

Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy

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First Published in 1999 in Great Britain by
FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS
Newbury House, 900 Eastern Avenue
London, IG2 7HH

and in the *United States of America* by
FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS
c/o ISBS, 5804 N.E. Hassalo Street
Portland, Oregon, 97213-3644

Website: www.frankcass.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Geopolitics, geography and strategy

1. Geopolitics 2. World politics – 1945–

I. Gray, Colin S. (Colin Spencer), 1943– II. Sloan, G. R.
(Geoffrey R.), 1955–

320.1'2

ISBN 0-7146-4990-2 (cloth)

ISBN 0-7146-8053-2 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Geopolitics, geography, and strategy / editors, Colin S. Gray,
Geoffrey Sloan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7146-4990-2. – ISBN 0-7146-8053-2.

1. Geopolitics. I. Gray, Colin S. II. Sloan, G. R.

(Geoffrey R.)

JC319.G487 1999

320.1'2-dc21

99-38173

CIP

This group of studies first appeared in a double Special Issue on
'Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy'

of *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (ISSN 0140 2390) 22/2-3 (June/September 1999)
published by Frank Cass.

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Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire

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23. John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare* (NY: Viking 1989) p.110.
24. These bottlenecks were easy to spot on a global map, and Mahan identified seven of them – the Straits of Dover, Gibraltar, and Malacca, the Cape of Good Hope, Malta, the Suez Canal, and the St Lawrence seaway.
25. See Wilson, *Spaceflight Directory* (note 20) for a representative catalog of spacecraft in orbit.
26. *Influence of Seapower* (note 18) p.83.
27. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* (1921) trans. by Dino Ferrari (NY: Coward, McCann 1942) pp.88–90.
28. Alfred Hurley, Billy Mitchell: *Crusader for Air Power* (U. of Indiana 1964) pp.81–3.
29. See Doug Beason, 'What are these Lagrange Points Anyway?', in Jerry Pournelle (ed.) *Cities in Space: The Endless Frontier*, Vol.III (NY: Ace 1991) pp.58–65. See also Vaucher.
30. The L-5 Society has since been absorbed into the National Space Society, where many of its former members are now primary officers.
31. Damon (note 10) p.40.
32. Spacecraft move from their original orbit, and in the process change their inclinations (this is how the Shuttle places payloads into geostationary orbit, releasing them with an attached upper stage or bus), but the transfer costs additional fuel, fuel that had to be placed on the launching rocket, ultimately limiting payload weight or spacecraft lifespan.
33. The Iridium constellation originally was to have 77 satellites, and was named after the 77th element on the Periodic Table. When the constellation was scaled back to 66 satellites at a slightly higher altitude, a name change to Dysprosium (Periodic Table element number 66) was not made, for commercial reasons.
34. The most spectacular growth in space development to date has arguably been the direct result of Cold War competition, see Walter McDougall '... the Heavens and the Earth' (NY: Basic Books 1985), Cass Schietle, *The National Space Program from the Fifties into the Eighties* (Washington DC: National Defense UP 1983), and Matthew von Bencke, *The Politics of Space: A History of US-Soviet/Russian Competition and Cooperation* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1997).

Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society

GEARÓID Ó TUATHAIL

As we complete a century of geopolitics (the word was coined in 1899) it is both appropriate and necessary to reflect upon its history, meanings and use in a critically-minded manner. The critique of geopolitics is as old as geopolitics itself but as humanity grapples with the prevailing chaos, proliferating risks and pervasive disorder of a turn of a century condition, it is vital that we develop a critical perspective on the seductive simplicity-mindedness of geopolitics and its dangerous counter-modern tendencies.

Geopolitics can be described as problem-solving theory for the conceptualization and practice of statecraft. A convenient label for a variety of traditions and cultures of theory and practice, geopolitics sees itself as an instrumental form of knowledge and rationality. It takes the existing power structures for granted and works within these to provide conceptualization and advice to foreign policy decision-makers. Its dominant modes of narration are declarative ('this is how the world is') and then imperative ('this is what we must do'). 'Is' and 'we' mark its commitment to, on the one hand, a transparent and objectified world and, on the other hand, to a particular geographically bounded community and its cultural/political version of the truth of that world. Its enduring 'plot' is the global balance of power and the future of strategic advantage in an anarchic world.

Geopolitics is of the same ilk as political realism, distinguishing itself by its proclivity to find 'geography' as a singularly important element in foreign policy conceptualization and practice.

Critical geopolitics, by contrast, is a problematizing theoretical enterprise that places the existing structures of power and knowledge in question. Also a convenient label for a disparate set of literatures and tendencies that congealed in the 1980s into a developed critique of

'orthodox geopolitics' and the dangerous nostrums associated with it, critical geopolitics seek to recover the complexities of global political life and expose the power relationships that characterize knowledge about geopolitics concealed by orthodox geopolitics.¹ Eschewing explicit interest in providing 'advice to the prince', critical geopolitics critiques the superficial and self-interested ways in which orthodox geopolitics 'reads the world political map' by projecting its own cultural and political assumptions upon it while concealing these very assumptions.

Geopolitics, critical geopoliticians argue, operates with a 'view from nowhere', a seeing that refuses to see itself and the power relationships that make it possible. As an unreflexively eurocentric and narrowly rational cultural practice of 'experts' in powerful Western institutions (from universities to military bureaucracies to strategic 'think-tanks'), geopolitics is not about power politics: it is power politics!

Critical geopolitics strives to expose this power politics to scrutiny and public debate in the name of deepening democratic politics. For critical geopolitics, the notion of 'is' is always an essentially contested perspectival notion. Knowledge is always situated knowledge, articulating the perspective of certain cultures and subjects while marginalizing that of others. Its 'we' is a transnational community of citizens skeptical of the power concentrated in state and military bureaucracies, and committed to an open democratic debate about the meaning and politics of 'security'.

During the Cold War, the contrast between the orthodox geopolitics of both East and West and critical geopolitics was stark and clear. Orthodox Cold War geopolitics peddled dangerous simplifications about world politics while justifying the potentially catastrophic militarization of the European continent and other regions. The practical critical geopolitics of the European peace and environmental movements opposed the Manichean reasoning of both East and West, and the militarization of the planet it made possible.²

Since the end of the Cold War, the irredeemable complexity that critical geopolitics always asserted but orthodox geopolitics tried to repress has become even more undeniable. The contemporary geopolitical condition exceeds the 'either-or' reasoning of orthodox geopolitics, with its proclivity for us/them, inside/outside, domestic/foreign, near/far binaries and its reliance on mythic binaries from the geopolitical tradition like the heartland/rimland, land power/sea power and East/West. The old conceptual maps of geopolitics do not work in a world of speeding flows, instantaneous information, and proliferating techno-scientific risks.

Nevertheless, the urge to arrest this teeming complexity of our age by

returning world politics to certain 'fundamental axes' or 'timeless truths' remains, merely the latest version of a long-standing countermodern impulse to (re)invent certainty in a world where the vertiginous 'creative destruction' of transnational capitalist modernity dominates.

Ironically, the vertigo of our contemporary condition has rendered critical geopolitics more relevant to policy making than ever before while shifting political winds have brought some former peace movement figures to political power (Vaclav Havel in the Czech Republic and Joschka Fischer in Germany, for example). Critical geopolitics has long taken the dynamics of globalization, informationalization and 'risk society' seriously, recognizing that a new modernity of 'and' (ambivalence, multiplicity, simultaneity, globality, uncertainty, formlessness and borderlessness) is exploding in our inherited modernity of 'either-or' (calculability, singularity, linearity, nationality, certainty, dimensionality and [b]orders).³ Like orthodox geopolitics, critical geopolitics is both a politically minded practice and a geopolitics, an explicitly political account of the contemporary geopolitical condition that seeks to influence politics. Unlike orthodox geopolitics, critical geopolitics has a much richer understanding of the problematic of 'geopolitics' and a better conceptual grasp, I wish to argue, of the problems facing states in conditions of advanced modernity.

This is a brief introduction to critical geopolitics. As an approach, critical geopolitics begins by arguing that 'geopolitics' is a much broader and more complex problematic than is acknowledged in orthodox understandings of the concept. To claim that geopolitics is the study of the influence of 'geography' on the practice of foreign policy by states is not to specify a narrow problematic for 'geography' has a multiplicity of different meanings. All states are territorial and all foreign policy strategizing and practice is conditioned by territoriality, shaped by geographical location, and informed by certain geographical understandings about the world. Geography is not a fixed substratum as some claim but an historical and social form of knowledge about the earth. To consult 'geography' historically was not to view raw physical landscape or 'nature' but to read a book. Though often forgotten today, 'geography' is not 'nature'. Rather, geography is an inescapably social and political *geo-graphing*, an 'earth writing'. It is a cultural and political writing of meanings about the world.⁴ Similarly, geopolitics is a writing of the geographical meanings and politics of states.

For heuristic research purposes, critical geopolitics divides geopolitics into formal, practical, popular and structural geopolitics (see Table 1, p.111). Formal geopolitics refers to what is usually considered 'geopolitical

thought' or 'the geopolitical tradition'. It is a problematic of intellectuals, institutions and the forces shaping geopolitical thought in particular places and contexts. Practical geopolitics is concerned with the geographical politics involved in the everyday practice of foreign policy. It addresses how common geographical understandings and perceptions enframe foreign policy conceptualization and decision making. A good recent example of this is how the geographical notion of 'the Balkans' helped condition how US foreign policy-makers approached, conceptualized and responded to the Bosnian Civil War, with damaging results for the region and for European security. Popular geopolitics refers to the geographical politics created and debated by the various media-shaping popular culture. It addresses the social construction and perpetuation of certain collective national and transnational understandings of places and peoples beyond one's own borders, what Dijkink refers to as 'national identity and geopolitical visions'.⁵ Finally, structural geopolitics involves the study of the structural processes and tendencies that condition how all states practice foreign policy. Today, these processes include, as we have noted, globalization, informationalization and the proliferating risks unleashed by the successes of our techno-scientific civilization across the earth.

Combining practical and popular geopolitics, I will briefly discuss, first, how critical geopolitics has developed a revisionist historiography of certain prominent geopolitical figures and the 'geopolitical tradition', second, its critical analysis of practical and popular geopolitical reasoning in foreign policy and, third, its analysis of the contemporary geopolitical condition.

FORMAL GEOPOLITICS: DECONSTRUCTING THE GEOPOLITICAL TRADITION

The notion of 'the geopolitical tradition' is a somewhat arbitrary construct that has varied historical origins, central figures and key debates depending upon the definition and practical understanding of 'geopolitics'. To most strategists, geopolitics is a twentieth century tradition of thinking about statecraft that begins with Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred Mahan, Rudolf Kjellen and Halford Mackinder, develops in the interwar period with Karl Haushofer's German *Geopolitik* and Nicholas Spykman's 'rimland' theories, and finds expression today in the writings of contemporary figures like Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁶ This 'great man' specification of the tradition is idealist in its concentration on 'geopolitical

TABLE 1
THE TYPES OF GEOPOLITICS STUDIED BY CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

Type of Geopolitics	Object of Investigation	Problematic	Research Example
Formal Geopolitics	Geopolitical thought and the geopolitical tradition	Intellectuals, institutions and their political and cultural context	Halford Mackinder, his geopolitical theories and imperialist context
Practical Geopolitics	The everyday practice of statecraft	Practical geopolitical reasoning in foreign policy conceptualization	'Balkanism' and its influence over US foreign policy towards Bosnia
Popular Geopolitics	Popular culture, mass media, and geographical understandings	National identity and the construction of images of other peoples and places.	The role of mass media in projecting images of Bosnia into Western livingrooms
Structural Geopolitics	The contemporary geopolitical condition	Global processes, tendencies and contradictions	How globalization, informationalization and risk society condition/transform geopolitical practices

thought' at the expense of geopolitical practice and practitioners (though the latter two were both). It also tends to be Eurocentric, neglecting Russian and Japanese geopolitical thought. Most importantly, it tends to elide fundamental questions concerning the specification of 'geopolitics' and the relationship of geopoliticians as intellectuals of statecraft to the power relationships characterizing their state, its national culture and its political economy.

While problematizing constructions of 'the geopolitical tradition', critical geopolitics nevertheless engages the intellectuals, institutions and texts of this tradition and its histories. In very broad terms, critical geopolitics seeks to contextualize geopolitical figures and unravel the textual strategies they use in their writings. It argues that orthodox geopolitical utilizations of classic geopolitical figures often neglect the context within which they lived, ignore the incoherences in their works, and ironically utilize their arguments to close off any openness to geographical difference. Critical geopolitics, in other words, seeks to recover the geography and geopolitics of 'geopolitical thought' while opposing any glib celebration of the so-called 'timeless insights' of certain geopolitical masters.

This approach is evident in a 'revisionist' literature on Sir Halford Mackinder, a widely celebrated 'founding father' of geopolitics (despite the

fact that he never used the term in his writings and personally disliked it).⁷ The Mackinder that appears in many orthodox accounts of geopolitics is a cardboard figure who is decontextualized from his imperialist context, defined by only a few texts and, in even cruder versions, by his sloganized version of strategy ('who controls...' etc). The 'real' Mackinder is more complex and also more mundane, an ultimately minor figure in the history of strategic thinking. Halford Mackinder's life and work was conditioned by the structural geopolitics of British imperial decline. Mackinder's 'liberal imperialist' ideology was at attempt to modernize the organization and idea of the British Empire.⁸ As an imperialist thinker and subsequent member of parliament, he stood for 'national efficiency' but the 'nation' he imagined was a nation of white male British gentlemen that were to be efficient in exploiting Britain's vast imperial possessions, maintaining white Anglo-Saxon supremacy, and subjugating the 'lesser races' and regions of the Empire. He envisioned the discipline of Geography as part of his overarching project of modernizing the British Empire. Geography was a discipline that should be used to teach British schoolchildren to 'think imperially'.⁹ The techniques he sought to establish at its core, visualization, mapping and drawing, sparse description, were meant as practical skills for the 'man of action', the merchant, colonial administrator, and statesman.¹⁰ The discipline of Geography as a whole, for Mackinder, was geopolitics.

The bulk of Mackinder's writings were devoted to geographical education. Mackinder's celebrated 'geopolitical texts' and his other writings are marked by the assumption that seeing is a naturalistic and objective activity. In asserting the innocence of 'visualization', Mackinder was merely naturalizing the political and ideological assumptions of his own culture and ideology. Mackinder's texts are marked by a blindspot that tries to deny interpretative activity while nevertheless relying upon it.¹¹

Furthermore, the geopolitical 'insight' of these texts is vastly overrated. The 1904 'Geographical Pivot of History' address is remarkable in its neglect of the single most important power of the coming twentieth century, the United States, and the single most significant time-space compressing technology, the airplane. His geopolitical thesis about sea power, land power and transportation technology is historically simplistic, geographically determinist, and technologically unidimensional.¹² Mackinder's 1919 text *Democratic Ideals and Reality* is significant less for 'geopolitical insight' than as an illustration of the bizarre nature of Mackinder's organic conservatism and countermodern fantasies.

Mackinder's strategic ideas had understandably little influence over British foreign policy at the time and might well have sunk into obscurity if

it were not for the historical accident of their 're-discovery' during World War II amid sensationalist and ill-informed media speculation about Karl Haushofer and German *Geopolitik*.

To understand the appeal of formal geopolitics to certain intellectuals, institutions and would be strategists, one has to appreciate the mythic qualities of geopolitics. Geopolitics is mythic because it promises uncanny clarity and insight in a complex world. It actively closes down an openness to the geographical diversity of the world and represses questioning and difference. The plurality of the world is reduced to certain 'transcendent truths' about strategy. Geopolitics is a narrow instrumental form of reason that is also a form of faith, a belief that there is a secret substratum and/or a permanent set of conflicts and interests that accounts for the course of world politics. It is fetishistically concerned with 'insight', and 'prophecy'.

Formal geopolitics appeals to those who yearn for the apparent certitude of 'timeless truths'. Historically, it is produced by and appeals to right wing countermoderns because it imposes a constructed certitude upon the unruly complexity of world politics, uncovering transcendent struggles between seemingly permanent opposites ('land power' versus 'sea power', 'oceanic' versus 'continental', 'East' versus 'West') and folding geographical difference into depluralized geopolitical categories like 'heartland', 'rimland', 'shatterbelt', and the like. Foreign policy complexity becomes simple(minded) strategic gaming.¹³

Such formal geopolitical reasoning is anti-geographical in its conceptualization and representation of the world. It is also a flawed foundation upon which to construct a foreign policy that needs to be sensitive to the particularity and diversity of the world's states, and to global processes and challenges that transcend state-centric reasoning.

PRACTICAL AND POPULAR GEOPOLITICS: GEOPOLITICAL REASONING IN THE PRACTICE OF STATECRAFT

Formal geopolitical reasoning is worth distinguishing from the practical geopolitical reasoning foreign policy decision-makers utilize in the everyday conduct of statecraft. In contrast to the formalized theories and grand strategic visions of geopolitical intellectuals, foreign policy decision-makers use practical and pragmatic geopolitical reasoning whenever they try to make spatial sense of the world, implicitly utilizing inherited forms of geographical knowledge to enframe particular questions and tacitly deploying cultural geographic discourses to explain certain dramas and

events. Practical geopolitical reasoning is ordinary and informal everyday discourse. It is taught in educational establishments, part of the socialization of individuals into certain 'national' identities and geographical/historical consciousnesses.¹⁴ Widely disseminated by the media in popular political culture, it has the significant quality of being unremarkable and can be described as 'common sense' geopolitics. It is also, in certain instances, an ethnocentric, stereotypical and formulaic form of knowledge about the world that produces bad foreign policy conceptualizations and practices. Common sense geopolitics does not necessarily make good sense geopolitics.

The power and significance of practical geopolitical reasoning can be illustrated by considering the power of 'Balkanism' in conditioning American foreign policy ambivalence towards the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War. The section of the ABC News website devoted to the Balkans begins with the following observation:

There are countless explanations for the volatility of the 'Balkan Powderkeg'. Historians variously blame disputes over resources, ancient hatreds or meddling by Great Powers intent on keeping the region unstable. But geography is also a powerful clue: Lying south of the Danube river, the Balkans region, like Afghanistan, is composed of scarce fertile valleys, separated by high mountains that fragment the area's ethnic groups, even though many have similar languages and origins.¹⁵

This description is part of the discourse of 'Balkanism' that helped define the Bosnian war in the American popular imagination. In this discourse, 'history' and 'geography' serve as *deus ex machina* explanations for the war. The Bosnian war happened because it was in 'the Balkans'. It was a product of 'ancient hatreds'. Geography helped make conflict inevitable. In her study of Balkanist discourse, Maria Todorova approaches 'the Balkans' in a manner inspired by Edward Said's approach to 'the Orient', that is as an historical geographical construct that reveals as much about the geopolitical consciousness of 'the West' as it does about the region it purports to describe.¹⁶ Once a synonym for the mountain Haemus, the signifier 'Balkan' became a designator of the vast region between the Bay of Venice and the Black Sea in the construction 'Balkan peninsula', first used by the German geographer August Zeune in 1808 and subsequently by Robert Walsh, a British traveler in 1827. The reason for the inflation of the signifier seems to have been the persistence of an ancient Greek belief that Haemus was a majestic mountain chain linking the Adriatic to the Black

Sea.¹⁷ The belief was erroneous but the term entered the vocabulary of travelers and scholars nevertheless though few had a precise idea of its exact meaning.

The transition of 'the Balkan peninsula' to 'the Balkans' and the remarkable emergence of the geographical category as a verb (to 'balkanize') was a consequence of the slow decline of the Ottoman Empire in the region and the violence of the Balkan wars and World War I. For most of the nineteenth century Todorova argues that 'there was no common Western stereotype of the Balkans', not because there were no common stereotypes but because 'there was no common West'.¹⁸ The Balkan Wars and World War I, however, crystallized a dominant and thoroughly negative image of the region. The Balkans became an abstract symbol of the violence and instability that supposedly is a consequence of the mixture of heterogeneous nationalities in one region. Various discourses stressed racial and/or civilizational explanations for the ferocity and brutality of the violence. Discourses employing the concepts of 'southern Slavs', 'racial hybridity' and 'primitivism' abounded as did geographically determinist notions about the 'blood feuds' of mountainous peoples. 'The complex ethnic mixture was held responsible for the instability and disorder of the peninsula, which was diagnosed as afflicted by 'the handicap of heterogeneity'.¹⁹

In dominant Balkanist discourses, the Balkans were a location on the edge of Europe, territorially within Europe but not part of modern European space and time. The region was a homeland of essential and primitive nationalist passion, a liminal zone where European civilization ended and an 'other' non-European zone began. None of these discourses adequately described the political complexities of southeastern Europe and the key role of the geopolitical strategies of the great powers in fermenting violence in the region for their own ends. The Balkans served as a projection zone for European powers, a region which enabled them to see themselves as modern and advanced while they displaced their own nationalism and violence upon the region. As an 'other' to Europe, 'the Balkans' were ironically quintessentially European.

After World War II, the Balkan region was generally perceived as part of an 'Eastern Europe' defined by Communist Party domination and control. Elements within the Yugoslav state sought to overcome the historical legacy of 'the Balkans' by constructing a supra-ethnic civil nationalist identity 'Yugoslavian'. Flawed as it was by reliance on Tito's personality, Communist myth, and a rotational system of governance that ironically perpetuated ethnic identities, the Yugoslavian federal state was an

historic effort to reject the myth of 'the Balkans'. Geography would not be historical destiny. An alternative universe of belonging and identity could be constructed. When the structures of Communist power came crumbling down in 'Eastern Europe' and this previously undifferentiated bloc was given the freedom to geographically differentiate itself, the key questions in Yugoslavia were whether the identity 'Yugoslavian' could survive the collapsed legitimacy of Communism or whether the federal state would succumb to 'Balkanization'.

The notion of 'southeast Europe' was always an alternative geographical identity for the Balkan region ever since it was first proposed in the late nineteenth century. Originally proposed as a neutral, non-political and non-ideological geographic designation, the term became associated with the geopolitical vision of the Nazis in the 1930s.²⁰ Yet the term was never essentially Nazi for it emerged independently in other linguistic traditions at the time. Used interchangeably with the classification 'the Balkans' ever since World War II, the term 'southeastern Europe' is nevertheless not without political and symbolic significance. Unlike 'the Balkans', the designation firmly and unambiguously locates the region within 'Europe' and thus within the same geographical and moral universe of 'European civilization'. Read as part of 'the Balkans', Bosnia is easily designated as beyond the West's universe of responsibility, as being located in a non-European zone of marginal strategic significance. Read as part of 'southeastern Europe', it is imaginatively closer to 'the West', part of 'our' domain of strategic responsibility. Securing its stability, consequently, was a much more urgent and pressing priority because it is part of 'Europe', part of 'us' as opposed to 'them'.

From a critical geopolitics standpoint what is important is the socially constructed nature of the categories of 'the Balkans' and 'Europe' and the power relations involved in their deployment and utilization as frameworks for understanding the Bosnian War. One can argue that the ambivalent positionality of Bosnia between the discourses of 'southeast Europe' and 'the Balkans' in the Western geo-political imagination helps accounts for the West's failure to intervene decisively to end the war until the summer of 1995. Within many European states, particularly those geographically close to and familiar with the former Yugoslavia, the discourse of 'southeast Europe' had greater resonance than it had within the United States where, with a political culture with little genuine geographical knowledge of the region, the imaginative geography of 'the Balkans' tended to be more dominant.

Discourses that persistently referred to the 'ancient origins' of the

Balkan war or the 'thousand year old hatreds' that characterized the region served to enframe the Bosnian War within Balkanist discourse. The genocide in Bosnia was *balkanized*, that is made meaningful within the terms of a flawed stereotype of the region and its history. This enabled certain policy analysts, most notably President George Bush, Secretary of State James Baker and General Colin Powell, to view the parties in the war as equivalent and to designate the whole region as a potential 'quagmire' for the United States rather than as a vital region of the European continent that required stabilization by NATO.²¹ US foreign policy and NATO credibility suffered for four years because of the persistence of the flawed discourse of 'Balkanism', a hegemonic order of 'common sense' geopolitics that made the development of 'good sense' geopolitics more difficult.

Critical geopolitics is relevant to policy making in that it can help deconstruct the persistence of such stereotypical geopolitical conceptions and notions in popular and political culture. With its sensitivity to geographical difference and its critique of ethnocentrism, it forces strategic thinking to acknowledge the power of ethnocentric cultural constructs in our perception of places and the dramas occurring within them. Critical geopolitics is also cognizant of how technologies of time-space compression like global media networks transforms the strategic value of places in the global information age. Ostensibly marginal geopolitical locations like Bosnia can become symbolically strategic after a while if images of genocide and chaos are persistently projected from the region by Western television networks and media outlets. As I have argued elsewhere, this is precisely what happened with Bosnia and, I would add, is currently happening with Kosovo.²²

STRUCTURAL GEOPOLITICS: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL CONDITION.

Even before the end of the Cold War, certain profound changes in the international system were underway that were transforming the spatiality and temporality of world politics. Globalization is the name given to a variety of different cultural and economic tendencies which are binding the world's largest economies closer together and dissolving the ability of any single state to full control and manage its own economic destiny.²³ Globalization is most pronounced in financial markets and the 'creative destruction' unleashed by unregulated transnational finance has created considerable volatility and instability in the international system.

Interestingly, the rhetoric of Cold War geopolitics is re-appearing with a new financial inflection as 'emerging market' become 'dominoes' tottering on the brink of failure and in need of financial bailouts by overstretched and underfunded regulatory institutions. The crises of globalization are initially financial but these can quickly become geopolitical and geo-strategic.

Facilitating the often dizzying pace at which these crises can develop is a second structural process, informationalization. Like globalization, this too is a buzz word for a multiple of related tendencies: the transformation of manufacturing and the service sector by information technologies, the creation of virtual built environments, the development of global telecommunication systems, and the cultural experience of media saturation and information overload. But it too has transformed the spatiality and temporality of world politics. In a world where an infosphere of codes, flows and networks is the vital operational system for the technosphere of cities, states, economies and megamachinic bureaucracies, notions of 'here' and 'there', 'us' and 'them', 'domestic' and 'foreign', 'close' and 'far' are not what they used to be. Space appears to be displaced by pace while telemetricity appears more significant than territoriality. Geopolitics is becoming postmodern.²⁴

A third structural transformation already unleashed well before the end of the Cold War was the qualitatively new world of risks created by the successes of advanced techno-scientific civilization. Since the explosion of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II, it has been evident that humanity was capable of inventing technologies that could radically alter the conditions of human life on the planet. The development of nuclear power, the widespread use of chemicals in all aspects of life after the war, and the more recent breakthroughs in genetic engineering have created a qualitatively new universe of risks for human kind. Environmental poisoning, ozone depletion and global warming are part of modernity's increasingly evident 'side effects' and boomerang processes. Informationalization has also created new dependencies and vulnerabilities, as the Y2K problem, communications mishaps, and network system crashes demonstrate.

These risks are diffuse and difficult to detect, risks that pervade everyday life in the advanced modern world. Unlike the 'natural' risks of the past, the risks of advanced techno-scientific civilization are manufactured and have potentially catastrophic consequences. Though rarely considered, many of these consequences are beyond conventional rational calculations, beyond the local and the personal, beyond even human lifetimes and the human species. In addition, catastrophic accidents,

symbolized most dramatically by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986, are now not only possible but inevitable, predictable 'unanticipated consequences', for even the most unlikely event will occur in the long run.

For sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, industrial modernity has been so successful that it has graduated to a new modernity, a reflexive modernity of 'risk society'.²⁵ Industrial society is a victim of its own success; 'high-powered industrial dynamism is skidding into a new society without a bang of a revolution, bypassing political debates and decisions in parliaments and governments'.²⁶ This new society is a society of generalized and globalized techno-scientific risks. Ignored or folded into the overarching East-West divide by the strategic community in the past, the full dimensions of this new global risk condition are only now being grasped by this community as it confronts problems of post-Cold War nuclear proliferation, chemical weapons production, bioterrorism and information warfare.²⁷

Globalization, informationalization and proliferating techno-scientific risks have transformed the dimensionality and territoriality of geopolitics at the end of the twentieth century. Some have even suggested this marks 'the end of geopolitics' but such arguments have a narrow Cold War conception of geopolitics.²⁸ What can be said is that the problematic of 'national security' has itself become globalized, informationalized and, I would argue, is itself a threat to us if conceptualized in countermorden rather than reflexive ways. Adequately addressing the various dimensions, challenges and dangers of our contemporary geopolitical condition is not possible here, so I can do no more than briefly note three critical geopolitical arguments about this condition.

The first argument is that the problematic of 'national security' in the contemporary era is now global. While regional and state-centered threats are still significant security concerns, the most pressing security challenges, from terrorism to international organized crime and proliferating weapons of mass destruction, are now 'deterritorialized' and global. Most within the Western security community now recognize this and have a strong appreciation of the value of coordinated international diplomatic efforts through diplomacy, international assistance, arms control, and non-proliferation initiatives to shape the international geopolitical environment. However, two tendencies tend to undermine such efforts, the first a unilateralist and neo-isolationist reflex in states (like the US) which disparages international cooperative initiatives, the second an unwillingness on the part of Western states, alliances and economies to reflexively examine how they themselves may be contributing to global insecurity with

their own narrow techno-scientific rationality, neoliberal nostrums, informational networks, profligate consumption, and export of deadly weapons and toxins.

This relates to the second argument made by critical geopolitics: that the institutions of Western modernity are experiencing a 'victory crisis'. Beck suggests that 'more and more often we find ourselves in situations which the prevailing institutions and concepts of politics can neither grasp nor adequately respond to'.²⁹ He describes an ironic legitimization crisis for the political institutions of the West at the end of the Cold War, as one world of risks passes and the new has not yet been fully grasped.³⁰ The institutions experiencing a 'victory crisis' include the free market, the welfare state, multiparty democracy, national sovereignty, and 'national security' bureaucracies. This 'victory crisis' is one of capability and rationality. Industrial society institutions cannot handle, manage and respond to the problems of risk society; our regulatory institutions cannot keep up with the global plurality of risks proliferating as we enter the second millennium. Furthermore their calculus of risk is suspect. Potentially catastrophic hazards have become normalized. Acceptable risks have become accepted risks. 'The inherent pluralization of risks ... calls the rationality of risk calculation into question'.³¹

This 'victory crisis' is also one of lost historical foundations, as particularly 'national security' institutions designed to fight one type of threat now operate in a world where that threat has disappeared. Cold War era security institutions have a problematic existence in a world of transnational threats and global dangers. They promise security against a territorial threat but are struggling to respond to 'non-traditional' threats that often cannot be seen and have no agreed territorial source. Finally, the 'victory crisis' is one of contradiction. The new universe of global risks faced by 'national security' institutions are products of the success of these very institutions. Some of the most immediate threats now faced by the West, for example the threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the terrorism of fundamentalists based in Afghanistan, are threats the West had a hand in producing itself within its universities, its transnational chemical companies, its biological research labs and its intelligence services (the bases bombed by the US in August 1998 were originally established by the CIA to train Afghans to fight the Soviet invasion of their country). Contemporary geopolitics is characterized by many 'boomerang effects' with the institutions that are supposedly producing 'security' actually producing the opposite.³²

The policy implications of this disjuncture between unreflexive Cold War institutions and the contemporary post-Cold War era of global risk

society is the need for radical institutional reforms to create global systems of regulation and governance. Feeble movement in this direction has begun with the G7 attempt to overhaul the institutions regulating the global financial system. More radical structural reforms are needed to, among other things, re-cast NATO as a broad European security institution (with a 'no first use' nuclear policy), overhaul the United Nations Security Council, strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons and the Biological Weapons Conventions, and establish a permanent United Nations rapid reaction force.

The difficult politics of getting these reforms enacted brings us to the third argument made by critical geopolitics about the contemporary geopolitical condition: the dangers of countermodernity. Countermodernity is a persistent feature of modernity, a thoroughly modern restraining twin of the 'creative destruction' unleashed by modernization. The essence of countermodernity is its attempt to manage the chaos and upheaval caused by modernization. It does so by resorting to myth and violence, by inventing mythic traditions and communal fundamentalisms while drawing borders and organizing violence against those it designates as 'outsiders' to its naturalized community and 'chaotic' elements in its aesthetic visions of society. Finding expression in resurgent nationalism, religious fundamentalism and assertive unilateralism in the contemporary era, countermodernity is an aggressive creed of simplification, a political effort to discipline the chaos and uncertainties of living in a global world with 'timeless truths' and 'imagined essences'.

Historically, orthodox geopolitical discourse gave voice to such countermodern tendencies and inclinations. Today, this danger persists, particularly as institutions and intellectuals used to thinking in 'either-or' terms confront the uncertainties and unruliness of 'and'. As a largely conservative community, some within the 'national security' establishment persist in thinking about the problems of risk society using conceptual understandings wedded to simple modernization and Cold War rhetoric and rationality. They attempt to reduce the irredeemably global problems of risk society to an 'either-or' logic and represent risks as enemies, draw boundaries against this enemy, and then apply instrumental rationality to 'solve' the threat they pose.

One can find evidence of this countermodern tendency in certain contemporary geopolitical crises where global threats are territorialized as threats from 'rogue states'.³³ The problem of weapons of mass destruction, for example, becomes the problem of Saddam Hussein and what to do about Iraq. The problem of ballistic missiles becomes the problem of Iran, Iraq,

North Korea and China. Terrorism becomes the problem of 'rogue states' like Sudan and Afghanistan. Indeed, the Clinton administration's August 1998 cruise missile attacks against Sudan and Afghanistan illustrate the impulse to discipline 'and' by 'either-or' thinking. A formless transnational terrorist attack on US embassies in Africa demanded a resolute response. A weakened President and his inner circle decide, with debatable intelligence information, that a series of sites, former CIA bases in Afghanistan, a pharmaceutical plant outside Khartoum, are terrorist bases and facilities that present 'an immanent threat to the national security of the United States'.³⁴ Eighty cruise missiles are then sent to demonstrate 'a resolute response to international terrorism'. The world of 'and' is resimplified by the 'either-or' of state violence. The December 1998 bombing of Iraq is another example. The absurdity of bombing to stop certain states developing weapons of mass destruction illustrates the contemporary geopolitical condition, a world where either/or institutions are desperately trying to grapple with the risks and dangers of 'and'.

None of this is to suggest that so-called 'rogue states' are not threats that sometimes require resolute international response. Rather, it is to challenge the ways in which the threat is represented as a territorial threat 'out there' from 'non-Western others' rather than as a pervasive threat from our very own techno-scientific modernity. Behind the territorializing of global risks in 'rogue states' is a broader geopolitical question that is central to geopolitics today and likely to remain so into the twenty-first century: how does the West respond to the *inevitable* diffusion of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, techno-scientific capabilities pioneered by superpower military-industrial complexes, to developing states, to rogue states and even to failing states? Put differently, how is the Enlightenment West going to deal with the diffusion of its most deadly weapons, substances and delivery vehicles to the non-West? Whether the West responds by acknowledging that the problem is techno-scientific modernity as a whole – acknowledging that 'we (too) are the enemy', that 'our' laboratories, 'our' corporations and 'our' scientists first developed most of the weapons that now threaten us – or whether it responds by territorializing logics that view the problem as 'out there' with 'them' is a crucial question.

No state or national security complex has a monopoly on rationality and good sense. Acknowledging this and developing a critique of our own bureaucracies and techno-scientific rationality is part of the politics of critical geopolitics. This politics is conservative in that it opposes the 'creative destruction' of capitalist modernization and unfettered techno-scientific 'progress' for its own sake in the name of conserving human

initiative, control and environmental quality. It is radical in that it critiques the persistence of our ethnocentric assumptions, the narrowness of our rationality (for it is not rational enough), the failings of our institutions, and the false solutions of our countermorden myths. The challenge of our contemporary geopolitical condition is to live with the ambivalence of global risk society and to strive for the construction of security at a global level. Whether this is possible in a world of clashing modernities, contradictory rationalities, competing states and dislocating change remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. Critical geopolitics varies from political economy analyses of world politics to largely textual analyses of foreign policy reasoning, inspired by Foucaultian discourse theory and Derridean deconstruction. For the former see John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London: Routledge 1995) and John Agnew, *Geopolitics: The Political of Writing Global Political Space* (London: Routledge 1996). See also the special issues on 'Critical Geopolitics' in the journals *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12/5 (1994) and *Political Geography* 15/6/7 (1996). Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby (eds.) *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 1998) and idem and Paul Routledge (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader* (ibid. 1998).
2. See E.P. Thompson, *The Heavy Dancers* (NY: Pantheon 1985) and Mary Kaldor, *The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict* (Cambridge: Blackwell 1990).
3. This contrast between 'either-or' and 'and' was first developed by Wacziarg Kandinsky in a 1977 essay. It is developed further in the works of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. See his *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage 1992); *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge: Polity 1995); *The Reinvention of Politics* (ibid. 1997) and *Democracy Without Enemies* (Oxford: Blackwell 1998).
4. See Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994).
5. Gertjan Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions* (London: Routledge 1996). On popular geopolitics see Joanne Sharp, 'Hegemony, popular culture and geopolitics: the *Readers Digest* and the construction of danger', *Political Geography* 12 (1993) pp.491–503.
6. For a discussion of these figures see John O'Loughlin (ed.) *The Dictionary of Geopolitics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood 1994). For a consideration of traditions of geopolitics see Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson (eds.) *Geopolitical Traditions: Critical Histories of a Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London: Routledge 2000).
7. See, for example, Gerry Kearns, 'The imperial subject: geography and travel in the work of Mary Kingsley and Halford Mackinder', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* 22 (1997) pp.450–72 and James Ryan, 'Visualizing imperial geography: Halford Mackinder and the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, 1902–11', *Ecumene* 1 (1994) pp.157–76.
8. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Putting Mackinder in his place: Material transformations and myth', *Political Geography* 11 (1992) pp.100–18.
9. Halford Mackinder, 'On thinking imperially', in M.E. Sadler (ed.), *Lectures on Empire* (London: privately published 1907).
10. Marked not only by racial and imperialist discourses, geopolitics is also uncritically patriarchal in its assumptions, reasoning and heroic style. Geopolitics is a deeply masculinist practice that appeals to heroic public subjectivities.
11. This point is developed at length in Ch.3 of *Critical Geopolitics*. (note 1).
12. This argument is developed in *Geopolitics Reader* (note 1) pp.15–18.
13. For a contemporary example see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (NY: Basic

Books 1997), a book that manages to avoid some of the most pressing problematics of our time: globalization, informationalization, corruption, and deteriorialized threats.

14. For an excellent study of geopolitical consciousness see Anssi Paasi, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border* (Chichester, John Wiley 1996).
15. See 'A Beginners Guide to the Balkans', ABCNews, at http://www.abcnews.com/sections/world/balkans_content/ [available Nov. 1998].
16. Maria Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* (NY: OUP 1997); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage 1979).
17. *Ibid.* p.25.
18. *Ibid.* p.115.
19. *Ibid.* p.128.
20. *Ibid.* pp.27–8.
21. For a discussion of the 'quagmire' and the competing 'Holocaust' spatialization of the Bosnian War see Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (note 1) Ch.6.
22. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'A Strategic Sign: The Geopolitical Significance of Bosnia in U.S. Foreign Policy', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 17 forthcoming.
23. The extent and significance of globalization is deeply contested. For alternative views see Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations* (NY: Knopf 1991) and Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question* (Cambridge: Polity 1996). On the geographical dimensions of globalization see Kevin Cox (ed.) *Spaces of Globalization* (NY: Guilford 1997) and Andrew Herod, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, and Susan Roberts (eds.) *An Uneasy World? Globalization, Governance and Geography* (London: Routledge 1998).
24. For a discussion of our contemporary geopolitical condition as 'postmodern geopolitics' see Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Postmodern Geopolitics? The Modern Geopolitical Imagination and Beyond', in *Rethinking Geopolitics* (note 1) pp.16–38, and Timothy Luke and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Thinking Geopolitical Space: The Spatiality of War, Speed and Vision in the Work of Paul Virilio', in Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds.) *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge 2000).
25. See note 3 and Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford UP 1994).
26. Beck, *Reinvention of Politics* (note 3) p.26.
27. Richard Falkenrath, Robert Newman and Bradley Thayer, *America's Achilles Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1998); Leonard Cole, *The Eleventh Plague: The Politics of Biological and Chemical Warfare* (NY: W.H. Freeman 1996); John Arquilla, David F. Ronfeldt and Alvin Toffler (eds.) *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp. 1998); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Deterritorialized Threats and Global Dangers: Geopolitics, Risk Society and Reflexive Modernization', *Geopolitics* 10, special issue on 'Postmodernity, Territory and Boundaries' (1999) forthcoming.
28. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'At the End of Geopolitics? Reflections on a Pluralizing Problematic at the Century's End', *Alternatives: Social Transformation and Humane Governance* 22 (1997) pp.35–55.
29. Beck, *Reinvention of Politics* (note 3) p.7.
30. *Ibid.* pp.12–13.
31. *Ibid.* p.32.
32. The Pentagon is one of the largest polluters in the United States. The weapons produced in the name of 'national security' at US military facilities across the country, such as the Hanford nuclear reservation in Richland, Washington, Rocky Flats in Colorado, have left a permanent legacy of toxicity. Producing nuclear 'national security' has long generated generational community insecurity, a 'side effect' of Cold War geopolitics that will be around for centuries. Lake Karachay near the former Soviet Union's 'secret' weapons complex at Chelyabinsk has been described as 'the most polluted spot on earth'. See Tom Athanasiou, *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor* (Athens: U. of Georgia Press 1996) p.120.
33. Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws* (NY: Hill and Wang 1995).
34. On the ambiguous intelligence about the Khartoum plant see Seymour Hersh, 'The Guns of August', *The New Yorker*, 12 Oct. 1998.

Geopolitics: International Boundaries as Fighting Places

EWAN W. ANDERSON

The focus of geopolitics is upon the use of geography to illuminate politics and particularly political decision-making. Despite the increasing effects of globalization, the basic unit in the contemporary world political system is the state. It is an internationally recognized political and juridical entity which claims sovereignty over a specific area of land and possibly adjacent sea, the inhabitants of the area and the resources located therein. This area is delimited in the minds of individuals and groups owing allegiance to the state, in most cases on cartographic representations of the state and in some cases on the ground itself, by boundaries. Boundaries indicate the accepted territorial integrity of the state and the extent of government control. In the majority of cases boundaries are legally recognized by the states which share them and also by the international community.

However, partly at least as a result of the global geopolitical changes over the past decade, approximately one-quarter of the world's land boundaries can be classified as unstable. In addition, some two-thirds of the global maritime boundaries have yet to be settled.¹ Since the possession of agreed boundaries has a crucial bearing upon state security and is also of great political, economic and social significance, conflicts related to boundaries are likely to remain a key component of the international scene.

In the current global political system, the state is the highest level of political decision-making body. States have to agree to acquiesce in the decisions of supra-national bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). To be a member of such a super-national body therefore involves a certain loss of sovereignty. However, in contrast to the internal operation of a state, there is no set means of law enforcement. Sanctions or even political force may