



Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

**REIMAGINING GEOPOLITICAL THOUGHT: THE CRITICAL GEOPOLITICAL
APPROACH AND THE PINK TIDE CONTEXT***

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the emergence and evolution of critical geopolitics as a theoretical framework in international relations. The study commences with a review of the transition from classical geopolitics, which placed significant emphasis on state-centric and territorially deterministic models, to post-structuralist approaches that have been known to challenge the objectivity of spatial and political categories. By integrating concepts of discourse, identity, and power/knowledge, post-structuralism laid the groundwork for critical geopolitics, which reconceptualizes geopolitics as a discursive practice. The article draws on the works of Foucault, Ó Tuathail, and Dalby to examine how geopolitical knowledge is produced and utilized in foreign policy discourse. To demonstrate the practical applicability of the present framework, the study briefly engages with US foreign policy discourse during the Pink Tide period in Latin America. Instead of emphasizing meticulous case studies, this illustration aims to underscore the pivotal role that geopolitics plays in elucidating the establishment of geopolitical dichotomies, such as ‘friends’ and ‘foes’, in regional strategic frameworks. The paper aims to contribute to two distinct but interconnected fields of study: the theoretical understanding of critical geopolitics and the analytical potential in interpreting contemporary foreign policy narratives.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Critical geopolitics, Post-structuralism, Pink tide, Bush administration

**JEOPOLİTİK DÜŞÜNCENİN YENİDEN KURGULANMASI: ELEŞTİREL YAKLAŞIM
VE PEMBE DALGA BAĞLAM**

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, uluslararası ilişkilerde teorik bir çerçeve olarak eleştirel jeopolitiğin ortaya çıkışı ve evrimini incelemektir. Çalışma, devlet merkezli ve bölgesel deterministik modellere önemli ölçüde vurgu yapan klasik jeopolitikadan, mekansal ve politik kategorilerin nesnelliğini sorgulayan post-yapısalcı yaklaşımlara geçişin incelenmesiyle başlar. Söylem, kimlik ve güç/bilgi kavramlarını entegre ederek, post-yapısalcılık jeopolitiği söylemsel bir pratik olarak yeniden kavramsallaştıran eleştirel jeopolitiğin temellerini attı. Makale, Foucault, Ó Tuathail ve Dalby'nin çalışmalarından yararlanarak jeopolitik bilginin dış politika söyleminde nasıl üretildiğini ve kullanıldığını incelemektedir. Mevcut çerçevenin pratik uygulanabilirliğini göstermek için çalışma, Latin Amerika'daki Pembe Dalga döneminde ABD'nin dış politika söylemini kısaca ele almaktadır. Bu örnek, ayrıntılı vaka çalışmalarını vurgulamak yerine, jeopolitiğin bölgesel stratejik çerçevelerde ‘dostlar’ ve ‘düşmanlar’ gibi jeopolitik ikilemlerin oluşumunu açıklığa kavuşturmada oynadığı önemli rolü vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalenin katkısı, iki farklı ama birbiriyle bağlantılı çalışma alanına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlayan ikili yapısında yatmaktadır: eleştirel jeopolitiğin teorik anlayışı ve çağdaş dış politika anlatılarını yorumlamada analitik potansiyel.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jeopolitik, Eleştirel jeopolitik, Post-yapısalcılık, Pembe dalga, Bush dönemi

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Introduction

Geopolitics as a field has undergone a profound transformation in the last few decades, shaped by evolving international dynamics and the proliferation of critical approaches within IR theory. Classical geopolitics traditionally focused on the spatial dimensions of power and control. However, new modes of analysis have emerged that interrogate the assumptions and discursive structures underlying geopolitical reasoning. In particular, critical geopolitics emerged as a reaction to the determinism of classical frameworks, seeking to unveil how people construct and mobilize geographical representations in a political context.

This study aims to examine the theoretical evolution from classical geopolitics to critical geopolitics, highlighting the epistemological and ontological shifts that allowed for this shift. Incorporating post-structuralist contributions to IR theory, the analysis provides a more reflective account of how power and space are articulated through discourse and how it is utilized in foreign policy choices. This paper will employ a critical geopolitical approach to analyze US foreign policy under the George W. Bush administration in relation to the Pink Tide in Latin America.

The emergence of the Pink Tide in the early 2000s, with its leftist and anti-neoliberal orientation, posed a symbolic and material challenge to US geopolitical hegemony. Although much of the literature has focused on the economic and political implications of the Pink Tide, this article departs from a purely empirical analysis and instead adopts a theoretical lens grounded in critical geopolitics. Rather than providing an exhaustive case study, the objective is to demonstrate how the ‘friend–foe’ dichotomy in geopolitical discourse can be interpreted through the lens of critical geopolitics. By examining how Latin American countries were discursively framed and categorized in terms of alignment with US interests, the article illustrates how geopolitics is not merely about physical space but also about meaning-making and identity production.

The central research question guiding this article is: How did the theoretical shift from classical geopolitics to critical geopolitics reshape the way we understand spatial imaginaries and foreign policy, and how can this be illustrated through the case of US discourse toward Latin America during the Pink Tide?

Thus, this paper is structured as follows: the next section offers a historical and conceptual overview of classical geopolitics. This is followed by an analysis of the post-structuralist turn in IR and its influence on the emergence of critical geopolitics, and subsequently delineates the main assumptions and methods of the critical geopolitical approach. The following section applies this framework to the US geopolitical imagination during the Pink Tide, focusing particularly on the Bush Administration's foreign policy discourse. The contributions of the Critical Geopolitical approach to the field of international relations and its application in studying spatial relations and foreign politics were summed up in the article's conclusion section using the example of the US-Latin America during the Pink Tide. The possibilities for further application of the approach in global spatial imaginaries and policies were also discussed.

1. Theoretical Framework: From Classical to Critical Geopolitics

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in critical geopolitics, which posits that geopolitical knowledge is socially constructed and intertwined with power. As Dalby (1991) argues, “geopolitical discourse constructs worlds in terms of self and other” (p. 274). Drawing on post-structuralist thought and the work of scholars such as Ó Tuathail (1996), Foucault (1972), and Said (1978), critical geopolitics emphasizes how space and identity are discursively produced. These approaches help uncover how the US positioned Latin American countries within a friend/foe framework, often based on normative judgments and historical perceptions of the region.

Rooted in the philosophical underpinnings of post-structuralism, this approach challenges the objectivity of fundamental concepts such as sovereignty, statehood and borders and instead focuses on how these notions are constructed, legitimized, and operationalized through discourse. Ó Tuathail (1996) has emphasized that “geography is about power and is a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities for the power to occupy and administer particular spaces” (p. 1). In this respect, spatial boundaries are not viewed as natural or fixed but as political inscriptions that give meaning to identity, difference, and threat. Post-structuralism, therefore, provides the epistemological foundation for critical geopolitics by interrogating how global space is divided and how such spatial distinctions shape political identities and security logics (Burchill, 2005).

At the same time, the concept of geopolitics itself resists a singular and fixed definition. While traditionally associated with strategic competition between states over territories and resources, its meaning has significantly expanded. Scholars like Flint (2006) and Sidaway (2002) have argued that geopolitics now encompasses a wider set of practices that shape and are shaped by global power relations, including environmental issues, social movements, and cultural processes. In the context of political science and international relations, critical geopolitics is thus understood as the practice of identifying power relations embedded within geopolitical discourse—particularly as shaped by dynamics such as free trade and democracy. From this vantage point, geopolitics today includes not only strategic considerations but also commercial, cultural, and symbolic dimensions that influence how space and identity are constructed and contested.

The following sections trace the intellectual lineage of this framework by first examining classical geopolitics, then exploring the epistemological interventions of post-structuralism, and finally outlining the emergence of critical geopolitics as a reflexive approach to global political space.

1.1. Classical Geopolitics and the Spatial Foundations of Power

The origins of geopolitics lie in classical understandings shaped by thinkers such as Ratzel, Kjellen, and Mackinder, who associated territorial control with power and identity (Hagan, 1942; Agnew, 2003). These deterministic and state-centric perspectives continued to dominate throughout the Cold War, reinforcing binary oppositions like democracy versus communism (Kissinger, 1994; Mamadouh, 1998). The term ‘political geography’ is widely regarded as representing the earliest form of geopolitics. The term was coined by Friedrich Ratzel, who proposed that the state constituted the core concept within the field of political geography. The proposition was made that the field of political geography would not exist in the absence of the state and space. In this sense, Ratzel's perspective asserts the primacy of spherical expansion in this field. This concept is not merely confined to the expansion of space; it is also intricately intertwined with the growth of commercial and cultural centers, as well as migratory pathways. The subject performs an examination of the geographical position, the neighbors, the character of the population, and the quality and sphere. The concept, which Ratzel assigned a metaphysical significance, constitutes the foundation of the contemporary term ‘geopolitics’ (Hagan, 1942). The term ‘geopolitics’ was coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf J. Kjellen with a view to establishing geography as an academic discipline. The adoption of the term by Kjellen resulted in the interconnection of global thinking and global action, with geopolitical logic proving more advantageous to some than to others (Agnew, 2003). It was posited that certain components of the state, including territory, population, national welfare, social construction and administrative structure, were accorded a higher degree of priority. Nevertheless, the term ‘geopolitics’ was introduced to encompass the territories of states, in addition to their shape, form, natural and physical resources. Kjellen's conceptualization of the state as a living organism that grows in size and strength, rather than as a useful example, is a seminal contribution to the field. His study of the growth and expansion of this organism is also highly significant. The initial conceptualizations

of the state as a geographically expanding organism established the foundation for subsequent geopolitical theories, which subsequently identified a correlation between territoriality and political power and identity.

Throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century, geopolitics was regarded as the province of states and statesmen. It was also considered a field of study focused on the strategic behavior of states and predicting their future actions, which is accepted as the definition of classical geopolitics as a perspective. Nevertheless, the evolution of geopolitics as an academic study has led to the emergence of a more dynamic and extensive field of study, encompassing a broader range of actors, such as international corporations and non-governmental organizations. As a result, the traditional scope of geopolitics, which previously focused exclusively on states, has been expanded (Flint, 2006). Halford J. Mackinder is widely regarded as a major figure in the field of geopolitics, and he made a seminal contribution to the discipline with his introduction of the concept of the 'axis of world politics' through his Heartland thesis. Mackinder's analysis of world politics was primarily influenced by Mahan's work on sea power and geopolitics. In his analysis, Mackinder adopted a closed-system perspective, emphasizing the interconnection of different states with land and sea power as the primary axis of any conflict. This thesis remains a relevant debate, and it was also utilized and adopted by President Reagan in his nuclear policy-making process. According to Mackinder, the most significant objective for all world states was to prevent the unification of the heartland by a single authority, as this could potentially result in the domination of the World (Weigart, 1945). Mackinder's theorization of Eurasia as the strategic pivot of global politics as the Heartland, introduced a vision of world order in which spatial control translated directly into hegemonic potential, influencing geopolitical strategies well into the Cold War era (Hagan, 1942; Hyndman, 2004).

Prior to the conceptualization of the term 'geopolitics' within this field of study, Clausewitz established a novel methodology by investigating the phenomenon of war and its underlying causes. In accordance with Clausewitz's assertion, "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 87). Clausewitz's primary focus was on the study of land power and war strategies, thus establishing himself as one of the inaugural scholars to incorporate geopolitics into his academic research, predating the formal recognition of the term itself (Roxborough, 1994). Clausewitz's strategic writings provided a foundation for integrating military logic into geopolitical reasoning, thereby reinforcing the link between space, conflict and statecraft. It is evident that the term 'geopolitics' possesses a more profound and historical significance within the confines of our discipline. Geography has always played a pivotal role in the annals of human history, encompassing the intricate dynamics between nations and their foreign policies towards each other. As Spykman notes in *The Geography of Peace* (1944, p.41), "Geography is the most fundamental factor in foreign policy because it is the most permanent". Following the decolonization of Asia and Africa, the term geopolitics was popularized again by Henry Kissinger in the 1970s, after its association with the Nazis (Mamadouh, 1998; Owens, 2010). The endeavors to rehabilitate and redefine geopolitics in the post-war period demonstrate that spatial knowledge is not solely historically contingent; rather, it is also shaped by prevailing political imperatives and global realignments.

Geopolitics has evolved and changed in accordance with the sequence of events that have transpired throughout history. Whilst Mahan, Ratzel and Mackinder were at the vanguard of classical geopolitical thinking, during the Cold War ideological understandings and representations predominated. A significant illustration of the geopolitical approach is evidenced by George Kennan's policy of containment. Kennan's influence on US foreign policy and its global standing during the Cold War was significant. As Koppes (2013) asserts, the ideas on containment that the subject developed had a significant influence on US policies during the Cold War. The geopolitical strategy of containment was a deliberate attempt to prevent the Soviet Union and communism

from expanding their area of influence. In a cable written by Kennan in 1946, it is asserted that confronting the Soviet Union in all the areas in which they seek to exert influence and expand could result in their defeat. The geopolitical approach was adopted by the US President, Harry S. Truman, and was applied to US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War, the geopolitical approach espoused by Kennan found expression in the foreign policy of the United States, a strategy that was ultimately successful in securing victory (Kissinger, 1994). The containment policy can be seen as a geopolitical imagination of binary oppositions, such as the US versus the USSR, or freedom versus communism. This later evolved into broader discursive framings of friends and foes.

The conventional theoretical frameworks that underpin classical international relations theories have been rendered obsolete by the emergence of a novel international political order, coupled with the evolution of foreign policy choices. These theories, based on the idea that borders are fixed and states are like organisms or people with rationales such as national interest and security, have given way to a shift in how foreign policy is conceptualized and how it differs from domestic policy. The Cold War era is often considered the time when geopolitics began to be used in theoretical and practical contexts. This idea is supported by an analysis of the containment policy implemented by the United States. These developments led to the establishment of a binary worldview, which viewed global politics through the lens of ideological oppositions, particularly communism versus democracy. This set the stage for the ways in which the US would talk about its relationships with other countries in the future (Mamadouh, 1998).

The classical geopolitical approach provided strategic frameworks rooted in territorial determinism and a state-centric worldview. However, as the late twentieth century progressed, assumptions about space, power, and identity became increasingly questioned. The geopolitical realities of the post-Cold War era have exposed the limitations of perceiving geography as a static and objective backdrop to global politics. Most notably, there has been the collapse of bipolarity and the rise of transnational threats. In this context, a novel intellectual paradigm emerged. This theoretical framework examined the process of constructing and utilizing geographical knowledge. The limitations of conventional geopolitical analysis have resulted in the emergence of critical geopolitics, a field that draws on post-structuralist insights. The focal point of the analytical process was transitioned from an inquiry into territorial control to an examination of the discursive construction of space, threat, and identity in the context of foreign policy. Adoption of a new methodological approach enabled this shift in focus.

The following section will explore post-structuralist theory, which serves as the conceptual foundation of the critical geopolitical approach, and its underlying assumptions regarding classical geopolitics, which led to the emergence of the critical geopolitical approach.

1.2. Post-Structuralism: Rethinking Space, Identity, and Knowledge

Post-structuralism, with its theoretical emphasis on discourse, identity, and power/knowledge relations, gave rise to a series of inquiries into spatial and political structures within the context of international relations (IR). Post-structuralism is a theoretical approach that interrogates the objectivity of concepts employed in the study of international relations, including sovereignty, borders, and statehood. The critical lens employed by post-structuralism to analyze these concepts establishes an additional focal point, wherein the construction of space and meaning is also subjected to scrutiny. Post-structuralism created the basis for critical geopolitics, a field that uses the post-structuralist framework to study how spatial dimensions are constructed through the political dynamics in the global order. Critical geopolitics is an academic field concerned with the construction and application of geographical knowledge in the context of foreign policy discourse. It establishes a link between the questions of representation and material consequences and how they influence one another. This section explores the emergence of post-structuralism as a

philosophical paradigm that has profoundly affected geopolitical thinking, reconceptualizing it from its classical understandings to a discursive strategy to reconceptualize global space.

During the 1990s, the notion of a knowable reality emerged as the fundamental question within the discipline of International Relations (IR). Postmodernists argued that reality is discursively constructed, rather than merely existing objectively (George, 1994; Burchill, 2005). Post-structuralism, otherwise referred to as post-modernism, is the theoretical position that asserts the conception of reality as discursively produced, and that the relationship between power and knowledge is more complex than was previously theorized (Dunne, 2013). Post-structuralists posit that theories cannot be considered neutral, as they are influenced by discourse and the subjectivity of identities and values. This, in turn, results in an inevitable social and political impact (Bleiker, 2001; Griffiths, 2007; Dunne, 2013). Post-structuralism is not generally regarded as a theory of IR. Post-structuralist scholars posit that this critical attitude or ethos is employed to examine assumptions about knowable reality and its constituents (George, 1994; Dunne, 2013).

The study of post-structuralism is predicated on two fundamental concepts: identity and discourse. Discourse can be defined as a set of representations and practices that produce meanings, constitute identities, and establish social relations, thereby enabling political and ethical outcomes. Discourse cannot be understood simply as a linguistic approach; it is important to recognize that nothing exists outside of discourse, post-structuralism treats theory as an object of analysis rather than a tool (Foucault, M., & Gordon, C., 2016).

The post-structuralist approach has contributed to the discipline of IR through two key methodologies. Firstly, the genealogical method, and secondly, the textual strategy of deconstruction. This approach aims to identify the correlation between knowledge and power claims, and to problematize claims to political and epistemological totalization (Burchill, 2005). One of the primary proponents of this approach is Foucault. Foucault's argument posits that power and knowledge are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, rather than being distinct entities. Consequently, he does not perceive power and knowledge as discrete entities, but rather as a unified concept of power/knowledge. As posited by Burchill (2005) and Griffiths (2007), the necessity of power systems in the production of truth is indisputable, with truth, in turn, engendering the effects of power. Foucault contests the notion of a universal human nature, proposing instead that human beings are historically produced entities. It is therefore imperative that the study of cultural practices and identity is given due consideration in order to facilitate a comprehensive examination of this phenomenon. Foucault's theoretical framework posits that the formation of identity is predicated on a series of exclusions. The concept of power relations and identities, in conjunction with knowledge, can be traced back to limitations of the self and others, both within and outside the world. Foucault's conceptualization of power encompasses both repressive and productive dimensions, emphasizing its role in the formation of dichotomies such as friends and foes (Dunne, 2013). Foucault's theoretical standpoint posits that power is not a preexisting entity; rather, it is a social construct that is produced through interpersonal interactions and dynamics. A plurality of power relations emerges at the micro level in social interactions, resulting in dispersed power rather than centralized power. It is evident that Foucault's primary focus extends beyond a mere emphasis on power to encompass power relations and regimes of truth. The prevailing power relations thus shape the conditions that determine what is considered true at any given time. It can thus be concluded that the veracity of a statement is contingent upon the prevailing regime of truth at a given time, and that it cannot exist independently of power. Foucault's method of genealogy analysis involves the examination of discourse in relation to its historical and social context, with a view to elucidating its function in the establishment and maintenance of power relations (Griffiths, 2007). Post-structuralists posit the notion that there is no objective truth, only competing perspectives. As Burchill (2005) asserts, knowledge and history are produced through discourse by a dominant regime of truth, established by a particular group

of people who wield the power to determine what knowledge is accepted as truth. Post-structuralists are cognizant of the fact that there are multiple perspectives on any political event and its representation. The concept of identity is not merely accepted as a given; rather, it is subjected to rigorous scrutiny through a discursive lens, thereby emphasizing its dynamic and ever-evolving nature. Consequently, any historical occurrence may be interpreted from a variety of perspectives. Consequently, researchers are advised to pose the question, *How* is rather than *What* is. The field of IR is one in which interpretation is of paramount importance. The post-structuralist approach is predicated on the ability to transcend the boundaries of established truth (Burchill, 2005).

Derrida is also a widely regarded figure in the field of post-structuralism, and his contributions to the theory are as significant as Foucault's. His methodological approach, known as deconstruction, has had a profound impact on post-structuralist thought. Whilst Foucault focused on the effects of power relations on the historical construction of knowledge, Derrida emphasized the instability of meanings in texts and questioned the rooted interpretations of spatial and political spheres using the method of deconstruction, which is the process of interpreting texts. Derrida (1991) contends that this process is inherently political and has political outcomes. Derrida contests the notion of inherent meaning in words, images and ideas, and instead argues that their significance comes from the influences of language, history, and the individuals engaged in their creation and reception. Derrida's (1997) claim that texts cannot exist outside of their dichotomies is a key point of departure for this study. The concept of dichotomy extends beyond the mere juxtaposition of words; it is the fundamental mechanism through which we ascribe significance to a particular word by exclusion of others. It is an established principle that opposites cannot be mutually exclusive. The method of double reading, that Derrida contests focuses on different and hidden intentions between the first readings and the second readings. The discourses of humanitarian interventions and promoting democracies by the US in their foreign policies regarding Latin American countries are considered to be first reading in Derrida's deconstruction method. However, there is always a hidden agenda according to Derrida within the discourses that were used in the first readings, which he refers as the second reading. In the cases of the US discourses of democracy and humanitarian interventions as the first reading, the second reading behind those policies are the objectives of control and manipulation of Latin American countries in both economic and political spheres.

As Zuckert (1991) and Griffiths (2007) have demonstrated, words are endowed with meaning through the exclusion of others and the establishment of a hierarchical structure between them. The interpretation of texts is influenced by the prevailing contexts and the authorities wielding power during a given historical period. Derrida's critique of Western thought is centered on its tendency to exclude and disregard certain potential interpretations, categories, and occurrences when conceptualising notions such as state or violence (Griffiths, 2007).

Foucault's concept of genealogy and Derrida's method of deconstruction are central components of post-structuralist thought. These approaches have introduced new ways to analyze power relations and political processes, particularly through a focus on discourse and meaning. They challenge dominant power structures and existing definitions of reality. Rather than functioning as a theory of International Relations (IR), post-structuralism operates as an interdisciplinary framework that critically examines how perceived realities are constructed, highlighting marginalized meanings and agents within both global politics and academic discourse (Burchill, 2005; Griffiths, 2007; Dunne, 2013).

The theoretical foundations of critical geopolitics emerged from the interaction between post-structuralism and geopolitical analysis. This framework emphasizes that space and identity in international relations are shaped through discourse, rather than being fixed or objective. The end

of the Cold War created a void in spatial oppositions, which marked the beginning of a new phase in international politics—a period characterized by a crisis of meaning. Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, geopolitical discourse was reshaped to construct new spatial adversaries. The Bush administration's war-on-terror rhetoric reflected this shift and could no longer be explained using classical geopolitical frameworks (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 2002). These developments contributed to the transformation of geopolitical studies.

Peter J. Taylor and John O'Loughlin support Agnew and Ó Tuathail's distinction between two types of geopolitics. The first, practical geopolitics, is used by policymakers to guide state behavior, focusing on short-term interests and constructing threats through a binary 'us versus them' logic. The second, formal geopolitics, is developed by scholars and intellectuals to critically analyze these strategies and promote more humane understandings of geopolitical practice (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Mamadouh, 1998). In the late 1980s, Agnew and Ó Tuathail proposed a discursive reconceptualization of geopolitics, suggesting that geographical knowledge functions as a discourse that sustains Foucauldian power/knowledge relations (Ó Tuathail, 1996). As Ó Tuathail (1996) states, "geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of power and hegemony" (p. 46).

The following section will explore the development of critical geopolitics as an analytical approach in IR, building upon the limitations of classical geopolitics and the epistemological insights of post-structuralism.

1.3. Critical Geopolitics: Discursive Practices in the Spatialization of Power

Following the works of Yves Lacoste on the subjects of power and knowledge, Michel Foucault, who had previously studied the importance of space and territory and its role in international politics, incorporated space and territory into his studies on discourse. Foucault's argument posited that the political construction of space constituted a pivotal aspect of human relationships, and of power relations within the international system. Consequently, geography assumes a pivotal role in the knowledge-power relations, which cannot be disregarded. Although Foucault's primary focus remained on the nexus between discourse and geopolitics, Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) emerged as a pivotal text in the field. In his renowned work, Said emphasized the use of negative rhetoric by Western states toward the East, highlighting the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of geopolitical dynamics. Said argued that Western states' foreign policies toward the East were founded on the assumption that Eastern countries were underdeveloped and exotic, therefore requiring Western assistance, given the cultural superiority attributed to the West. This discourse functioned to legitimize colonialism and assert Western power over Eastern states, which were constructed as 'the other' (Said, 1978). These assumptions established the foundation for a new strategy that incorporated discourse in its merits, thereby giving rise to critical geopolitics.

Critical geopolitics is the examination of spatial and power relations through the lens of post-structuralist insights by adopting a methodological approach that draws upon Foucault's research in discourse and spatiality, where geography is reconceptualized as a subject of operationalization of power. Foucault argues that spatial representations and discourse are critical in the process of establishment of authority and control (Foucault, 1972).

Throughout the 1990s, scholars such as Gearoid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby examined the theoretical foundations of critical geopolitics by exploring its philosophical underpinnings. Their contributions constituted a considerable challenge to the epistemological and ontological foundations of classical geopolitics. As a consequence, geography was reconceptualized as a construct of discursive practices rather than as an objective truth (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Dalby, 1991).

Critical geopolitics, as defined by Burchill (2005), is the examination of the methods through which spatial practices, political identities, and definitions of threat are embedded in geopolitical discourses. Accordingly, Dalby's (1991) argues that the geopolitical discourse constructs the world

in terms of the self and the other, thereby strengthening the existing security discourse. This form of discourse is also argued to be useful as a tool for identifying threats, as it facilitates the formation of political identities through the exclusion of others, thereby creating an illusion of threat and safety through the use of spatial discourse and the establishment of a domestic identity (Dalby, 1991; Burchill, 2005). Campbell (1992) advances the argument that spatial divisions correspond to moral hierarchies, thereby legitimizing interventionist or coercive action on this basis. Within this theoretical framework, the concept of geopolitical imagination assumes a pivotal role. The concept is relevant for two primary reasons. Firstly, it addresses the manner in which states conceptualize their global positioning. Secondly, it examines the means by which states categorize external entities in spatial and normative dimensions. The formation of these imaginations is influenced by a multitude of factors, including historical narratives, ideological assumptions, and strategic interests. Consequently, they are interwoven into the discourse of foreign policy and serve as foundational principles for global engagement.

Geopolitical codes, in their capacity to serve as discursive frameworks, provide states with a conceptualization of geopolitical actors as either friends or enemies, thereby influencing foreign policy behaviors (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). These codes are not constant; rather, they undergo evolution in response to shifting global dynamics and ideological shifts. The United States has historically employed these types of codes to establish bilateral disagreements with Latin America by frequently utilizing the term ‘freedom’ in opposition to ‘populism’ or ‘authoritarianism’ (Dodds, 2014). In the context of critical geopolitics, the discourses in question are not impartial. Rather, they are employed by dominant actors to establish an international order in which they can influence perceptions and legitimize their interventions. Therefore, discourse assumes a particularly significant role in understanding how the US created a regional dichotomy as a response to the Pink Tide, which represented a regional challenge to their conventional beliefs and geopolitical imaginations (Dodds, 2014).

The classification of states as ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ is not descriptive but constitutive in the context of critical geopolitics. They are used to create geopolitical identities and establish spatial orders to manage and control perceptions of threat and alliance in the international order. The objectivity of these categorizations is questionable, as they are not grounded in empirical evidence. Rather, they are constructed categories influenced by ideological positions, power relations, and normative claims. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt a critical geopolitical approach to understand how the United States positioned Latin American states as friends and foes during the Bush administration. This is essential for the examination of language and spatial assumptions in foreign policy discourses.

2. Constructing Friends and Foes: US Geopolitical Imaginations of the Pink Tide

During the period known as the Pink Tide, the perceptions of both allies and adversaries in Latin America were of pivotal importance to US foreign policy. The current section will therefore first examine the United States' perceptions of various Latin American governments and secondly analyze how these perceptions influenced interactions. The term ‘Pink Tide’ was coined to describe the rise of leftist and anti-neoliberal governments across Latin America that challenged US influence in the region. These governments, which emerged in the early 21st century, represented a shift in the political landscape of Latin America. These governments rejected the neoliberal model and fostered new regional alliances, thereby presenting an alternative to the US led order.

2.1. Pink Tide As a Geopolitical Challenge to US Hegemony

Before presenting the typological categorization of Latin American states into ‘allies’, ‘ambiguous’, and ‘enemies’ based on Bush-era US discourse, it is crucial to contextualize the emergence of the Pink Tide within broader regional and geopolitical shifts. The conclusion of the

Cold War marked the beginning of a new era in Latin America. While the communist threat diminished, US interests in the region persisted through economic and strategic mechanisms. The dissolution of the Soviet Union reinforced US economic dominance, complicating Latin American autonomy in policymaking. At the same time, the reallocation of aid to Eastern Europe placed Latin America in a disadvantaged position (Castañeda, 1993; Frechette, 2006). Interventions like the 1989 invasion of Panama revealed a continuity in US geopolitical engagement, albeit under new discursive justifications. In the 1990s, neoliberal reforms reshaped Latin America's economic and social landscape. Promoted heavily by US-backed institutions and policies, these reforms were endorsed during events like the 1994 Summit of the Americas (Smith, 2019). While initial democratic transitions were celebrated, the failure of neoliberalism to deliver social welfare led to a leftist resurgence. These governments, grouped under the term 'Pink Tide', which emerged in response to unmet economic promises and growing inequalities (Castaneda, 2006; Fernandes, 2007; Leogrande, 2007). The term 'Pink Tide' first used by journalist Frank Lehrer as a way of ridicule but later reinterpreted positively by scholars like Diane Raby, refers to the wave of leftist governments beginning with Hugo Chávez's 1998 election in Venezuela (Gonzales, 2019). The movement's ideological diversity encompassed a range of models, from radical populism to reformist modernism, with the degree of resistance or cooperation with the US serving as a crucial factor in shaping these models. While González (2019) and others have emphasized the adverse effects of neoliberalism, privatization, weakened public institutions, and displacement, Pink Tide leaders have offered a range of responses, from direct opposition to pragmatic compromise.

The Pink Tide marked a collective resistance against the structural adjustment programs and neoliberal prescriptions promoted by the US. The increasing prevalence of left-wing administrations, many of which placed significant emphasis on social justice and state-led economic development, represented a notable deviation from market fundamentalism and the economic policies historically supported by the United States. In response to perceived imperialist inclinations, several Latin American states initiated the establishment of regionally grounded cooperation frameworks. For instance, ALBA sought to establish a socialist counterpoint to the United States-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) initiative. Meanwhile, Comunidad de Estados Latinoamerica y Caribeño (CELAC) emerged as a strategy to diminish OAS dependency and affirm Latin American autonomy.

The geopolitical discourse of the Bush administration toward Latin America relied on the classification of states into allies, ambiguous actors, and enemies. The foundations of different spatial imaginations were shaped by critical geopolitical discourses (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Discursive concepts such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'populism' and 'terrorism' were strategically used to justify a range of policies, from economic integration to military containment. Foreign policy instruments such as CAFTA, FTAA, and Plan Colombia were consistent with these discursive framings. In the context of US geopolitical discourse, the dichotomies of friend and enemy cannot be regarded as mere rhetorical devices. A thorough examination of these dichotomies through the lenses of critical geopolitics reveals that they were deliberately constructed as instruments to maintain spatial and political control in the region following the Cold War.

2.2. Geopolitical Classification of Latin American States

The foreign policy of the Bush administration toward Latin America was based on a spatial categorization of the dichotomy between friend and foe. Colombia's status as a 'reliable partner' was attributed to its contributions to security cooperation, while Venezuela and Bolivia were identified as potential threats to regional stability due to their political and economic orientations that are in opposition to US interests.

The countries that have been constructed as enemies through geopolitical discourse often characterized by negative discursive labels such as 'authoritarianism', 'populism', 'instability' and

‘anti-Americanism’. These representations framed left-leaning governments not only as ideological opponents but also as security threats within the US geopolitical imagination.

Leogrande (2007) has argued that the Bush administration used political language to justify pressure and the exclusion of certain leaders. In the geopolitical discourse, countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, and Nicaragua have been characterized as posing a threat to democratic principles and as advocates of radical populism. This discourse has been instrumental in rationalizing the United States' decision to maintain a low profile in regional initiatives such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), while also supporting actions including election interference, diplomatic isolation, and military cooperation with neighboring governments (Nycz, 2008).

In the context of international relations, countries categorized as having ambiguous or shifting alignments like Brazil and Ecuador are mostly kept in a discursive gray zone. Even though they are not constructed as enemies, their nationalist discourses and shifting economic policies led them to be categorized as ‘unreliable’, leaving them in a gray zone within a binary spatial construction. The Yasuni-ITT initiative in Ecuador and the growing diplomatic role of Brazil demonstrates how the discourse of the United States has led to the partial exclusion of both countries from certain economic partnerships and ongoing political scrutiny (Gonzales, 2019). This strategy was not overtly hostile; however, it exhibited a degree of skepticism within a cooperative framework. According to the discourse of the United States, the allied countries included Colombia, Chile, and Uruguay. The discourse used to identify these countries employed more affirmative terms, such as ‘democratic’, ‘stable’, and ‘committed to freedom’. The utilization of these affirmative rhetorical strategies was further endorsed by collaborative endeavors in the domains of economic reforms and regional security. The Bush administration would characterize them as responsible actors and the establishment of closer ties between them would be facilitated through security and economic cooperations like The US–Chile Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and Plan Colombia which was established under the discourses of counter-narcotics and anti-terrorism (Leogrande, 2007; Nycz, 2008; Smith, 2019). These mechanisms functioned to reward states that demonstrated a high degree of compliance, while concurrently isolating those states with different political orientations. This process served to reinforce a geopolitical order that was binary in nature.

2.3. Geopolitical Tools and Discursive Practices in US-Latin America Relations

During the early 2000s, the United States experienced a notable shift in its foreign policy approach toward Latin America. This recalibration entailed a combination of economic initiatives, security programs, and discursive interventions, aimed at constraining the influence of leftist governments and reinforcing geopolitical hierarchies. One such instrument was Plan Colombia, originally initiated in 2000 under the Clinton administration as a \$1.7 billion military aid package aimed at assisting the Colombian government in combating the FARC and curbing narcotics production. However, in the post-9/11 context, the Bush administration reconceptualized its objectives.

With US Ambassador Anne Patterson playing a central role, Plan Colombia was absorbed into the broader framework of the global war on terror. By deploying the discourse of ‘narco-terrorism’, the Bush administration justified expanded aid and intervention in Colombia, situating the initiative within a securitized narrative that conflated internal dissent with transnational terrorism (Nycz, 2008).

Parallel to its security strategy, the Bush administration confronted challenges to its neoliberal economic agenda, particularly with the electoral rise of Pink Tide governments. The collapse of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project exemplified this divergence, as Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina resisted Washington’s hemispheric integration plan. In response, the US adopted a bilateral strategy, rewarding cooperative states through targeted trade agreements. A Free

Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed with Chile in 2003, followed by the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2004, encompassing El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic (Office of the US Trade Representative, n.d.; Leogrande, 2007). These trade pacts functioned not only as economic tools but also as mechanisms of geopolitical alignment and exclusion.

The Bush administration also employed discursive strategies to shape political outcomes and construct adversarial identities across the region. US actively intervened in several national elections to marginalize candidates perceived as threats to US interests. In Nicaragua's 2002 elections, the administration accused Daniel Ortega of associating with Fidel Castro and Muammar Qaddafi. Similarly, in Bolivia, it warned that US aid would be withdrawn if Evo Morales came to power, and in El Salvador, it threatened to deport Salvadorans residing in the US if the FMLN party won the elections (Leogrande, 2007). These interventions illustrate the performative use of discourse to reinforce the friend/foe dichotomy, simultaneously delegitimizing leftist leaders and privileging pro-US candidates.

When such discursive tactics failed—as in Morales's eventual electoral victory—the Bush administration recalibrated its rhetoric, moving towards more moderated cooperation while continuing to monitor regional developments. Furthermore, after 9/11, Washington expanded military programs such as the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Programme and Support for Special Operations to Combat Terrorism in Latin America. Leaders such as Hugo Chávez and Daniel Ortega were increasingly framed through the lens of terrorism, a strategic discursive move that justified heightened surveillance and punitive measures. The revival of Cold War-style ideological binaries under the guise of counter-terrorism discourse exemplified how geopolitical threats were linguistically produced and embedded into US foreign policy doctrine (Nycz, 2008).

3. Conclusion: Reframing Geopolitical Boundaries through Critical Discourse

The critical geopolitical approach offers a powerful theoretical framework to examine how foreign policy discourses construct geopolitical realities. By highlighting the constitutive role of discourse in shaping perceptions of space, identity, and threat, critical geopolitics provides insight into the ways state actors, such as the US, frame global events to legitimize their interests and interventions (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Dalby, 1991). Through the theoretical contributions of post-structuralism, especially the concepts of power/knowledge and discursive formation, this approach challenges the objectivity of spatial representations and geopolitical narratives (Foucault, 1972; Burchill, 2005).

This research has shown that classical geopolitics, with its emphasis on states and objective power definitions, does not effectively address the discursive instruments through which global power is produced and maintained. The theoretical evolution from classical to critical geopolitics, based on the ontological and epistemological shifts brought about by post-structuralism, has established the foundation for understanding geopolitics as a practice of representation rather than purely a strategic field. Critical geopolitics is a theoretical framework that reframes geography not as a neutral background but as a contested domain of meaning-making and identity construction (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Mamadouh, 1998).

The case of the Pink Tide period in Latin America under the Bush administration has served in this article as a brief empirical illustration of how geopolitical discourses are employed to delineate friends and foes. Although much of the existing literature has analyzed the Pink Tide primarily through economic or ideological lenses, this study has instead focused on how US foreign policy discourse functioned as a geopolitical act that categorized Latin American states in accordance with US interests and threat perceptions (Castaneda, 2006; Fernandes, 2007). Countries such as Colombia, Chile, and Mexico were framed as allies due to their alignment with neoliberal economic policies and cooperation with US security initiatives, while Venezuela and Bolivia were

depicted as adversaries, positioned outside the acceptable normative boundaries of the liberal order (Leogrande, 2007; Smith, 2019; Nycz, 2008).

Beyond classification, the article has shown that discursive interventions were supported by policy instruments such as Plan Colombia, bilateral trade agreements like CAFTA, and direct electoral influence campaigns. These tools operated not only as means of material alignment but also as discursive strategies to reinforce a US-centered geopolitical order. The revival of the friend–foe dichotomy in post-9/11 rhetoric reactivated Cold War binaries under a new guise, transforming left-leaning leaders into threats through the lens of narco-terrorism and authoritarian populism (Nycz, 2008; Gonzales, 2019).

In this context, critical geopolitics allows for the understanding of normative foundations of foreign policy by examining the discursive constitutions of spatial and ideological hierarchies. The role of language, identity, and perception in global politics can be more clearly articulated by examining how spatial representations are politically constructed. As Dalby (1991) asserts, geopolitical discourses do not simply reflect the world—they construct it. This understanding facilitates a more profound examination and interpretation of foreign policy as a discursive practice, emphasizing the role of constructed political concepts such as threat, stability, and cooperation.

As presented in this study, critical geopolitics can offer a more profound understanding of international politics and geopolitical studies through the use of discourse-based methodologies. A thorough examination of power that extends beyond material capabilities, coupled with a critical evaluation of power construction through various lenses, can facilitate a more profound comprehension of the international order. In this regard, the present article contends that critical geopolitics, which integrates the strengths of classical geopolitics and post-structuralist methodologies, serves as a valuable instrument for enhancing the understanding of the significance of discourse on spatial imaginaries, a factor that exerts a direct influence on foreign policy actions, as evidenced by the case of Latin America. Moreover, a comprehensive exploration of the formation of geopolitical imaginaries can assist in understanding how global powers shape their policies and power positions.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of the enforcement and narration of hegemony through spatial discourse and power constructions by integrating theoretical inquiry with empirical illustration.

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