms of pursuing a rational strategy of maximising “national security”, the historical materialist approach argued for above would allow us to deconstruct the realist concept of “national security” and examine to what extent we can reconstruct it as “ruling class security”, that is, these strategies in fact reflect (if not always perfectly) capitalist class strategies seeking to reproduce class hegemony. 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 hence that so-called national security is often in fact about the security of 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 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.⁸⁴ 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 a dominant class (fraction), and maintaining its 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 both the British and the US cases of imperialism show that imperialism as a solution to the recurrent problem of overaccumulation was from the perspective of its ruling elites preferred to alternative "domestic" and more progressive solutions, such as redistribution and other socio-economic reforms allowing the absorption of surplus capital.⁸⁵ As the latter would necessarily involve class compromises and concessions limiting the power and privileges of the British and American ruling classes, 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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⁸⁴ Assuming that the conquering state would not leave its rule intact, Brenner, op.cit. in note 55, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Harvey, op.cit. in note 45, p, 126; the US case also van Apeldoorn and De Graaff op.cit. in note 36 ;Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, "Corporate Elite Networks and Us Post- Cold War Grand Strategy from Clinton to Obama", *European Journal of International Relations*, online first, (2012, June) and Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, *American Grand Strategy and Corporate Elite Networks: The Open Door and its Variations since the End of the Cold War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014 forthcoming).