
Geoeconomic Leaders among the Three Seas Initiative Countries. Part 1: Geoeconomics as a Paradigm for Research on International Security

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to build an analytical framework for measuring the geopolitical potential of the states in the Three Seas Initiative region and, on this basis, to infer which states are leaders in the region. The article integrates theoretical principles of geoeconomics with practical indicators that, in the authors' opinion, can serve as analytical tools to determine the geoeconomic power of states in international relations and security implications.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The methods used in this study are comparative analysis and inductive method to build general theorems. The above methods consist of research procedures such as describing, defining, classifying. Classification and taxonomy of variables were used to analyze the potential of countries. The spectrum of methods used guarantees the objectivity of the results obtained.

Findings: Geoeconomics as a paradigm of international security research meets the cognitive requirements of security and political sciences. It has the appropriate theoretical foundations necessary for conceptualization and enables the construction of a cognitive framework relating to socio-economic facts.

Practical implications: Geoeconomics represents a new quality of potentiometric cognition applicable to international relations. It makes it possible to discern the potentials of states, to identify leaders, and to relate states and regions to general properties of international order (geopolitics and geostrategy) in the context of international security studies.

Keywords: Security, geoeconomics, indicators, Three Seas Initiative.

JEL Classification: Security issues.

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1. Introduction

The paper is the result of research on international security carried out under two Ministry of National Defense Research Grants, “The geopolitical, military, and economic security dimension of the Three Seas Initiative. The present and the prospects” and “Polish Reason of State in the 2035 Perspective”. It is intended to use the results of research conducted within the framework of extended analysis of phenomena in the international security environment. This paper presents a reevaluation of the structure of geopolitical relations in the new international order. The emergence of geoeconomics as a new paradigm for describing socio-political phenomena makes it necessary to determine its theoretical and methodological utility. The problem resolved herein is the conceptualization and methodological utility of geoeconomics in describing phenomena for a selected geopolitical area. For purposes associated with this premise, a comparative analysis of the theory of geoeconomics and conceptualization of this term for the research were carried out.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse selected geoeconomic and geopolitical theories. The research questions that guided the overall analysis were: To what extent and in what scope can geoeconomics complement geopolitical research in the area of international security? How does the geoeconomic research paradigm relate to geopolitical and potentiometric analysis in international security? What indicators can be used to assess the geoeconomic position of states and their security?

The results of the study make it possible to build general theorems. The concept of geoeconomics served as an instrument to identify categories and indicators. A task of key importance in the study was to relate the theoretical findings to empirical data in the form of facts and parameters that allowed for developing comparisons. The combination of the above problems resulted, in our opinion, in a model of geoeconomic cognition with cognitive and analytical properties for the countries of the Three Seas Initiative as presented in the following research paper.

1.1 A Theoretical Approach to Geoeconomics in Security Studies

The contemporary international order requires understanding. The plethora of phenomena and processes that are subject to observation and study makes understanding of the phenomena taking place in international security increasingly difficult. Therefore, the branches of the existing sciences are beginning to grow and expand in order to capture the trends and phenomena occurring in the international security environment in an increasingly detailed and relevant way. Given the reality and variability of the processes taking place in the modern world, “economic instruments play an increasingly important role, replacing the previous geopolitical factors such as population size, military strength, and territory” (Potulski, 2010). This makes it necessary to adapt, refine, and develop new qualitative indicators of trends in the geopolitical space for the purpose of analysis of international security (Mostafanezhad, 2017). An example of this is geoeconomics. Today, a new field of

knowledge is emerging that is based on social science, political science, security science, economic science, and natural science. However, its scope is undefined and undeveloped, mainly due to the lack of its own methods of cognition (Blackwill and Harris, 2016).

The fundamental objective from the standpoint of geoeconomics to be achieved by way of analysis of international security and the definition of world order is to define this scientific field. Since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been only a few publications that used the paradigm of geoeconomics in research on international relations, which makes an analysis of the definition difficult. However, there are several theoretical approaches to geoeconomics (Mercille, 2008). Each recognized that geoeconomics is a tool of geopolitics and turns the economy into an instrument of rivalry. Through wealth and capital accumulation (Wallerstein, 2007), geoeconomics is to ensure security internally as well as internationally (Grosse, 2020).

The research analysis will be preceded by a comparative analysis of the theoretical approaches to geoeconomics proposed by Edward Luttwak, the author of this concept and promoter of studying the international order through the economic lens, and Joseph Nye who, in his groundbreaking work, discusses the concept of a three-dimensional chess game as a model of the entire international order. In his assumption, the central chessboard, which binds hard power with soft power, is geoeconomics as a field of competition between countries and global powers. The third concept relates strongly to geopolitics and geostrategy, as well as geoeconomics. Carlo Jean proposes the category of economic wars as a new dimension of rivalry between the poles in the new international order. These three theoretical approaches enable a methodologically sound analysis of the potentiometric indicators of countries and global powers.

1.2 The Concept of Geoeconomics According to Edward Luttwak

Edward Luttwak created and brought into the scholarly discourse the concept of geoeconomics as a paradigm for the study of contemporary international relations (Luttwak, 1990; 1991). It was created for the purpose of defining the new power relationship between global powers after the Cold War, indicating the arrival of an era of geoeconomics (Luttwak, 2000). Luttwak refers to Robert Cooper's concept of existence in the modern world of different international orders (their different levels): pre-modern, modern, and post-modern (Cooper, 2005). Geoeconomics as a relationship between states and regions and as a new arrangement of international relations is a part of postmodernity. It emerged as a result of evolution and geopolitical competition at the time when the first capitalist states were established (Callinicos, 2009).

Armed conflicts in countries that are a part of the geoeconomic order are becoming rare and geopolitical rivalry is expressed mainly through economic means (Luttwak,

2000). Armed conflict are replaced by geoeconomics, where the equivalent of force is investment capital accumulated or controlled by the state, the equivalent of improvements in weapon types is state-subsidized development of new products, state-supported market penetration replaces military bases and garrisons deployed abroad, as well as diplomatic influence (Luttwak, 2000). However, it is important to distinguish between the level of capitalism and geoeconomics, which is present only in the case of actions taken by states (Alami and Dixon, 2020). Luttwak also discusses the grand strategy, which he strives to outline as an interstate or interregional conflict. In the grand strategy, the military dimension is only one of many elements of conflict and is supplemented by political, diplomatic, and economic contexts (Luttwak, 2001).

Luttwak's identifies taxes, import limits, mercantilism, and trade barriers as the tools of geoeconomics (Wróbel, 2012). In his opinions, the offensive weapons are research and development (spending on science) to become a leader in industries with high future potential, privileged strategic manufacturing (shipbuilding, automotive), public procurement, and “predatory finance” (cheap credit) (Luttwak, 2000).

The goal of geoeconomics is to gain a prominent position in strategic industries (telecommunications, information technology, and biotechnology) and to maximize not the amount of gold owned, but the number of highly skilled jobs in modern industries and specialized services (Luttwak, 2000). The future of the international order will be determined by the competition between geoeconomic regions, but also between the states of the rich North and the poor South (Jean, 2003). The aversion to armed conflict and use of force in Europe means that the power of countries will be determined by their economies (Smith, 2002).

1.3 A Three-Dimensional Chess Game - The Second Level of Rivalry between Powers – Geoeconomics according to Joseph Nye

Joseph Nye, the author of the well-known concept of soft power, also refers to geoeconomics as one of the three dimensions of global power. He assumes that geoeconomics is, besides hard power and soft power, the third determinant of state power in the form of the middle board in a three-dimensional chess game. Geoeconomics, in his view, is international political relations, distinct from an international order based on military power, where the distribution of power is multipolar (Nye, 2007). However, geoeconomics is also considered as the soft power of geopolitics as it serves to increase power (Gritsch, 2005).

Nye presents a liberal, rather than a realist, view of the contemporary international order and geoeconomics. He points out that geoeconomics does not have to be a field of competition, but a platform for cooperation between countries and regions. In doing so, he assumes that competition in geoeconomics is a positive-sum game, globalization is an undeniable fact, and only community action, rather than real

struggle, become a rational solution (Nye, 2002). Separation of politics from economics causes states to adopt other forms of regional and supra-regional cooperation. The attractiveness of these solutions leads to the emergence of imperial geoeconomic blocs based on the bandwagoning principle (Gindin and Panitc, 2005).

According to Nye's approach, Geoeconomics uses tools in the form of humanitarian aid (an expected and desired form of cooperation), corruption, and sanctions. The instruments of influence are money and economic sanctions. In Nye's view, the features of geoeconomics as an order are persuasion and coercion (Nye, 2007). This schematic understanding of the instruments of geoeconomics needs to be supplemented by a key category of Nye's deliberations, soft power. There is a coupling between the two in the form of attraction, market attractiveness, and economic attractiveness as a soft power tool to gain geoeconomic advantage (Nye, 2007).

Table 1. *Economic power (Geoeconomics) in Nye's approach*

Behavior	Main measures	Government policy
Temptation	Payments	Aid
Coercion	Sanctions	Bribes Sanctions

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Nye, 2007.

Nye endorses the pacifist vision of geoeconomics present in almost all representatives of liberalism in international relations. He points out that democracy and socioeconomic changes have made war possible but no longer acceptable on the level of international competition between developed countries. Geoeconomics does not use the category of conquest but, instead, that of competition. War threatens economics and is therefore undesirable in the geoeconomic dimension (space) for several reasons: it threatens economic objectives, it is costly and it scares away investors (Nye, 2007).

Hard power also has an impact on Geoeconomics. On the one hand, it gives a sense of security and stability, and creates myths of invincibility, but on the other hand, war and keeping the forces necessary to ensure security are costly and place a burden on the government budget (Nye, 2007). Nye also divides international order, as does R. Cooper, into three dimensions, where the three sources of power - military, economic, and soft - remain relevant, albeit to different degrees and in different relations (Nye, 2007). There is no doubt that, like David Harvey, Nye sees that capital is a resource and creates the necessary conditions for modern forms of geoeconomic warfare (Harvey, 2010).

Geoeconomics is most strongly manifested in the category of national interest, which should be capacious and far-sighted. Nye points out that the category of imperialism requires maintaining international markets for the pursuit of interests. Geoeconomics as a plane of international relations can be presented as a good

consumed by the entire international community. The national interest of a country in this dimension is focused on the production (Aleksy-Szucsich, 2012) and export of goods, and on benefiting from presence in markets and their stabilization (Nye, 2007). While military power is the foundation of empires and military powers, geoeconomics as a dimension of international order focuses on economic powers and their rivalry.

Geoeconomics as a plane of competition and an axis of the international order relates to the flow of capital, ideas, and liberal values. Through Geoeconomics, individual actors (states, NGOs, and transnational corporations) gain a much greater scope of influence. States continue to control the fiscal policy and thus to regulate financial flows. By using corporations, they have much more influence over the lives of people in other countries than their government representatives. Geoeconomics also provides two benefits to countries, they can join a positive-sum game and they are on a fairly level playing field with other actors in terms of economics.

With Geoeconomics as one of the three dimensions of grand politics, the international order will take shape as a result of the competition of the G-3 triad: USA - Europe - East Asia (China and Japan) (Oliveira, Murton, Rippa, Harlan, and Yang, 2020). In addition to states, there are also other actors, such as transnational corporations (Potocki, 2003) with sufficient capital to be able to pursue their own politics alongside the politics of powers, while complementing or competing with the latter. Success in the field of geoeconomics will translate directly into hard power and soft power of these countries (Nye, 2007).

2. Geopolitics, Geostrategy, and Geoeconomics - Carlo Jean's Concept of Economic Warfare

The concept that links the above-mentioned deliberations of Nye and Luttwak seems to be Carlo Jean's view of Geoeconomics and economic warfare. First of all, Jean rejects the view of Geoeconomics proposed by Luttwak as an alternative to geopolitics, but considers it as “an analysis and theory of the preparation and use of economic instruments to achieve geopolitical objectives” (Jean, 2003). The purpose of geoeconomics is to improve the competitiveness of a country's economy in global markets. This is not done by weakening other countries/economies, but by strengthening one's own economy (Jean, 2003). In this sense, Geoeconomics is a dimension of geopolitics. What distinguishes the two concepts is that Geoeconomics works for the society and the economy more than for political struggle.

With regard to Nye's concept of soft power, Jean recognizes, in the same way as Luttwak, that the central interest of the state continues to be the promotion of its own and regional welfare. The multiplication of the wealth of a state's own citizens is intended to create appropriate soft power measures. Creation of the myth of wealth, security, and prosperity is an element of soft power that is utilized as an instrument for actions in the geoeconomic sphere. In this respect, Geoeconomics appears to be

“a system of promotion (sistema-Paese) in international competition and as an end in itself” (Jean, 2003). This is because, in line with Nye's assumptions, countries are evaluated in many ways and economic performance remains the most important criterion.

Like Nye, Carlo Jean defines the category of national interest by recognizing it as negotiable with other actors involved in the Geo-Economic competition (other states and regions, but also intra-state companies). National interest must be suspended in the future and must include and balance costs and objectives (Jean, 2003). States are and will remain the primary actors in international relations, with other geopolitical actors growing in strength. Regarding the category of interest, it should be pursued with new state structures and strategies adapted to geoeconomic objectives (Jean, 2003).

Carlo Jean strongly emphasizes the concept of economic warfare. He presents Geoeconomics as a platform for the pursuit of its three orders, economy as a military power, economy as a cause of war, and economy as an instrument of conflict (Jean, 2003). The concept of economic warfare is based on three dimensions of purpose, political, strategic, and economic. In the first dimension, the means are embargoes and sanctions (Jean, 2003). The strategic dimension is not precisely defined. It seems that a reference can be made in this regard to Ulrich Beck who identifies and defines a whole range of strategies of capital use (autarky strategies, substitution strategies, monopolization strategies, and preemptive domination strategies) (Beck, 2005). The economic dimension of economic warfare is measured by balancing costs and profits. It is not a zero-sum game and has a transactional nature. The aim of such warfare is not to annihilate or impose a country's will on the opponent, but to increase our own wealth, assuming that this involves violation of the rules of competitiveness and free market (Jean, 2003). Geoeconomics is considered to be a strategy in a geopolitical game.

Nation-states, on the one hand, are losing their importance due to globalization, especially in economic terms, because “the economy has lost its link with the territory of a state” (Jean, 2003). The economy is now governed globally and regionally, with less and less regulation left to states. Economic processes are transnational and are no longer subject to state control, much less to direct management. Geo-Economic competition is characterized by a “distributed decision-making system” (Jean, 2003). However, on the other hand, states have a whole range of instruments for geoeconomic rivalry. Additionally, the possibility to develop a state's own Geo-Economic potential is not geopolitically (geographically) determined. This gives states of all potentials and sizes a broad range of possibility for action (Haliżak, 2012c).

Jean prefers to discuss economic warfare, with Geoeconomics as one of its dimensions. He points out that economic rivalry between countries and economic regions will become increasingly intense. The accumulation of capital by states is a

new dimension of competition. It translates into Geo-Economic structural means, improvement of infrastructure, level of education, level of vocational training, development of service networks, and development of innovation and scientific research (Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2012). All of this is to further industrial expansion and take the contemporary form of Colbertism of new, advanced technologies (Jean, 2003).

As for tools and instruments of Geoeconomics, Jean approaches the issue in a rather figurative, ambiguous, and general way. The broad description allows for ambiguous interpretation. It does not refer to indicators but to actions such as protection of leading economic actors, expansion of industrial intelligence and counterintelligence, and drafting of standards that regulate the economy and import standards (Jean, 2003).

In Jean's view, the dimension of Geo-Economic rivalry looks similar to Cooper's, but translates into geographic aspects. Jean indicated that conflicts will play out along three axes, North-North, South-South, and North-South. Economic struggle will be dominant in the first axis, military power will dominate in the second, while in the third axis there will be a change in the nature of the use of military forces, which will be deployed on missions and international security operations "obviously protecting the existing economic order that is beneficial to the West" (Jean, 2003).

In geopolitical terms, Jean advocates the emergence of Geo-Economic regions in which the prerogatives of market regulation will be held by supranational institutions. This will create a new world order based on economic poles. He favors the idea of competition between Geo-Economic poles. It develops a vision of an axis composed of the USA, Europe, and Japan, which already seems to need updating and exchanging Japan for China as a country and a region (Collinicos, 2009) of exceptional Geo-Economic importance. He points out that these three states-regions will control the world economy in the near future by dictating the rules of the Geo-Economic game. The new world order will evolve into three mutually competing Geo-Economic blocs. The future geopolitical order will be constituted not as previous ones by military and political events, but (as in the case of the collapse of the USSR) by Geo-Economic actions (Jean, 2003).

3. Geoeconomics - Systematization of the Concept

The above theoretical analysis of geoeconomics provides a starting material for the development of methodological, methodical, and theoretical assumptions concerning geoeconomics. Edward Halizak points out that Geoeconomics "is, in an exploratory sense, the most adequate analytical category for capturing significant changes in the international arena" (Halizak, 2012a). It reduces Geoeconomics to analytical and cognitive properties and an approach to, or paradigm of, research on security using socio-economic instruments. Such an approach dominates the Polish scientific literature, where "Geoeconomics can be defined as the intersection of the economic

and financial sphere with the sphere of international politics and the security dimension” (Jędrzejowska, 2014). This definition makes it possible to engage geopolitics (with its scope of relevance to security science) and economics. Thus, the geographical factor is displaced in the above approach and replaced with the geopolitical paradigm.

The approach proposed herein focuses, as in the comparative analysis above, on the geopolitical factor (rather than political and geographic factors separately) and the economic factor. In this dimension, Geoeconomics would draw from geopolitics and geostrategy, as well as from security science and economics. However, the problem remains as to whether Geoeconomics is a paradigm or can be considered an independent field of cognition (Holden, 2020). Jakub Potulski points out that “Geoeconomics is a complex concept, as according to it the state policy is dependent on economic factors. It is also a specific research approach which means an interpretation of the global system in terms of its economic attributes” (Potulski, 2010). Thus, Geoeconomics is not an independent science, but rather a research approach.

Luttwak equates geopolitics with Geoeconomics. Other scientists believe that these sciences are not mutually exclusive. “Geoeconomics is not a branch of geopolitics, as is commonly believed, but an entirely new concept, a generalization of new phenomena and processes in international relations” (Halizak, 2012b). Geoeconomics should be seen as a paradigm that combines geopolitics (geostrategy) and economics (Lisiakiewicz, 2017). This combination of sciences must each time refer to the characteristics of the organization of the international system and take into account the factor of its security.

The purpose of learning about Geoeconomics is to verify the international order. This paradigm, which concerns states, regions, and the world order, is always implemented on a macro scale. Geoeconomics applies primarily to “classification of countries according to the degree of their socio-economic development, assessment of economic integration and disintegration, and analysis of problems of economic differences and inequality between countries” (Potulski, 2010).

To describe these phenomena, Geoeconomics each time uses generalizations derived from geopolitical concepts, as well as economic measures and indicators. Unlike geopolitics, this research approach utilizes factual empirical material. As a result, Geoeconomics rather transforms data, gives reliable conclusions, and at the same time complements but does not replace geopolitical calculations (Cowen and Smith, 2009). There are also opinions that “the emerging new world order is primarily a new economic order - *pax oeconomicana* - that covers the entire globe” (Potulski, 2010).

However, the optimism arising from the application of the Geo-Economic paradigm to the analysis of international security should be tempered. “The economic factor is

an element of strength which is of universal importance and is undoubtedly a resource that is favorable to the growth of the power of the state. However, it is wrong to claim that the 21st century is the century of Geoeconomics” (Łoś, 2018). It turns out that it is also incorrect to say that global powers pay more attention to economics than geopolitics (Anioł, 2002). This view, typical of the early 21st century, has been verified by the actions of global powers in the last two decades.

Therefore, Geoeconomics can and should be treated as a complementary science to political science and international security science (on a par with geopolitics and geostrategy). Geoeconomics is a strategy of geopolitical rivalry with own resources (national economy), instruments, and area of rivalry (Grosse, 2014).

4. Instruments and Space of Geoeconomics

The above definitional and conceptual analyses require a conceptualization of the underlying assumptions. While Geoeconomics itself is often defined and each time operationalized when choosing the research method, in order to verify the research measures (instruments) of the Geo-Economic international order, it is necessary to specify what the Geo-Economic space is and what these indicators are. As the above discussion demonstrates, the common denominator for a definition of Geo-Economic space is the state and the economy, and the relationship between them. It can be pointed out that for Geoeconomics the objects of analysis are the fields of correlation between politics and economy, the limits of market and state action, the state capabilities, and the market competitiveness strategy (Halizak, 2012c; 2012d).

The space of Geoeconomics is relative in terms of the subject that perceives or its studies. It is considered as a function, an indicator of the intensity of the relationship between the economy, the state, and the geographic distribution of economic activity. It incorporates the structure of institutionalization of capitalism and liberal values, such as the free market along with legislation. It is also a function of economic competition (Halizak, 2017).

The Geo-Economic space can also be analyzed axiologically. In such a case, it refers to shared values, including cognitive properties, such as transactions and interactions based on a unified technological system, universal technical, scientific, and natural laws, as well as free market processes and phenomena that are subject to the analysis by laws of economics, the only cognitive model and modus (way of implementation) of global economy (capturing the whole system along with its differentiating regions), peculiar organizations, structure, and institutionalization that imposes economic standards and norms (Żukowska, 2016). Consequently, the Geo-Economic space comprises the economic-political (spatial, geopolitical) and economic (socio-globalization) dimensions.

5. Conclusions

The study presented herein shows that economics is the key to resolving geopolitical problems related to economic rivalry. It helps to present the state in the broad context of its economic position in the international security environment, taking into account the most important instruments relating to the characteristics of power. The paradigm of geoeconomics is a dimension of geopolitical research and determines the strategy of states related to regional security, taking into account their capabilities and opportunities and verifying their potential.

Therefore, geoeconomics helps to determine the ranking and thus the status of countries, building their position (stratification) in the region, by using its unique indicators, such as gross domestic product (GDP) growth, GDP per capita, Human Development Index, Fragile State Index, investment and R&D spending, state military spending and ratio of education and health spending to military spending, skilled labor force size, unemployment level, and humanitarian aid donated to poorer countries, as well as indicators related to doing business and the largest corporations of the countries in the region.

Geoeconomics as a paradigm for research on international security works in certain properties of cognition. It meets the methodical and methodological requirements of objective cognition. Outside the 3SI region, it may have broader cognitive applications. The next part of the paper titled: *Geo-Economic Leaders among the Three Seas Initiative Countries. Part 2. Research Results* discusses indicators and relates the theoretical considerations to practical cognitive applications.

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