THE ARAB WORLD – BETWEEN CENTRALITY AND PERIPHERY ON THE POLITICAL MAP

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Abstract: Into the Arabic speaking countries, the values of the geopolitical potential Index indicate the existence of three pivot states: Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco. Thus, the Turkish-Arabic-Iranian pivotal area (which includes Saudi Kingdom and Egypt) is found between Europe and Asia, within a difficult Newtonian mechanics of simultaneous gravity attraction, in relation with the two territorial bodies with masses higher than its mass. The phenomenon emphasizes the status of the Arabic-Turkish areal as a double peripheral fronton of connection and transit between the European and Asian space.

Key words: Arab speaking space, geopolitical potential, power states, pivotal states, peripheral states

1. THE NOTION OF GEOPOLITICAL POTENTIAL USED FOR DEFINING THE CENTRALITY: POWER STATES, PIVOTAL STATES, PERIPHERAL STATES

The political-geographic space is organized under the form of a hierarchic territorial system, within which each state represents a well-defined component with a specific place and valences into the systemic structure. In order to emphasize this aspect, the Anglo-Saxon specialized literature had used within the last decade of the 20th century, through Robert Chase, Emily Hill and Paul Kennedy the theory of pivotal states[1], for the application of which there had not been yet conceived a rigorous methodology regarding the introduction of the state entities into the specific category or for the settlement of other categories of states (for example peripheral states, power states). The theory concerned asserts that the determination of pivot state is made according to a set of six criteria, respectively the state's geographic and geostrategic position, the territorial size, the demographic potential, the economic potential, the organizational capacity and the military potential, without specifying exactly what are the methods and the sizes by which the respective criteria are being transposed into practice so as the states would be classified according to one category.

With the purpose of a unitary settlement of the states' framing method into the hierarchy of the spatial system, we have projected the usage of ***the geopolitical potential index (I)***, as a synthetic parameter used for classifying

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[1] Robert Chase et al., *The Pivotal States: a New Framework for U.S. Policy in the Developing World*, 1998, p. 74

the states, and its calculation formula shall contain the values of different indicators that personalize the six criteria hereinabove. Subsequently, according to the values of the geopolitical potential index, the valences of the states shall be settled within the worldwide or territorial system: power-states, pivotal states and peripheral states.

Thus, for the criterion of the geographic and geostrategic position we shall take into account three sizes: the length of the borders, the number of the sea facets and the number of the strategic routes within the states' spatial proximity (straits, canals, roads/railroads with strategic valences). For the criterion related to the size of the territory we shall take into account the surface of the states and for the demographic potential, we shall take into account the number of the population and the growth rate of the population (expressed by values in absolute figures of the demographic balance). The economic potential shall be compared by means of the value of Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.) and the military potential by means of the value of military expenses exclusively addressed to defense. The organizational capacity of the states shall be expressed by the stability of the state-governmental system, respectively the sustainable or instable system or non-governing state.

The geopolitical potential index shall be calculated on a scale from 0 to 100, the states with the value of the index surpassing 40 units are considered power-states, the value between 20-40 units define the pivotal states and the values situated under 20 units characterize the peripheral states.

Practically, the geopolitical potential index shall be obtained by adding the parameters hereinabove mentioned to which the following is associated: a multiplication factor that renders the weighting factor to each parameter into the general economy of the calculated potential. The biggest weighing factors shall be assigned to the geographic and geostrategic position, to the demographic and economic potential (20 % each), followed by the stability of the state system and the military potential (15 % each), and then the territorial expansion (10 %). Unlike the other sizes strictly quantifiable by their intrinsic values, for the stability of the state system, a value between 0 – 100 shall be associated to each of the three gauge-states: 100 – stable state system, 50 – instable state system, 0 – non-governing state. In consequence, the calculation of the geopolitical potential index shall be made according to the following formula:

$$I = 0.20 \cdot G + 0.10 \cdot S + 0.20 \cdot D + 0.20 \cdot E + 0.15 \cdot O + 0.15 \cdot M \qquad (1)$$

in which: G – size for the characterization of the geographic and geostrategic position;
S – the surface of the state's territory;
D – demographic potential;
E – economic potential (expressed through the G.D.P. value);
O – organizational capacity (political-state stability);
M – annual military budget.

At the same time, the indicators of the geographic and geostrategic position and of the demographic potential are parameters made up of three, respectively 2 sizes, with different weighing factors into the calculation of indicators involved (the lengths of the shores – 30 %, the number of sea facets – 30 %, the number of the strategic routes in vicinity – 40 %, and for the demographic potential the population number is of 50 %, the annual growth rate is of 50 %), but if they are added together through calculation, they shall not

exceed 100 units:

$$G = 0.30 \cdot L + 0.30 \cdot F + 0.40 \cdot R \qquad (2)$$

$$D = 0.50 \cdot P + 0.50 \cdot B \qquad (3)$$

where: L – length of the shores;
        F – number of sea facets;
        R – the number of the strategic routes within the states' spatial proximity (straits, canals, roads/railroads of strategic importance);
        P – total population;
        B – growth rate (demographic balance in absolute figures).

$$I = 0.20 \cdot (0.30 \cdot L + 0.30 \cdot F + 0.40 \cdot R) + 0.10 \cdot S + 0.20 \cdot (0.50 \cdot P + 0.50 \cdot B) + \\ + 0.20 \cdot E + 0.15 \cdot O + 0.15 \cdot M \qquad (4)$$

Since the value 100 represents the maximum possible margin, characteristic to the states with the highest value in the field of the respective size, for each state we shall take into account the calculation of percentage-characterized ratio between the own value and the value of the state with a maximum value on the Globe (example: the contribution of the economic potential shall be $0.20 \cdot 100 \cdot E/E_{max}$). Thus, the formula (4) is transformed into the effective calculation equation:

$$I = 0.20 \cdot (0.30 \cdot 100 \cdot L/L_{max} + 0.30 \cdot 100 \cdot F/F_{max} + 0.40 \cdot 100 \cdot R/R_{max}) + \\ + 0.10 \cdot 100 \cdot S/S_{max} + 0.20 \cdot (0.50 \cdot 100 \cdot P/P_{max} + 0.50 \cdot 100 \cdot B/B_{max}) + \\ + 0.20 \cdot 100 \cdot E/E_{max} + 0.15 \cdot 100 \cdot O/O_{max} + 0.15 \cdot 100 \cdot M/M_{max} \qquad (5)$$

where: L_{max}, F_{max}, R_{max}, S_{max}, P_{max}, B_{max}, E_{max}, O_{max}, M_{max} – the sizes of the states with maximum values registered on the Globe for each of the following categories L, F, R, S, P, B, E, O, M, respectively:
L_{max} = 202,080 km. (Canada);
F_{max} = 4 (Russian Federation, U.S.A.);
R_{max} = 7 (U.S.A.);
S_{max} = 17,098,242 kmsq. (Russian Federation);
P_{max} = 1.325 billion inhabitans (People's Republic of China);
B_{max} = 16.512 mil. inhabitans/year (India);
E_{max} = 13,790 billion USD (U.S.A.);
O_{max} = 100 (standard-gauge of the entire stability);
M_{max} = 587.53 billion USD (U.S.A.).

According to this computing algorithm, on the Globe there are a number of three states that belong to the category of the power-states (with I>40), respectively U.S.A. (I=69.2 – the maximum value of a state in the world), People's Republic of China (I=46.1) and the Russian Federation (I=43.2); as a consequence, the power-states represent approximately one quarter (24.7 %) of the continental global space. These states have the capacity of organizing the geopolitical planetary space according to their own interests, creating an influential hinterland from which they extract their necessary resources and in which they share their fund of plus-value that they produce. One remarkable thing is the net detachment towards the other two power states, of U.S.A. that hold the worldwide supremacy at four gauge chapters: number of own sea facets and the number of strategic controlled routes, G.D.P. and the budget allotted for defense. People's Republic of China had managed to advance leaving behind the

Russian Federation in terms of the value of the geopolitical potential index by the decisive argument of the demographic factor and by the value of the Gross Domestic Product – 2.5 times higher than the Russian Gross Domestic Product.

The class of pivotal states (20<I≤40) contains at a worldwide level a number of 24 states: 7 in Europe (France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Norway, Sweden), 3 in Africa (South Africa, Egypt, Morocco), 9 in Asia (India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Turkey, Iran), 4 in America (Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina) and 1 into the Oceania space (Australia), the pivotal spaces occupy 31.4 % of the global territorial patrimony. The pivotal states generally have either regional or continental power valences (such as India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Great Britain), or they have a specific geopolitical importance into the chain of relations between the world powers through the sea proximity position towards the transit strategic routes (the case of Norway, Morocco, Egypt, Malaysia, Argentina, South Africa).

It is interesting to notice the presence of a few states that we identified into the category of pivotal spaces. Thus, the position of India is situated at the upper limit of the category (with the index value of I=39.4), its status of pivotal state is the guiding mark of a slow but sure transition towards the status of power state within the perspective of the following years; the main quantitative argument that stands at the grounds of its valorizing position is represented by its huge demographic potential, both in respect of its effective number of the population as well as of its dynamics, which is materialized by the greatest growth rate on the Globe (16.5 millions of persons/year). Within the same status, but situated at the lower limit of the category, is Denmark. The Danish Kingdom, by its index value of I=19.9, is found within the niche of peripheral states, but at the limit of transition towards the status of pivot state, and such aspect is due mainly to its exceptional geostrategic position that ensures the control over the important set of north-european straits (Skagerak, Kategat, Öresunde, Great Belt, Little Belt), which are found at the crossway of the Northern-Southern route with the Eastern-Western connection route between the basins of the Nordic Sea and Baltic Sea. These natural advantages have nevertheless a static character that cannot multiply the value of Denmark's geopolitical potential index, which is the only way of Hamlet's country of accessing among the "pivots" and this way is exclusively linked to the economic sector, respectively by the growth of the G.D.P., which could make possible the overpass by index I of the threshold belonging to the 20 units. The presence of Canada among the pivot states (I=36.5) is due to a great extent to the immensity of the sea space to which it can naturally access, represented by the 202,080 km of shore and the 3 conterminal sea facets (to the Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific Ocean), despite the fact that its status is partially eclipsed by the territorial proximity of its great neighbor at South – U.S.A. These elements grant the Canadian state a remarkable patrimonial space, capitalized under the form of a real territorial treasure which ensures its preemption into a special geostrategic area – the northern defense areal of the Euro-Atlantic Community, which is set out on the line D.E.W. – Defense Early Warning.

Thus, the pivot state is defined by its capacity of influencing the territorial and international stability and its eventual destabilization could have macro-territorial consequences, inducing a chaos at the level of the entire geopolitical system to which it belongs; to the same extent, the political and economic stability of the pivot state is «exported» at the level of the entire geopolitical system (Chase et al., 1998).

2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE VALUES REGARDING THE GEOPOLITICAL POTENTIAL INDEX AND THE STRUCTURING OF THE ARAB POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHIC SPACE

For an objective assessment of the central-peripheral relations, we shall perform a spatial quantification of the geopolitical potential both within the Arab space as well as at the international scale.

2.1. Spatial distribution of the geopolitical potential at the scale of Arabic space

The values of the geopolitical potential index (I) calculated according to the formula described hereinabove reveals the fact that none of the Arabic speaking countries had recorded values I>40 and as such, none of the countries fulfills the conditions to be classified as a power state, which is a state with a hegemonic vocation into a field or another, at the worldwide scale.

Into the Arabic speaking countries at the level of 2008 the values of the geopolitical potential Index indicated the existence of three pivot states: Saudi Arabia (I=23.5), Egypt (I=21.3) and Morocco (I=20.2). This occupies 23.1 % of the Arabic space, 7.6 % of the total of pivotal spaces from the map of the world and 2.4 % of the surface of terrestrial dry land, pretty weak percentages that attest the relatively modest participation of the Arab world into the planetary geopolitical system (table 1).

We can notice the value related closeness of the United Arabic Emirates (I=19.7) and Oman (I=19.4) to the status of pivot countries, due to their growth in the economical-commercial dynamics, due to the consolidation of the state's stability and due to the allotment of considerable incomes for defense expenses (U.A.E. – 3.2 % of GDP, Oman – 11.5 % of GDP)[2]. Thus, U.A.E. exceeded the value of 19 units of index I starting with the '70s-'80s, based upon the special growth of the incomes obtained from exploitation of hydrocarbons and from reinvestment of such funds into different service industry activities aboard, which brought great profits (real estate locations, shares, financial-banking activities, services). Oman got closer to the threshold value of 20 units starting with the '80s-'90s, once the sultanate had been implemented following the termination of internal conflicts and with its neighbors, which were inherited from the pre-independence period, a reality that is nevertheless emphasized by the allotment of huge funds for the military expenses.

Morocco became the pivotal state following the independence that it gained in 1956, through the addition at the initial data the component related to the political and state stability, while its regional competitor, Algeria, became a pivot state at the middle of the '70s, at the same time with the relative and ephemeral internal stabilization, but it lost this status starting with 1992 because of the long internal instability that followed the cancellation of the results from the polls of December 1991, that were won by the Islamic Salvation Front. The loss of Algeria's status of pivotal state emphasizes/completes the translation of the geopolitical weigh centre in Maghreb from Algeria to Morocco, a process that started from the '80s at the same time with the advent of the first weakness signs of Algeria's state economy, which was build according to the soviet model (Drysdale, A., Blake H., G., 1985). Thus, the geopolitical role of the Morocco Kingdom is consolidated at Gibraltar entrance, which increases its importance

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[2] Vincent Thébault, Roland Pourtier, *Géopolitique de l'Afrique et du Moyen-Orient*, 2006, p. 94.

rate both as part of the future regional European-Mediterranean construction and as the first target of the American interests into the Eastern Atlantic [3].

Values of the geopolitical potential index (I) and
of its components for each state (2008)

Table 1

States	Geopolitical potential index I
Algeria	14,4
Saudi Arabia	23,5*
Bahrain	17,7
Chad	8,7
Comoros	10,2
Djibouti	10,3
Egypt	21,3*
U.A.E.	19,7
Eritrea	10,8
Jordan	16,7
Iraq	11,3
Kuwait	16,8
Lebanon	16,6
Libya	17,7
Malta	17,6
Morocco	20,2*
Mauritania	9,7
Oman	19,4
Westbank & Gaza	9,3
Qatar	17,8
Western Sahara	1,7
Syria	17,1
Somalia	3,3
Sudan	12,5
Tunisia	17,9
Yemen	12,7
Israel	18,6

* – values that grant the status of pivotal state

Within this context, the Arabic speaking countries, on their different territorial components, possesses the valences of a/some peripheries of the intermediary areal types or of the liaison bridges between the geopolitical areas from the continental neighborhood. The qualitative and spatial juxtaposition of the features derived from the geopolitical potential of the Arab speaking countries, as well as of the states belonging to the neighborhood continents (Europe, Asia, Africa), configurates the political geography of the chess table where the power balances are "played", composed and recomposed into the Euro-Afro-Asian macro-space.

Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century we face a relatively symmetric spatial distribution in terms of the geopolitical potential positioning into the Arab space, although in terms of its "weigh" it is asymmetric.

It is symmetric because the two pivotal areals are situated at the eastern and western extremities of the Arabic speaking countries: the eastern areal

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[3] Yves Lacoste, Camille Lacoste, *L'État du Maghreb*, 1991, p. 118.

contains the greatest part of the Arabic peninsula and the marginal areas of the Red Sea's strategic route (Saudi Arabia and Egypt), and the western areal (Morocco) actually controls another segment of the same route, respectively the transit thorough Gibraltar and the Western Mediterranean basin.

The asymmetry comes from the uneven "weigh" of the two areals, but if we look on a broader territorial scale, it is nevertheless a relative asymmetry. This is happening because at the North of Gibraltar there is another pivotal area, the one of the European Union, resulted from the accumulation of pivotal states' status of 7 members that hold this status: Great Britain (I=26.0), Germany (I=25.9), France (I=25.8), Spain (I=24.1), Italy (I=23.8), Norway (I=20.4), Sweden (I=20.3). As a consequence, the Morocco pivot from the North-West of Africa may be seen as a trans-Mediterranean extension of the more consistent West-European pivotal areas, along with which it forms a larger pivot area under the form of an uneven pair made of two lobes and that are separated by the median of the Mediterranean. But the weigh centre of this North-South Mediterranean "duet" is visible into the Northern part (European) and thus it gains an asymmetric character inland, on the North-South direction. At the East of the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey also represents a pivot state (I=23.1), as well as Iran to the Persian Gulf (I=20.4), which compose altogether with the Arab nucleus around the Red Sea (Saudi Arabia, Egypt) a Turkish-Arabic-Iranian Eastern Pivotal areal, which, unlike the Western Euro-Maghreb areal, it identifies a North-South asymmetry with the weigh centre that is pivoted into its southern axis (Arabic). At the scale of the Mediterranean extended space, the Turkish-Arabic-Iranian pivot area and the Euro-Maghreb pivot area constitute the extremities of an eastern-western axis, which is also asymmetric in terms of its "weigh", in which the eastern areal (Arabic-Turk) represents a satellite of the western areal (Euro-Mediterranean). At the same time, the Turkish-Arabic-Iranian areal is also situated into a satellite position towards the Central Eastern and South-East-Asian pivotal area, which is centered around China as a regional power and the following countries are part of this area: India (I=39.4), Japan (I=28.4), Indonesia (I=27.1), South Korea (I=21.8), Thailand (I=20.6), Malaysia Federation (I=20.2).

Within this geopolitical context, the Turkish-Arabic-Iranian pivotal area (which includes the Arab pivotal nucleus around the Red Sea) is found on the route between Europe and East Asia, within a difficult Newtonian mechanics of simultaneous gravity attraction, in relation with the two territorial bodies with masses higher than its mass. The phenomenon emphasizes the status of the Arabic-Turkish areal as a ***double peripheral fronton of connection and transit between the European and Asian space***, centered on the hereinbefore mentioned pivotal areas.

Besides the 3 power-states and the 24 pivotal states that exist on the political map of the world, the other 166 states of the world form the big mss of peripheral states (43.9 % of the surface of terrestrial domain), of which the geopolitical and geostrategic importance is relatively limited, and their territories contain the hinterlands of one or other power or even the hinterlands of some of pivot states. According to their territorial positioning and grouping, the peripheral states compose internal peripheries (close to one another), within the great geopolitical assemblies, interposed peripheries (of contact) between different territorial geopolitical systems and marginal peripheries (far away to one another), which are found outside the great regional geopolitical systems.

The application of the model hereinabove mentioned at the level of Arabic speaking countries emphasizes the existence of a mosaic related spatial drawing, defined by a particular geopolitical tectonics, resulted from the positioning of pivot areas in relation with the peripheral areas in vicinity. It represents a model of political-territorial system that organizes the political-geographic space into a hierarchic manner and at the same time, it separates the high potential spatial niches of the low potential ones. According to this spatial reasoning, 76.9 % of the Arab speaking countries belongs to the peripheral field, which is structured on four components: an interior periphery, two contact peripheral areas and one marginal periphery.

Thus, the territories that belong to the North-African states such as Libya, Tunisia and Algeria form a *peripheral internal space*, which is situated inside the Arab world, a kind of connate space that is limited to the East by the Egyptian-Saudi pivot cell and to the West by the Morocco pivot cell, containing 27.6 % of the surface of Arabic speaking countries.

Between the pivotal nucleus from the Arabic Peninsula and the Iranian pivot there is an interposition of *a peripheral contact area* between the two pivot spaces (containing 4.9 % of the Arabic speaking countries), formed by the territories of 6 states from the Persian Gulf: Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, U.A.E., Oman. This peripheral area disposed along the Gulf has a bivalent behavior, both in terms of tectonic fissure that separates the two pivotal geopolitical "plates" (Saudi Arabia and Iran), as well as in terms of external eastern periphery of the Arab world.

The second contact periphery is situated between the Egyptian-Saudi pivotal space at South and the Turk pivot space at North, being composed of the territories that belong to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestinian territories. (1.9 % of the Arabic speaking countries). Its positioning at the northern limit of the Arab areal grants it a bivalent attribute which is similar to the previous case (Arab-Turkish contact periphery and at the same time marginal-northern periphery of the Arab space). Also, Malta may be considered a marginal-northern areal of the Arab world and at the same time a peripheral contact space between Arabic speaking countries in Africa and the European nucleus.

The marginal periphery overlaps the spaces found at the south of the Arabic speaking countries, giving way to the great African territories, with which they join under the aspect of integration into the immense periphery of the underdeveloped South. It has a discontinuous spatial character and it is formed by the territories that belong to Mauritania, Western Sahara, Chad, Sudan, Eritrea, Republic of Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen and Comoros Islands (41.1 % of the Arabic speaking countries). It is a peripheral space dominated by pauperism and instability, states that are responsible of the dramatic decrease in the values of the geopolitical potential index, according to which the states involved had been inserted into this category.

2.2. Geopolitical potential of the Arab speaking countries and its valences at macro-regional scale

If the distribution of the values regarding the index I per states had emphasized, as we had previously noticed, the configuration manner of the geopolitical «tectonics» on the worldwide chess table, the calculation of the potential value for the great geographic areas shall render the value related place that the Arab space occupies on the big picture, in relation with the geographic political

blocks in vicinity (Europe; Non-Arabic Asia; Subsahariam Africa; Community of Independent States - C.I.S. – former U.S.S.R. without Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia).

The calculation involved shall be performed at a unitary level for the entire regional block targeted, according to data collected per each state for each element of the calculation formula and not through the collection of sizes pertaining to the geopolitical potential index of each state, so as to maintain within the limit of the value scale from 1 to 100 the element that allows the performance of an objective comparative assessment of the referential parameter.

At the same time, the values of each element pertaining to the territorial assembly shall be reported to the total value (maximal) at the planetary value of that element and not to the maximum value recorded into a certain state as we proceeded in case of calculating index I per states. For example, for the G.D.P. component, we shall relate the G.D.P. value of the territorial targeted assembly (resulted from the addition of G.D.P.s pertaining to states within the regional unit involved) to the total worldwide value of the G.D.P., respectively 65,610 billion USD.

It is hereinafter that we shall render the total values at worldwide level (for the year 2008) of parameters to which the shall make the relation for the calculation of components pertaining to index I on great continental-regional units:
- L_{total} = 1,467,477 km.;
- F_{total} = 20 continental sea facets;
- R_{total} = 38 routes with strategic valences at worldwide level;
- S_{total} = 148,900,000 kmsq.;
- P_{total} = 6.74 billion inhabitans;
- B_{total} = 1.17 %/year = 78.85 milion inhabitans/year;
- E_{total} = 65,610 billion USD;
- O_{total} = 83.4 units;
- M_{total} = 1,470 billion USD.

For the performance of a right appreciation of the geopolitical potential into the Arabic speaking countries within the context of marginal territorial proximities, we shall take into account in a separate manner the values of index I related to the three components of Eurasia (Europe, C.I.S., Non-Arabic Asia), as well as to the other two components of the Arabic speaking countries (Arabic Asia and Arabic speaking countries in Africa) (table 2).

Values of the geopolitical potential index (I) and of its components
on large continental-regional units (2008)

Table 2

Continental-regional assemblies	Geopolitical potential index I
Europe	29.9*
C.I.S.	33.8*
Non-Arabic Asia	41.4**
Non-Arabic Africa	16.4
Arabic Asia	18.8
Arabic Africa	14.3
Total of Arab speaking countries	21.3*

* – values that grant the status of pivotal areas
** – values that grant the status of power areas

Each of the regional units mentioned hereinabove shall be framed within one of the three categories according to the value of the geopolitical potential index, into a manner that is similar to the states, so that we will have power areas (with I>40 units), pivotal areas (20<I≤40) and peripheral area (I≤20 units).

It is obvious that within such areas, irrespective of their rank, the following may be identified, at their turn: power-states, pivotal states and peripheral states and it is not mandatory to represent each of these categories at the level of each territorial units, as we have noticed hereinabove regarding the internal organization of the Arabic speaking countries according to the values of index I.

On such coordinates, we may have a glance on the great three-continental field starting from the Eurasian vision elaborated by Zbiegniew Brzezinski[4], with the observation that we shall also extend it over the continent in South-Africa, because, unlike the author that we just mentioned, the objective of our approach is that of scanning a certain perimeter on the specified "great chess table", respectively to settle/identify the place and valences of the Arabic speaking countries into its posture of contact interface between the three continental assemblies. We propose to realize this by means of a comparative assessment of the distribution of values regarding the geopolitical potential index at the level of the great regional assemblies on the three continents, element by which we shall try to define the connections of Arab speaking countries' entities as opposed to/ along with the territorial assemblies that are found in proximity.

Thus, in front of us there is a spatial drawing that emphasizes on one side the role and status of the two territorial components of the Arabic world (Arab Asia and Arabic speaking countries in Africa) between the continental-regional units in proximity, and on the other side, the valences of the Arabic speaking countries as an overview, within its posture of triple territorial contact. Also, it reveals the existence of an interesting structural model of the periphery in relation with marginal spaces and with the relations that are settled between these proximal units.

Thus, the Arabic speaking countries on the whole, by means of the value regarding the geopolitical potential index (I=21.3), fulfill the role of a regional pivot area, situated into an intermediary position in relation with the neighborhood continental units: Non-Arabic Asia (I=41.4), Europe (I=29.9) and Subsaharian Africa (I=16.4).

These values of index I place the Arabic speaking countries' block into the posture of *median peripheral areal* between three regional units with different geopolitical ranks: a power area to the East (Non-Arabic Asia), a pivot area to the North (Europe) and a peripheral area to the South (Subsaharian Africa). Non-Arabic Europe and Asia benefit from a higher potential, especially due to G.D.P. and to the military budget that are more consistent, as well as due to the higher stability, while Non-Arab speaking countries in Africa struggles at the edge of subsistence across the line of all components that had been previously specified.

The Arabic Asia (South-West Asia) fulfills a double role of potential connection between Europe and Asia, on one side and between Asia and Africa, on the other side, but in relatively different manners from quantitative point of view on the two special directions. Thus, we can identify the fact that the value of index I for the Arabic Asia (I=18.8) is smaller than the value allotted to Europe (I=29.9), as well as than the value allotted for Non-Arabic Asia (I=41.4), but it records an intermediary level between the values of Non-Arabic Asia and Africa (Subsaharian Africa: I=16.4; Arabic Africa: I=14.3).

As a consequence, under the aspect of the geopolitical potential, the South-West Asia represents *a peripheral area with an inflexion character* that

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[4] Zbiegniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de şah. Supremaţia americană şi imperativele sale geostrategice*, 2000, p. 219.

makes the connection between a pivotal unit (Europe) and a power-unit (Asia), but at the same time it stands for an *intermediary (median) peripheral area* between the power unit of Asia and the peripheral unit of Africa.

The Arabic Africa (I=14.3) constitutes, according to dry figures, *a peripheral area of geopolitical inflexion* between Europe (I=29.9) and Subsaharian Africa (I=16.4), but if we analyze the political-geographic realities on the map, we can identify a series of elements that could modify this initial perception, which is exclusively based upon the values that are calculated strictly from quantitative point of view of index I.

In Arabic speaking countries in Africa there are a number of 13 states that represent 36 % of the continental surface and 23 % of its population, while the Subsaharian Africa contains 36 states, with 64 % of its surface and 77 % of the total population in Africa. As we had previously seen, the difference in terms of geopolitical potential between the two parts of the continent is only of 2.1 units, and if we exclude the higher developed and better positioned Republic of South Africa, the difference shall be reduced to a unit, which gives us a more realistic image about Arabic speaking countries in Northern Africa, which is almost at equality in terms of geopolitical potential with the rest of approximately two thirds of the African continent.

Through the prism of this reasoning, the Arabic-African areal rather appears as *a peripheral bridge with median character* between the more potent Europe (Pivotal area) at North and the less endowed Subsaharian Africa (farther peripheral area) at South.

3. RECONFIGURATION OF THE RELATIONS CENTRALITY-PERIPHERY ACCORDING TO THE DYNAMICS OF GEOPOLITICAL POTENTIAL

3.1. Typology of dynamics regarding the geopolitical potential into the Arabic speaking countries

For the configuration of the evolution regarding the geopolitical potential, the value of index I had been calculated on years of reference upon decade related intervals, for the period 1950-2008. Unlike other parameters that are presented within the paper, we took into account the calculation of the states' geopolitical potential index, including for the periods before the independence proclamation. Within such circumstances, we made abstraction into the calculation formula of the inexistent sizes at that date, associated as a rule, to the national sovereignty attribute, as well as the military budget and gross domestic product. In consequence, the values of the index for the pre-independence intervals are obviously smaller than the ones that were calculated for the years that followed the proclamation of the state sovereignty. Many times, the steps before the proclamation of independence had been accompanied by vast and ample insurgent movements, which determined an acute political instability, which triggered the decrease of the value related to index I for the territories involved. An illustrative aspect to this regard are the cases of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, states that prior to the proclamation of independence had known violent strikes for independence, which made that the deviation between the values of index I for the previous years and the years following the independence be of approximately 7.5-8 units. In a similar way in Eritrea, the value of the deviation had been of approximately 6 units: I=4 until the '90s and I>10 following 1993 (the year of proclamation of independence) (table no. 3).

Dynamics of the values regarding the geopolitical potential index
of the Arabic speaking countries in the period 1950-2008

Table 3

States	Value of geopolitical potential index						
	1950	**1960**	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2008**
Algeria	11.2	11.6	19.4	**20.1***	**20.2***	13.2	14.4
Saudi Arabia	21.6*	21.9*	22.5*	22.9*	23.1*	23.3*	23.5*
Bahrain	15.9	16.3	16.8	17.1	17.4	17.5	17.7
Chad	13.2	13.9	14.2	1.3	1.4	8.3	8.7
Comoros	10.0	10.0	10.1	10.1	10.1	10.2	10.2
Djibouti	9.9	9.9	10.0	10.0	10.1	10.2	10.3
Egypt	20.6*	20.7*	20.9*	21.0*	21.1*	21.2*	21.3*
U.A.E.	18.9	19.0	19.2	19.4	19.5	19.6	19.7
Eritrea	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.0	10.4	10.8
Jordan	16.6	16.6	16.6	16.6	16.7	16.7	16.7
Iraq	17.4	17.5	17.5	17.6	17.7	10.2	11.3
Kuwait	16.7	16.8	17.0	17.1	2.2	16.7	16.8
Lebanon	16.7	16.7	16.7	2.0	2.0	9.5	16.6
Libya	11.1	17.6	17.6	17.6	17.7	17.7	17.7
Malta	17.5	17.5	17.6	17.6	17.6	17.7	17.6
Morocco	15.0	20.2*	20.2*	20.3*	20.3*	20.2*	20.2*
Mauritania	9.3	9.5	9.6	9.6	9.7	9.7	9.7
Oman	12.0	12.0	12.4	19.1	19.3	19.4	19.4
Westbank & Gaza	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0	9.1	9.3
Qatar	17.6	17.6	17.7	17.7	17.7	17.8	17.8
Western Sahara	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7
Syria	16.8	16.9	17.0	17.0	17.0	17.1	17.1
Somalia	11.2	11.4	11.5	11.6	11.6	3.4	3.3
Sudan	12.1	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.4	12.5	12.5
Tunisia	11.0	17.8	17.8	17.9	17.9	17.9	17.9
Yemen	12.5	12.6	12.6	12.6	12.7	12.7	12.7
Israel	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.7	19.7

* – values that grant the status of pivotal state

One interesting fact to be noticed for the Arabic speaking countries is the manner of crystallization and evolution of the pivot state status for the states that hold or that held such an attribute, but also for the states that held this attribute and lost it in time (according to the values of index I of over 20 units).

Thus, Saudi Arabia and Egypt had been noticed as pivot states within the entire post-war period, being up to the end of the '50s the only pivotal states into the Arabic worlds. Following the accession to independence in 1956, Morocco had been registered into the category of pivotal states, raising to three their number into the Arabic world. As of the middle of the '70s, Algeria gained the status of pivot state following the stabilization of the internal situation and following the significant growth of the gross domestic product due to valorization of hydrocarbon resources, aspects that are added to its exceptional geographic and geostrategic position that it naturally benefits from into the West-Mediterranean basin[5]. Following the dramatic deterioration of the internal affairs of Algeria, starting with 1992, this country had lost its pivotal status while Morocco, its competitor and neighbor, had gained it, by gradually and surely

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[5] Brigitte Dumortier, *Géographie de l'Orient Arab*, 1997, p. 124.

assuming the role of unique pivot state within Maghreb. This change of the situation is the most spectacular regional shifting/translation of power into the Arab speaking countries following the World War Two, as Algeria was left into a geopolitical shadow, probably until the complete reconciliation and the real stabilization of its internal situation (Săgeată, M., 2006).

The state of geopolitical potential (expressed by the values of index I) had recorded a differentiated dynamics from one state to another, the ascendant or decreasing inflexions of the evolution curves being mainly owed to the advent of certain conflictual events, that affected the state of internal stability and had affected the value of the potential index.

According to the dynamics of such a parameter at the level of each state, we can distinguish four spatial types of evolution regarding the geopolitical potential into the Arabic speaking countries:

a. Spaces with an ascendant dynamics of the value regarding the geopolitical potential are characterized by a continuously ascendant evolution of the values regarding the geopolitical potential index, following the maintenance of the internal stability, the constant growth of G.D.P. due to the exploitation of energetic resources and to subsequent reinvestment of profits, as well as to the allotment of huge amount of money from the budget which are addressed to military expenses. This category includes four oil states, respectively Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, of which two states (Saudi Kingdom and Egypt) are pivot states within the Eastern-Arabic pivotal nucleus within the larger Turkish-Arabic-Iranian pivotal area.

b. Spaces with a relatively constant evolution of the value regarding the geopolitical potential index during the entire post-war era are characterized by a weak ascendant evolution, which is framed within a maximum range of 0.26 units (the case of Republic of Djibouti) and a minimum range of 0.03 units (the case of Western Sahara). These areals contain in their great majority weakly developed states and with a chronic internal instability, of which the geopolitically potential constant is normally situated at low values (under 15 units): Comoros, Djibouti, Sudan, Yemen, Mauritania, Western Sahara. Nevertheless, there are move evolved states under the aspect of economic, political and military conditions that belong to this category, which are identified by values of the geopolitical potential index between 17-19.7: Jordan, Syria, Qatar, Malta and Israel. In case of such states, the constant of the values regarding the index I derive from their stability on the long term, on the international arena.

c. Spaces with a relatively constant evolution of the geopolitical potential on two distinct stage present a peculiarity into their recent historical evolution, the existence of an event with historical-political value, that occurred at a specific point in time. Is it usually about the moment of proclamation of independence, moment that stabilized the respective country following a long period of uncertainties or even army conflicts. This is the case of Libya, Morocco, Oman, The Palestinian territories, Tunisia, Eritrea, where both before and after the proclamation of independence the geopolitical potential index had evolved on a constant basis, but at the level of different values on each stage, outlining two well individualized evolution intervals into the recent history of the states hereinabove mentioned.

d. Spaces with a fluctuating evolution regarding the value of the geopolitical potential index have gone though more important moments into the post-war period, that determined increases or decreases of the values of index I, according

to the internal stabilization or destabilization, to the economic recorded increase or decrease.

Algeria, for example, had known a significant drainage of its internal stability starting with the '70s (compared to the previous period) that had been maintained until the beginning of the '90s, when the situation degenerated into a rarely encountered violence (Barnett M. P., T., 2004); as a consequence, the index I had a relatively constant dynamics (at a low level) until the years that followed the proclamation of independence in 1962, after which recorded an ascendant curve until 1992, and then it dropped suddenly until it reached the levels that were similar to the '50s during the anti-colonial insurgence.

Other states had gone through a sudden drop of the potential value, following the burst of an internal conflictual state, and after the stabilization of the situation, the index I came close to values it encountered before the collapse, as it happened in Lebanon, Kuwait and Chad. In Lebanon the collapse overlapped the period of Civil War (1975-1990), in Kuwait it took place during the interval of the temporary occupation of Iraq (1990-1991) and in Chad the decrease of the values regarding the geopolitical potential index had been recorded during the period between the Coup d'état of 1975, that removed the president François Ngarte Tombalbaye and the instauration of a new regime, the one of the colonel Idriss Déby in 1993.

In other states the dynamics of the geopolitical potential had been more ample, in the sense that the value of index I collapsed immediately after a radical and negative change of the respective state's policy. This is what happened in Iraq, where the internal instability and the economic collapse had been more accentuated after 1991[6], following the aggressive projects of Bagdad regime, and in Somalia the removal of president Mohammed Siad Barre in 1991 was followed by the instauration of the internal chaos (Anderson W., E., 2000).

3.2. Redefinition of the relations centre-periphery according to the global dynamics of the relations of the geopolitical potential

For the investigation of the manner in which the spatial drawing had been drafted with respect to distribution of the geopolitical potential, it is extremely useful to analyze the chronological evolution of the weighing factor regarding different categories of states (pivotal states, peripheral states) identified according to values of index I, which correspond to different moments within the referential period. The dynamics of the pivot spaces and the dynamics of the peripheral spaces are responsible and explain to a great extent the spatial-temporary structure and mobility of primordial areas or of peripheral areas. The compared evaluation of their dynamics interprets the variable spatial geometry of the territorial niches that are occupied by the two fields that constitute the political-geographic space.

a. The dynamics of the weighing centre regarding the pivot spaces represent an evolving criterion for defining the characteristics of geopolitical "visibility" of the Arabic speaking countries on the worldwide map into different stages if the post-war period. On the line of this working judgment, we shall take into account the evolution in time of the weighing factor regarding the pivot states of the total of pivot states existent on the Globe, in comparison with the evolution of the weighing factor of that category that is similar to the marginal spaces,

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[6] Gheorghe Văduva, *Marele Orient Mijlociu pe un drum cu sens unic?*, 2005, p. 12-15.

respectively in Europe, Non-Arabic Asia and Subsaharian Africa. We shall only take into account the category of pivotal states since in the Arabic speaking countries, in lack of the power states, it is only these states that determine the primordial character of different territories from geopolitical point of view (with valences of central spaces).

The comparative spatial evolution in relation with the neighborhood continental areas shows that the number of pivotal Arabic states has always been much lower than in Europe and Asia and it has been higher than in Non-Arabic speaking countries in Africa (where the only pivotal state had been and shall stay South Africa) (table 4).

Dynamics of the weighing factor regarding the pivotal states into the Arabic speaking countries and within the proximity spaces during 1950-2008

Table 4

Year	Pivotal states on the Globe	Total of Arab countries		Europe		Non-Arabic Asia		Subsaharian Africa	
		Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%
1950	11	2	18.2	3	27.3	2	18.2	-	-
1960	17	3	17.6	5	29.4	4	23.5	1	6.7
1970	19	3	15.8	6	31.6	5	26.3	1	5.3
1980	23	4	17.4	7	30.4	6	26.1	1	4.7
1990	23	4	17.4	7	30.4	7	30.4	1	4.3
2000	24	3	12.5	7	29.2	8	33.3	1	4.1
2008	24	3	12.5	7	29.2	8	33.3	1	4.1

Nevertheless, the weighing factor of the pivot states had encountered at the level of the Arabic speaking countries a decreasing dynamics, with a slightly recovery at its peak within the '70s-'80s, due to a temporary accession of Algeria among the pivotal states.

A decreasing dynamics, but with a much more obvious decreasing curve and with much lower values, had been recorded into the Non-Arabic speaking countries in Africa. In Europe, the weighing factor of pivot states had registered a relatively constant dynamics, while the Non-Arabic Asia had a continuing ascendant dynamics.

Thus, under the aspect of the evolution method, the curve of the weighing factor regarding the pivotal states into the Arabic speaking countries is somewhat getting close to the one recorded in Subsaharian Africa, of which it is still differentiated by the existence of certain evolutional inflections (the "peak" that had been diminished starting with the '70s-'80s) and of the mush higher values.

The volume of "Arabic pivots" of the total of worldwide pivots had always been situated on a median place between the European pivot mass (which is superior) and the mass of the Subsaharian Africa (much smaller), both as a weighing factor from the worldwide total, as well as in terms of concrete number of pivot states. In exchange, the volume of Arabic pivot mass has always been smaller than the correspondent values in Europe and Non-Arabic Asia. Thus, we may assert that the visibility of the Arabic speaking countries which is given by the quantum of pivotal volume (the number of pivot states and their weighing factor on the Globe) had been permanently situated at a much lower level than the level of Europe and Asia, but at a higher level than the level in Africa.

We shall mention the fact that, if in comparison with Europe the volume has always been inferior, and in comparison with Subsaharian Africa it has always been superior, the volume of pivot states within the Arabic speaking countries had been initially identical with the one of Non-Arabic Asia (1950 both of them had two pivotal states). Subsequently, the evolution on the two regional blocks had been completely opposed, respectively descendant into the Arabic areal and ascendant into the rest of the Asian block.

Consequently, we may say that from the point of view of *illegible* of pivotal spaces, the Arabic speaking countries had behaved, during the entire post-war period, like a peripheral border towards the neighborhood blocks of Europe and Asia, both of them much better positioned on the checkerboard pattern of global claims. For that matter, the European and Asian domains had benefited and they still benefit, besides their much more consistent pivotal load and the existence inside them of 2 of the 3 power states of the planet – Russian Federation and People's Republic of China.

b. Dynamics of the weighing factor regarding the peripheral spaces constitutes a criterion into the evaluation of marginal valences of different territories, into different chronological steps.

In a natural way, the weighing of the peripheral Arabic speaking countries from the total of the world's peripheries, has evolved into a conversely relation as the one of pivotal states, recording an ascendant curve, both in the number of states as well as a percentage weighing factor at a global scale (6.8 % in 1950 and 14 % in 2000). The phenomenon is due to a continuous growth into the post-war period of the number of independent states and autonomous entities.

In Europe and Asia there has been a decrease of the weighing factor of the peripheral states until the '90s, when a reversal of the peripheral spaces took place at the same time with the increase of number of states due to the disintegration of the former U.S.S.R. and the former Yugoslavia. The Subsaharian Africa, as the number of states expanded themselves and as the importance of pivotal areals diminished, had gone through a continuous growth of the weighing factor regarding the peripheral spaces (4.1 % in 1950, 26.0 % in 2007) (table 5).

Dynamics of the weighing factor regarding the peripheral states into the Arabic speaking countries and within the proximity spaces during 1950-2008

Table 5

Year	Pivotal states on the Globe	Total of Arab countries		Europe		Non-Arabic Asia		Subsaharian Africa	
		Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%	Pivotal states (No)	%
1950	73	5	6.8	28	38.4	18	24.6	3	4.1
1960	93	12	12.9	27	29.0	19	20.4	19	20.4
1970	120	15	12.5	27	22.5	18	15.0	33	27.5
1980	140	20	14.3	26	18.6	18	12.8	41	29.2
1990	144	20	13.9	25	17.4	18	12.5	42	29.2
2000	164	23	14.0	36	21.9	25	15.2	43	26.2
2008	166	23	13.9	37	22.3	26	15.6	43	26.0

Within this context, we may notice a closeness between the models of evolution curves regarding the weighing factor of the peripheral areals into the

Arabic speaking countries and into the Subsaharian Africa, respectively an ascendant dynamics of the peripheral spaces. In addition, there are similarities between the evolution models from Europe and Non-Arabic Asia, respectively a decreasing dynamics of the weighing factor regarding the peripheral spaces until the '90s.

From this point of view, the Arabic speaking countries have recorded a proliferation of the peripheral spaces along with the African continent, while Eurasia had gone through their restriction and a growth regarding the weighing factor of the pivot spaces, which highlights the status of peripheral belt of the Arabic speaking countries in relation with the Eurasian continental mass at North and East.

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