A geographic and urban planning view of military administrative divisions

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Abstract The following issues are discussed in this article: military-geographic regionalization questions, the relationship between the Earth's surface and the geographic sphere, two main types of divisions - physio-geographic territorial and economic-territorial divisions, the administrative-territorial division of different states, and the problem of complex physical-geographical zoning differentiation objectively through the existing natural-territorial complex of different ranks and varying degrees of complexity. By examining the military-administrative divisions of the US and Russian Federation, both past and present, it is concluded that these divisions are based on geographic-territorial considerations, encompassing continents, states, and interior administrative area boundaries. These divisions facilitate the optimal command and control of troops. The joint staff of the armed forces, responsible for strategic territorial division into different commands, considers and analyzes various components of the geographical background during the initial phase of combat operations, providing strategic advantages for regional commands in the theatre of military operations. This approach forms the basis for the efficient utilization of different types of forces.

Keywords: military districts, military-geographic region, physio-geographic regionalization, administrative-territorial structure, area of responsibility, urban planning

1. Introduction

Military districts (also called military regions) represent formations of a state's armed forces (often of the army), which are responsible for specific territories. They are often responsible more for administrative than operational matters, and in countries with conscript forces, they often handle parts of the conscription cycle.

The aim of military-geographic regionalization is the assessment of a territory from the perspective of the complex influence of its natural conditions and urban planning on military operations and creating maps of military-geographic regionalization.

The study of the divisions of the Earth’s surface into its different characteristics is carried out within the framework of geographic science, reflecting the fact that both the Earth’s surface and the geographic sphere are geographical subjects for research.

In geographical science, two main types of territorial divisions are known: physio-geographic regionalization and the administrative-territorial division.

Nations (states) that couple cosmopolitan interests with a global reach subdivide the world into areas of responsibility that best distribute military strength and maximize flexibility. The United States and Great Britain did so to mutual advantage during World War II. The U.S. Department of Defense has put lessons learned to good use ever since (Collins 1998).

2. Literature Review

The territorial divisions of the earth’s surface with different characteristics are the subject of research within the geographical science framework, reflecting the fact that both the earth surface and geographic sheath are subjects of geographic study. Geography recognizes two main types of divisions: physio-geographic territorial and economic-territorial divisions. Until the 19th century, regionalization was being done without a scientific basis. Divisions were drawn based on the most significant features (orography, river basins, and political boundaries) and without reference to physio-geographic and economic divisions. Throughout the 19th century (especially during the second half), private geographic disciples were founded, and the development of sectoral schemes of natural regionalization was intensified (climatic, biogeographic, urban planning advisability, etc.). Economic regionalization stands out in its development as a separate discipline. The initial theoretical background for the development of complex physio-geographic regionalization was made in V.V. Dokuchaev’s works at the end of the 19th century. The idea of “natural zonality” formed the basis of the first schemes of physio-geographic regionalization in the European part of Russia (Tanfilev 1889) and in the Asian part of Russia (Berg 1931). At the beginning of
the 20th century, the problems of physio-geographic regionalization began to be discussed extensively among German, English and American scholars dealing with foreign geography (E. Herbertson, Z. Passarge).

Thus, it came to be believed that physio-geographic regionalization could point to actual existing differences in nature rather than being merely the result of purely scientific formation. Most of the Soviet geographers supported that conception (Maksakovskii 2008). Furthermore, along with the physio-geographic study of regionalization, climatic as well as hydrological, underground, geobotanical, and zoogeographical aspects were also considered (Dokoutschaeff 1900). However, related to this, an opposing opinion exists among the world’s scientists. For instance, in America, scientists do not recognize physio-geographic regionalization (as long as they do not recognize the objectivity of existence) in the absence of complex natural areas (Dokoutschaeff 1900). Interestingly, in regionalization rather than similarity, the main criteria of landscapes are the connection, interspace relationship, territorial unanimity of integral parts and commonness of their historical development (Isachnko 1965).

Major disputes regarding regionalization are sparked by problems on the boundaries of various natural complexes. The question in dispute is whether it is possible to consider them concise and real. To understand in detail the essence of the discrepancy, one should turn to the issue of natural territorial complexes, which are more often called landscapes and form the basis of regionalism in geography (Isachnko 1965).

3. Methods

Military regions are divided into military districts, usually contiguous with provinces, and military subdistricts. Military-administrative divisions of a state’s territory into military districts (in some countries divided into regions, zones, districts, etc.) have been established with the view of executing military operations to prepare the country and its armed forces for war. In the former USSR, a unit of a military administrative division was a military district (okrug). In the opinion of experts, in consideration of the feebleness of capacity remaining at the disposal of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, such redrawing of the military administrative map of the state was the only possible step to some kind of protection of the country. The national fighting capabilities of our four operations strategic commands (OSC) are different. As different are the degrees of threat along all the perimeter of Russian borders.

On December 1, 2010 the military-administrative division of the Russian Federation (see Figure 1) was done without multifaceted study of the military geographical conditions of the districts, which may later necessitate amendments in those divisions.

The general staff maintains operational control over the military district in compliance with the decisions of the minister of defense of the Russian Federation and ensures control over their implementation.

Areas of responsibility of the four Operational Strategic Commands of the Russian Armed Forces since December 1, 2010.

**Figure 1** Military districts of Russia 2010.  
The Commander-in-Chief of the Land Forces, the deputy minister of defense of the Russian Federation, maintains control over military districts in compliance with the decisions of the minister of defense of the Russian Federation on issues relating to his competency.

The military-administrative division is a system of delimitation of frontiers (zones) of responsibilities within which operational-strategic (operational) territorial formations function. Military-administrative divisions quite often coincide with the administrative territorial divisions of the country. In the Russian Federation, a military district is a basic military-administrative unity (in some other countries, this is referred to as zones, regions, etc.)

Kaliningrad is an independent, military-administrative unity and special administrative area within the boundaries of the Kaliningrad region and is not integrated into a military district.

4. The historical and ethnicultural approaches of formatting the administrative-territorial division of states

The operation “Storm in the Desert” signaled the start of a revolution in warfare, but the mass introduction of new technologies and the transformation of carrier components of the Navy took nearly ten years. Projection of the power “against the coast” and participation in local conflicts of low intensity in coastal areas became the basis for a new Navy strategy “From the Sea”, and the role of carriers in it was crucial (Tebin and Ermakov 2013).

The form of an administrative-territorial structure (or administrative-territorial division) also characterizes the state system of any country. Usually, such divisions are carried out taking into account economic, historical, national, urban planning, natural and other factors. Its fundamental functions include gradual placement of authorities and public administration, ensuring the collection of taxes and information, control of the center over the divisions, implementation of flexible economic and social policy, regional policy, and the conduct of election campaigns.

A political-geographer’s study shows that the current situation of the administrative-territorial division of states is formed under the influence of few factors and approaches, with historical and ethno-cultural approaches predominating. Historically, administrative-territorial divisions are inherent for many countries in Europe, giving rise to many historical provinces formed from former medieval feudal states (Turing, Bavaria, Baden-Wurttemberg and others in Germany, Toscana, Lombardy, and Piedmont in Italy). Ethnic administrative-territorial divisions are often seen in developing countries, especially in multinational countries (Nersesyan 2021). A case in point is India, where primarily ethnic borders are taken into account in delimiting borders between states (Maksakovskii 2008).

The physiographic regionalization system of the territorial division, based on detection and research of subordination of natural regions, has internal unity and peculiar individual natural characteristics. Regionalization can be zonal (strips, zones and subzones), zonal (physiographic countries, regions, provinces, districts, tracts, facies), or sectoral (relief, climate, soils, etc.) and complex (Sayadyan and Gevorgyan 2020).

One of the most important problems of physiographic regionalization is to objectively recognize scientifically proven complex physiographic regionalization differentiation through the existing natural-territorial complex of different ranks and different degrees of complexity and to establish a hierarchy of subordination.

Physio-geographic regionalization has great scientific and practical importance, particularly in the present day, when the issues of saving ecological equilibrium in nature and preventing ecological crises are thrown into sharp relief.

The natural-territorial complex with its internal and external interconnections and interactions is the main objective of physio-geographic research. Therefore, complex research of any territory is not limited by component wise characteristics. It necessarily includes also analysis of regional differences within its limits, inspection of the natural-territorial complex forming its parts.

The scientific-educational value of regionalization is what serves as a basis for a logical grouping of geographical information relating to territory, for consecutive presentation of materials during regional research, for creating materials in description of regional geography and for educational purposes (Smbatyan 2022).

The applied significance of works on physio-geographic regionalization lies in the fact that some separate natural complexes differ from one another by peculiar natural conditions and natural resources, the knowledge of which enables us to identify their best use while ensuring an ecological balance. For these purposes, applied schemes of regionalization are used in agriculture, town building, urban planning, region planning, organizing leisure activities and recreation for a population, and so on (Nersesyan 2021).

5. Military-administrative former and current divisions of the US and Russian Federation

Studying the military-administrative former and current divisions of the US and Russian Federation, we come to the conclusion that the basis of those divisions are geographic-territorial divisions: those of continents, states and interior administrative area boundaries that allow for the best command and control of troops. While fixing boundaries, very little of the probable theater of operations is taken into consideration from the view of effective command and control capabilities. Too little attention is given to factors of human geography, or the results of geographical forecasts are totally ignored.
Enlargement of modern technical and tactical capabilities of military equipment greatly neutralizes the influence of physio-geographical conditions on the implementation of military operations. Therefore, the main focus will be on human geographic factors. To substantiate the previously mentioned, let us examine two follow examples:

In example a., The borders of European (USEUCOM) and African commands (USAFRICOM) of the US Armed Forces (Figure 2) cross Egypt and the Mediterranean coast of Africa. In geography, if one studies North African countries, Egypt is never separated from other Arabic countries, taking into account their historical past and identical ethnology-cultural present. In 2011-2012, we witnessed the “Arab Spring” revolution in Maghreb countries implemented with nearly the same ‘script, which once again proves the historical-geographic identity of those countries. Historical tribal unions form the basis of the abovementioned countries. In other words, while making military-administrative divisions of African countries from the geographical point of view, it is appropriate to combine the North African countries into one grouping.

In example b., we would like to show the noneffective delimitation resulting from neglecting geographical forecasts in establishing the military-administrative divisions. According to the geographical forecast, due to global warming, “the North Sea route” from Europe to eastern Asian countries will gradually become more efficient. In this case, the armed forces of the Russian Federation have not set up a military district along the northern border. Otherwise, the military northern district would have bases equipped with modern technologies along that route, and by exploiting navigation modern devices together with logistic centers, the Russian Federation would ensure a gradually increasing volume of freight shipments in that direction. The same can be said in relation to the Canadian arctic zone.

6. Final considerations

Geographical-territorial division - the boundaries of continents, states, and inland administrative regions allow for better command and control of troops. The joint staff of the armed forces carrying out strategic territorial division into different commands, having studied in advance and taken into account different components of the geographical background already in the initial phase of combat operations, will provide strategic advantages for its regional commands in the theatre of military operations, which will form the basis for efficient use of different types of forces.

Ethical Considerations
Not Applicable.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
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