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**F-16 AS A TOOL IN US FOREIGN POLICY. SKETCHES
ABOUT RIMLAND DIPLOMACY**

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Abstract: United States armed forces are in full process or renewing their paraphernalia in order to cope to a polycentric XXI century environment. As some items are tossed away while other like F-35 promise to keep the edge, older equipment is transformed in bargain chip and tool of foreign policy. Such is the case with the F-16 jet, given to friendly countries to deepen alliances. This paper tries to find patterns of US military diplomacy engaging the writings of Nicholas Spykman and Karl Polanyi.

Key words: *F-16, United States, Romania, Portugal, geoeconomy, rimland, Nicholas Spykman, Karl Polanyi*

1. Introduction

US hegemony is exercised both with allies and foes through a certain political economy of security. With respect to allies or close countries, US decisionmakers have developed in time an intricate network of channels so as to advance American interest all over the world and at the same time give a sense of purpose to other friendly actors in the system. As such, military diplomacy is seldom maintained via joint exercises, experience exchange between security institutions, arms transfer, military advisers attached to foreign governments and so on. A case here one may take a closer look is the marketisation of F-16 jet planes. Although US Air Force is on the brink to sideline this machinery, American factories keep on producing it for the international market where more and more buyers are willing to enhance their arsenals.

While buying F-16s, different customers come closer to Washington, forge more intimate commercial and diplomatic ties and bind themselves to a dependency pipe which may bring future rewards. The later's example is Romania which has purchased F-16 to navigate throughout a vulnerable neighborhood and, in the near future, to receive F-35s jets, a brand that promises to cross the Vth generation frontier in aerospace technology.

Our paper stresses that the transfer of F-16s does not happen randomly or motivated only my economic reason but display a certain geographical patterns. Thus, the process follows three criteria → receiver countries must be at the same time: a) friends to USA; b) they have to be more or less democracies, and c) have a rimland location- they must border a sea or an ocean. In this regards we emphasise and bring back from oblivion Nicholas Spykman's legacy. More so, the same process underpins geoeconomic rationality- here we argue that the military equipment sold and bought entails symbolic meaning and should be regarded as a currency in itself! The explanatory framework laid down here supplements Spykman's viewpoint with the writings of sociologist like Karl Polanyi and Viviana Zelizer. Especially Polanyi (1886-1964) emphasises the market based modern economy is only one possible wealth producing activity among others like the economy of gift, reciprocity or redistribution. Following the above

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mentioned logic the papers asserts that F-16 marketization respects the logic of rimland built upon redistribution.

This paper has four parts: first one lists some of the most important countries that either have either entered into purchasing contracts with the US; the second describes the feature of F-16 in broad strokes while the third delves into theory and tries to craft an explanatory model for future employment in geopolitical studies; the fourth resumes everything and sets the stage for future research.

2. 2016- A year full of concretization

* F-16s for Pakistan. Since October 2015, the international press was talking about the possible sale of eight F-16 fighter jets to Islamabad. The news came relatively at the same time with the visit to the White House of the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif¹. The rumor would get substance this spring when the US Senate voted by a majority of 71-24 the contract².

It remains to be seen whether the country South Asian will have money to buy them all, especially the Senator Bob Corker, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee announced that devices will not be purchased through the funding foreign military (FMF), the situation in which US government would bear 46% of the cost of sale³.

India's reaction was not left waiting too long, the Officials in New Delhi protesting against the further arming of their northern neighbor⁴.

* To sweeten the pill, the manufacturer Lockheed Martin has proposed India to sell the license to assemble the F-16, as stated the chief executive, Phil Shaw in Singapore Aviation Exhibition 2016. Lockheed already has a number of contracts for parts on the Asian subcontinent involving 1,000 Indian workers. If New Delhi accepts proposal received, the first F-16 devices created in India will leave the hangar somewhere in 2019-2020⁵.

* On January 15, 2016, the Agency for Security and Cooperation in Defense of the Pentagon announced the sale of 33,000 items used for F-16 aircraft to Iraq.

Baghdad has also previously bought F-16 over the last decade. Its pilots train in Tucson, Arizona and from September 2015⁶ began to attack ISIS. Most of the items are bombs, of which 8,000 Paveway laser-guided bombs. Since Iraqi budget is tight, all Americans will help pay a part of the amount⁷.

* On February 22, 2015 Romania's Defense Ministry announced the intention to purchase 12 new F-16 aircraft from Portugal. The lot would reach on the Romanian territory sometime in 2017. The order value is about 695 million dollars. The amount includes both actual devices and logistics package, spare parts and training of the pilots, Gândul informs⁸.

¹ Franz-Stefan Gady, US Will Sell 8 F-16 Fighter Jets to Pakistan, *The Diplomat*, October 23, 2015

² Joe Gould, Pakistan F-16 Sale Survives US Senate Dogfight, *Defense News*, March 10, 2016

³ Pichi Chuang, U.S. OKs sale of 8 Lockheed F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan – Pentagon, *Reuters*, 12 February 2016

⁴ India reacts strongly to US decision to sell 8 F-16 jets to Pakistan, summons envoy, *Times of India*, 12 Feb 2016

⁵ Manu Pubby, Amid Pakistan row India considers proposal to manufacture F-16 fighter jets under „Make in India”, *Economic Times*, 15 Feb 2016

⁶ Dan Lamothe, Iraq has finally started using the F-16 fighter jet in combat operations, *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2015

⁷ Awad Mustafa, US State Department OKs \$2B in F-16 Weapons Sales to Iraq, *Defense News*, January 21, 2016

⁸ Slow deal with Portugal, Defence Industry Daily, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/nothing-but-netz-will-romanas-new-fighters-come-from-israel-01499/>. EXCLUSIVE Romania will buy another 12 F-16 fighter jets, Feb 22, 2016 <http://www.europafm.ro/romania-va-cumpara-alte-12-avioane-de-lupta-f-16/>. Army buys another

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* On March 29, 2016, an aircraft F-16 crashed near the base Baghram in Afghanistan. The pilot was rescued and catapult and the authorities are investigating the causes of the accident. A day later, on March 30, a similar aircraft of the South Korean Air Force same thing happened in Cheongsong area, to 322 kilometers southeast of Seoul. And here the two pilots were ejected⁹.

3. F-16 general technical features

In the second part of the Vietnam War, US air forces were seeking a device that incorporates lessons learned on theaters of operations in Southeast Asia, Korea '50s and also to replace older devices in the endowment US fleet such as F-15 jet. After a series of tests conducted by the engineers from General Dynamics (now part of Lockheed Martin) and Northrop, the Department of Defense (DoD) held a tender won in the end by those of General whom were assigned to refine the concept of F-16. The first flight is deemed to have been performed in January 1974 and formal entry into use was four years later in 1978. Meanwhile, four European countries: Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway have bought a total of 348 aircrafts, preferring the offer of the Americans to Mirage F-1 French model from the Dassault or that of the Swedish from Viggen¹⁰.

From then until today F-16 became one of the most traded fighter in history, surpassed perhaps only by MIG 21. Over 4.500 aircraft became part of the US Aviation and 27 other countries including that Venezuela, Benelux, Portugal, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Romania, South Korea etc.

Its technical features display: a length of 15,027 meters; height of 5,096 meters; weight (when the plane is empty) of 9 tons. Its speed goes beyond 2 Mach or 1.500 kilometers per hour. The maximum flight altitude is 15.000 meters and autonomy over 2000 miles. The cost of each unit varies between 14 and 16 million dollars¹¹.

The armament consists of:

- M61 A1 Vulcan cannon, which is actually a machine gun with six pipes, caliber 20 mm that can shoot up to 6.000 rounds per minute. Bullets used so far are of three types: M55- tracer; M53- penetrating and M56-explosive.

More recently it was introduced a new type of ammunition PGU-28 that would have three times the speed projectiles above¹².

- 9 rocket jacks. The number depends on the configuration of the airplane. The most commonly used are air-to-air missiles with medium range known as the AIM-120 AMRAAM, Raytheon mark affixed on the wings. Alternatives such as AIM-9 Sidewinder (Partnership Raytheon and Lockheed), Raytheon Sparrow, MBDA, all air-to-air or air-to-ground missiles: Maverick, HARM, Shrike¹³.

second-hand 12 F-16 sale. How many American soldiers will arrive in Romania in 2017, Gândul, February 22, 2016

<http://www.gandul.info/stiri/armata-cumpara-inca-12-avioane-f-16-second-hand-cati-soldati-americi-vor-sosi-in-romania-in-2017-15083708>

⁹ Dan Lamothe, F-16 fighter jet crashes in Afghanistan during takeoff from Bagram Airfield, The Washington Post, March 29 2016. Lieven Dewitte, South Korean KF-16D crashes, both pilots eject safely, *F-16.net*, 30 March 2016, <http://www.f-16.net/f-16-news-article5012.html>

¹⁰ Ingemar Dörfer, Arms Deal: The Selling of the F-16, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1983

¹¹ F-16 Fighting Falcon, US Air Force, 23 Sept 2015, <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/FactSheets/Display/tabid/224/Article/104505/f-16-fighting-falcon.aspx>

¹² http://www.f-16.net/f-16_armament_article5.html

¹³ F-16 Fighting Falcon Multirole Fighter, United States of America, Air-force technology.com

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4. The renaissance of rimland in a multipolar world

In 1904, Sir Halford Mackinder submitted an article to the Royal Geographic Society called „The Historical Pivot of History” which was to leave one of the deepest traces in the evolution of ideas in the XX century. There, and subsequently in another essay from 1919 „Democratic ideals and reality” Mackinder spoke about the <world-island>, an interlink between Europe, Asia and Africa and the geographical pivot, a wide area, largely comprised by Eastern Europe and the former Tsarist Empires (and later Soviet Union) deemed to be crucial for anyone willing to master the entire world.¹⁴ Today, this paper argues, in an increasingly multipolar world, such view seems Eurocentric at best¹⁵. With more and more centers of regional power, the cartography of power cannot be said to display one single pivoting area but several spatial points. Some may also take notice that all the emergent players, either regional or global are actually rimland countries that actually take or try to take advantage of the sea (here we may as well lump together BRICS nations: Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, CIVET countries like Turkey, Iran, Vietnam, Indonesia along with Mexico, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Ethiopia, and other smaller actors)¹⁶. Therefore the geopolitical thinking of the earlier XXI century should bring forth Alfred T. Mahan and Nicholas Spykman once again¹⁷. Apart from that, methodology should not indulge in geographical determinism or remain state-centric and broaden the analysis to include other kind of actors or take into account recent evolutions of alternative research programs in geography like: the School of Annales, urban studies of Doreen Massey, Saskia Sassen, Mike Davies; geographical economics of Paul Krugman and David Harvey; behavioral geography pioneered by Reginald Golledge and so on.

For the necessities of this papers, we believe we can initiate a dialogue between Nicholas Spykman and Karl Polanyi to explain the patterns of US marketisation of F-16 jets. The first reaction of the reader might be wonder, as they seem worlds apart, one passionate by international relations while the other attracted by prehistory as vehicle to extract a critique towards modern capitalism and market society!

Differences aside, there are other important similarities that can be construed to garner a dialogue between them. *First*, both their most important books have been written during WWII, when the fate of the international system was still to be decided. *Second*, both of them regard human interaction amidst the interplay of conflict and commerce, with different shades from one to another, of course.

¹⁴ Francis P. Sempa, Mackinder's world, *American Diplomacy*, February 2000, http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_14/sempa_mac1.html

H J Mackinder, The geographical pivot of history, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, December 2004, pp. 298–321. Pascal Venier, The geographical pivot of history and early twentieth century geopolitical culture, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, December 2004, pp. 330–336

¹⁵ Megoran Nick, Sharapova Sevara, Mackinder's "Heartland": A help or hindrance in understanding Central Asia's international relations?, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, № 4 (34) / 2005, pp.8-21. John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010*, Cambridge University Press, 2012. Erica Borg, Brandon Wagley and Blanca Velazquez, Revisiting the Heartland: The Eurocentric Pivot of History, Geopolitics.es, 11 September 2016

¹⁶ John Greenwood, After BRICS, CIVETS?, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 September 2001. Elaine Moore, Civets, Brics and the next 11, *Financial Times*, 12 June 2012. Peter Spence, and Dan Palmer, Mark Oliver, Beyond the BRICS: the guide to every emerging market acronym, *The Telegraph*, 13 Oct 2014

¹⁷ Francis P. Sempa, The Geopolitical Vision of Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Diplomat*, December 30, 2014. Akhilesh Pillalamarri, How Asians Came to See the Seas and Naval Strategy Like the West, *The Diplomat*, December 04, 2015

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- Although both of them contend that human beings are moved by a variety of motives, modern civilisation has rendered instability and conflict more present in the XX century.¹⁸
- In Polanyi's case market was generalised at the dawn of the XIX century. Up until then, it represented only a small portion of economic life and was usually maintained between great distances and practiced as a sort of tool under the rubric of what we call today international economic relations.¹⁹ Other forms are reciprocity and redistribution. Reciprocity takes place between equals whereas redistribution demands a center invested with authority.²⁰
- According to Spykman: *"Human beings invented a great variety of techniques designed to win friends and influence people. These different methods can be classified under four broad headings: persuasion, purchase, barter, and coercion, although this does not mean that every endeavor to make others do our bidding can be neatly pigeonholed into one of these categories."*²¹ [...] In international society, as in other social groupings, there are observable the three basic processes of co-operation, accommodation, and opposition. Not only individuals and groups but also states maintain the three of social relations."²²

Contrasting Polanyi, Spykman's magnum opus display a more policy-oriented style and is restless in following American interest which is judged according to a certain geographical alliances and direct actions. The American-Dutch author fears a Nazi-Japanese victory that might impair US freedom of movement in world affairs. Therefore, Washington is compelled to guard the Western hemisphere and at the same time help the embattled countries of Old World, namely European democracies crushed by the Whermacht. To accomplish such goal and assure a foothold for longer term, American policymakers should cultivate friendly nations and establish military bases and ports useful in the hour of need:

*"In terms of present-day technology, transoceanic air power cannot be a serious threat unless it can count on friendly air bases on this side of the water ready to welcome and service the invader. Bombing attacks by planes from carriers can probably not be prevented entirely but because of the limited capacity of carriers, the damage caused by such raids will be smaller than that inflicted by large land-based bomber fleets."*²³ [...]

*The problem of hemisphere defense under conditions of encirclement is defined by the location of its strategic zones in relation to the transatlantic and the transpacific coasts. The core of the strategic pattern is shaped by the lines which connect military means centers and vital areas. For sea power, military centers are the great naval bases in the vicinity of regions of high industrial productivity."*²⁴

After all those above theoretical consideration let us return to the main subject. The map bellow shows some of the current or future-to-be operators of F-16 planes:

¹⁸ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, foreword by Joseph Stiglitz, Introduction, by Fred Block, Beacon Press, Boston, 1944/1957/2002, pp. 3-17, 1-44, and *passim*. Karl Polanyi, *The livelihood of man*, ed. Harry W.Pearson, Academic Press, New York, 1977, p.11. Nicholas J.Spykman, *America's strategy in world politics. The United States and the balance of power*, with a new introduction by Francis P.Sempa, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, London, 1942/ 2008, p.7

¹⁹ Polanyi, *The livelihood of man*, p.Liii

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.40

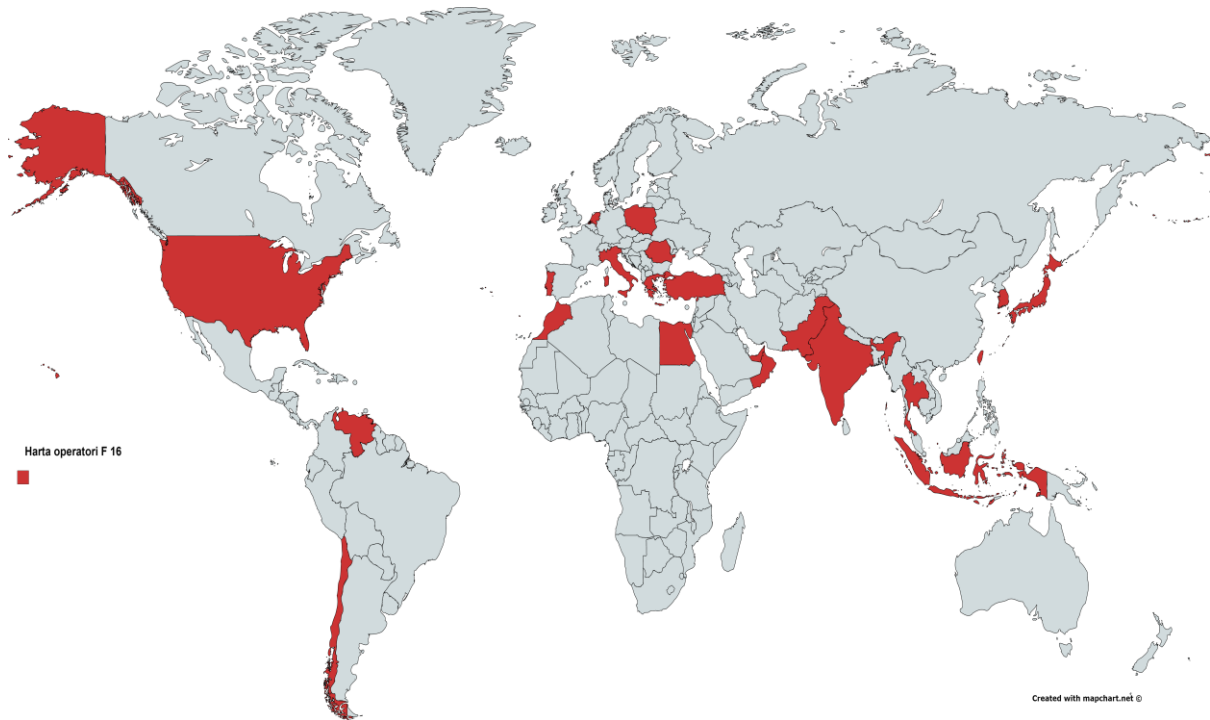
²¹ Nicholas Spykman, *op.cit.*, p.12

²² *Ibidem*, pp.15-16

²³ *Ibidem*, p.391

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.409

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Nota bene: map created by the author with mapchart.net

One can easily notice that operating countries are spread on almost all of the continents; some are NATO countries; some are functioning democracies while others authoritarian or illiberal republics (Venezuela, Turkey, Pakistan). Some, especially with a more powerful industrial base (Holland, India, forthcoming) manufacture different parts of the plane while others only employ the apparatus for defence purpose. What goes beyond all those features is their rimland position: all F-16 operators have some sort of access to water.

However, geographical position tells only half of the story. Spatial location is important to the extent people invest it with meanings, out of economic, historical or aesthetic causes.²⁵

For example the rimland disposition does not explain by itself why:

- from the supplier pointview: why US does not cluster the sales of F-16 more thoroughly in a region (like Latin America; NATO allies, Taiwan and South-East Asia in order to checkmate China and so forth) and spreads them across the Globe;
- from the client pointview: why bother with an older brand when newer airplanes are available on the market or they can be manufactured domestically and better tailored to one's needs? Let us take into account the Romanian model: why did Romania chose the American offer instead of other European alternatives such as the Swedish Gripen or the multinational project Eurofighter Typhoon? Some voices insisted on the cash strapped Romanian which would have been better served the former brands instead of the F-16, not to mention that the Swedish scenario would have com with offsets²⁶. The final decision took into consideration political and technical factors: choosing F-16

²⁵ Martin Müller, Reconsidering the concept of discourse for the field of critical geopolitics: Towards discourse as language and practice, *Political Geography* 27 (2008) 322-338, p.327

²⁶ Eurofighter Typhoon – „singurul avion care se poate bate cu rușii“, Gândul, 22 octombrie 2007. Dan Zavaleanu, Eurofighter vrea să vândă României avioane de luptă la preț de F-16, Cotidianul, 17 mai 2010. Marin Pană, Achiziția avioanelor de luptă- calcule comparative: între maxim, minim și optim de circumstanță, *Curs de guvernare*, 19.06.2013.

One story about the Swedish offset investment in Hungarian economy see: Zsolt Lazar, THE GRIPEN SALE TO HUNGARY: A LOOK BACK AT THE RESULTS, *Second line of defence*, 10.08.2015, <http://www.sldinfo.com/the-gripen-sale-to-hungary-a-look-back-at-the-results/>

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operated by the Portuguese air forces tightens Romanian commitment to NATO and the American ally, helps Romania pilots become familiar with US technology and clears the way to future acquisition of F-35²⁷.

Even India which went on with signing the Rafale deal with France on September 23 2016²⁸ and flirts with the Swedish offer from Saab to renew its aging MIG fleet, still does not discard the Boeing deal, how it was stated above²⁹.

Reflecting upon those examples and many more others, we may state that arms can be considered a special currency in themselves. Karl Polanyi shows how universal money-abstract vehicles one can buy everything sold on the market- are a rather modern invention, ancient times bearing witness to the existence of special money employed only for narrower purpose. Viviana Zelizer follows in Polanyi's footsteps and studies special monies in contemporary times. According to Zelizer: "*Money belongs to the market, but not exclusively so. And while money is indeed an objective means of rational calculation, it is not only that.*"³⁰ [...] *Market money does not escape extraeconomic influences but is in fact one type of special money subject to particular and cultural influences.*"³¹

The question of weapons as a special kind of currency has been also studied by David Kinsella who shows how important was symbolism in the military build-up of Third world postcolonial countries. During Cold War days, those newer countries did not buy military equipment based only on performance. Historical or geostrategic consideration played a big part in acquisition. (Egypt and Syria turned to the Soviet supplying pipe as they were interested to forge an alliance with Moscow which supported the Arab cause as against American supported Israeli foreign policy. Similarly was India's situation which initially purchased British ships and jets to later turn towards the Soviet Union cementing a long lasting bond³²).

The American rationality to continue the marketisation of F-16 seems to exemplify what Polanyi called a form of integration based on redistribution: the United States – the global hegemony- redistributes revamped technology to allies and friends in order to maintain a line of production,³³ create a web of dependency, bring other governments closer and get all sorts of benefits, like military bases or support.³⁴

²⁷ George Vişan, Achiziția avioanelor F-16: între eșec și vulnerabilitate strategică, *Civitas Politics*, 9 august 2010. George Vişan, De ce a cumpărat România avioane F-16..., *Civitas Politics*, 1 august 2013

²⁸ India signs 36-unit Rafale contract, *Flight International*, 23 September 2016. Special Correspondent, India, France ink €7.87 billion agreement for 36 Rafales, *The Hindu*, 24 September 2016

²⁹ Nayanima Basu, 'Rafale deal not a setback for Saab's Gripen jet', *Business Line*, 7 October 2016

³⁰ Viviana Zelizer, The Social Meaning of Money: "Special Monies", pp.93-127 in *Economic lives. How culture shapes economy*, Princeton University Press, Cambridge, New Jersey and Oxford, 2011, p.94

³¹ *Ibidem*, p.100

³² David Kinsella, Jugdep Chima, Symbolic forces driving third world arms production: the case of India, Presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, 18-22 March 1997, Toronto

³³ One should not overlook the fact that for many workers and engineers the Falcon project is probably the most important they worked at since they left the school. It would be hard to re-adjust to another line of production. A hearing to the US Congress dated October 24, 2011 stated that 11.000 people working in the aerospace industry will retire, while other 32.000 people were to be hired the same year. THE AVIATION WORKFORCE:INDUSTRY AND LABOR PERSPECTIVES ON TRAINING NEEDS AND CHALLENGES, OCTOBER 24, 2011, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg73541/html/CHRG-112shrg73541.htm>

³⁴ According to Glenn Hastedt, the seller has three motives to merchandise weapons: a) influence over the borders; b) protecting certain interest, and c) as barter in order to receive military bases. Glenn P.Hastedt, *American foreign policy: past, present, and future*, Rowman& Littlefield, Boulder, New York, 2015, pp.279-280

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5. Concluding remarks and future research

Present paper undergirded the premises that security goes hand in hand with economic reasons. For the chosen case study- namely the continual marketisation of Falcon 16 fighter- we contend that profit seeking from the American side is lumped together with other geographical, economic and symbolic inclinations. In a multipolar age with regional rivalries and cash-strapped budget, United States styled a military diplomacy able to recycle security materials and at the same time shape an friendly environment all over the map.

Our endeavor has certain limitation, both regarding its theoretical underpinnings as well as the substance of the case study.

With respect to theory, one may try to find a path to dialogue between classical geopolitics, still tarnished by the Nazi legacy (and today by the proclivity towards Eurasianism), the political geography stemming from the School of Annales, Marxist geography, urban studies and so forth.³⁵

With respect to the case study, future enterprise may try to sketch an interview based research and see if US policymakers see the world in geoeconomic terms when transferring weapons to other nations. More so, a deeper research than the one here could answer if those countries possessing F-16 fighter along with other American gear cooperate between them beyond their relationship to Washington. Signs for the pertinence for such an inquiry are to be seen recently, when Romanian Minister of Defence met his Portuguese counterpart to explore directions in security cooperation.³⁶

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³⁵ For trials towards a dialogue between academic disciplines see: Virginie Mamadouh & Gertjan Dijkink (2006): Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse, *Geopolitics*, 11:3, 349-366. Antonisch M, 2009. The revenge of political geographers, *Political Geography* 28 (4), pp.211-212. Martin Müller, *op.cit.* Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Routledge, London/New York, 2013. William Rooke, Towards a Marxist Geopolitics?, Center for Security Studies, The CSS Blog, 17 August 2011

³⁶ Convorbiri oficiale între miniștrii român și portughez ai apărării, Ministerul Apărării Naționale Direcția Informare și Relații Publice, COMUNICAT NR. 279 Data: 08.10.2016, http://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/15265_Convorbiri-oficiale-%C3%AEntre-mini%C8%99trii-rom%C3%A2n-%C8%99i-portughez-ai-ap%C4%83r%C4%83rii (Accesed 10 October 2016). Marius Frățilă, Anda Badea, MAPN: Ministrul Motoc a discutat cu omologul portughez noi direcții potențiale de cooperare, Agerpres, 8 octombrie 2016

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