

12

Post-Cold War Geopolitics: Contrasting Superpowers in a World of Global Dangers

Gearóid Ó Tuathail

It was just past midnight inside a secret bunker south of Moscow when the alarm went off. The bunker was the control center for a fleet of early warning satellites orbiting above the United States. A signal from one of the satellites indicated that Russia was under missile attack from the continental United States. Soon the electronic screens indicated five intercontinental ballistic missiles in the atmosphere rocketing their way to the Russian heartland. With only minutes to make a retaliatory strike, the lieutenant colonel in charge made a gut-level decision. He decided the early-warning signals were false and that no surprise American missile attack was underway. Fortunately for the millions of people living in the United States, Russia, and surrounding countries, he made the correct decision.

This incident is not fictional. It happened on September 26, 1983 at the height of a particularly tense period in US–Soviet relations, just weeks after the downing of a Korean Air Lines passenger jet by the Soviet Air Force. A subsequent investigation revealed that one of the Soviet satellites had mistaken the sun's reflection off the top of some clouds for hostile missile launches. The officer who made the gut-level decision was initially praised, then investigated for not following procedure, and finally allowed to continue working without recognition or reward until his retirement. He now lives, like most Russian pensioners, on meager and erratic payments from a once modern state that is now mired in poverty, corruption, and decay (Hoffman 1999b).

The Cold War era was a remarkably dangerous time in human history when two of the most powerful states on earth threatened each other with thousands of nuclear warheads. Ever since the development of atomic weapons by an enormous state-funded technoscientific project based in the United

States, the political leaders of one, then a few, and then more and more states have had the capacity to completely destroy rival states quickly and easily compared to the wars of the past. A 1-megaton nuclear warhead placed on a rocket could be delivered thousands of miles in a matter of minutes. Upon impact it would completely destroy 50 square miles of any major world city in seconds and poison the surrounding region with radioactivity for decades. Intercontinental ballistic missiles, silent nuclear submarines, and supersonic stealth bombers were all developed to help deliver this destructive capability to enemy states with speed, reliability, and certainty. The United States, the Soviet Union, and other states designed, built, and tested thousands of nuclear weapons of all shapes and sizes in the name of "national security." However, "national security" in the nuclear missile age really meant permanent national insecurity, for no amount of nuclear weapons could purchase protection and defense from other nuclear weapons. After Hiroshima, the world was living in a qualitatively new world of technoscientific terror. The best the two superpowers could do was to guarantee they could destroy each other if they ever attacked each other. Having the superpowers acknowledge this "balance-of-terror" was not easy, but they eventually conceded that nuclear weapons had deterrence value and little else. Behind the doctrine of deterrence was a grim condition called "mutually assured destruction," MAD for short.

What brought the superpower leaders to embrace deterrence in the 1970s were a number of military confrontations involving their allies that nearly degenerated into nuclear war. On three separate occasions in the 1960s – over the Berlin crisis of August 1961, the introduction of Soviet missiles into Cuba in October 1962, and in the Middle East in June 1967 – superpower confrontations brought each side perilously close to the brink of nuclear war despite the desire of both sides to avoid the catastrophe such a war would represent. That the superpowers did not stumble into a thermonuclear war was, in part, a product of luck. Reflecting decades later, US Secretary of State Robert McNamara noted that "we came within a hairbreadth of nuclear war without realizing it . . . It is no credit to us that we missed nuclear war – at least we had to be lucky as well as wise" (McNamara quoted in Schell 1998: 47). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as superpower relations degenerated once again, other geopolitical crises created the conditions for confrontations, miscalculations, and blunders. Fortunately, as in the 1960s, the world's geopolitical luck held and the danger of a thermonuclear exchange between the superpowers was averted. But it could easily have been different.

To many, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of communist rule in Russia signaled a new beginning in world affairs, an era of promise beyond the shadow of nuclear war. The world seems a much safer place with an absence of an overriding ideological confrontation between two heavily armed and hostile superpowers. This chapter takes a more skeptical view. The technoscientific terror born at the end of World War II and developed

during the Cold War persists in the post-Cold War era. Weapons of mass destruction and the infrastructures necessary to manufacture them – nuclear weapons complexes, biological and chemical weapons factories and facilities – continue to haunt world politics. As the twenty-first century begins, eight states possess approximately 32,000 nuclear bombs with 50,000 megatons of destructive energy. This global arsenal is equivalent to about 416,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs and is more than enough to destroy the world human beings have created on planet earth (Cirincione 2000: 2). The capability to build biological and chemical weapons, the poor state's atomic bomb, is known to many more states and, in a new development, to non-state actors also. After the Gulf War United Nations inspectors in Iraq, for example, discovered that Saddam Hussein's regime had assembled hundreds of weapons filled with VX and sarin nerve gas and two dozen other biological agents. The manufacture and subsequent release of sarin gas on the Tokyo subway by the Aum Shinrikyo cult revealed that states no longer have exclusive control over weapons of mass destruction. The suicide terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon demonstrate that even ordinary technologies, like jet airplanes loaded with fuel, can produce extraordinary death and destruction. The threat posed by weapons of mass destruction is one of the most immediate and pressing challenges to the common security of humanity in the twenty-first century. It is a threat that cannot be reduced to state-centric terms, to "us" versus "them." Rather, it is a threat embedded within the very technoscientific systems of production and destruction developed by the imperfectly modern superpowers and their allies since World War II. To understand this threat as a defining feature of the geopolitics of the post-Cold War world, we need first to discuss the general meaning of geopolitics and how geographers can study the subject in a critical manner. We then turn to consider the contrasting modernity of the superpowers today, to specifying the contemporary geopolitical condition more generally, and to briefly discussing the debate over the meaning of "national security" in the twenty-first century.

Geopolitics, Critical Geopolitics, and Geopolitical Discourses

Geopolitics is the study of the geographical dimensions of world politics, most especially the struggles for power by states with worldwide reach and power projection capabilities. As a form of knowledge, geopolitics has its origins in the late nineteenth century within the academic institutions and military academies of states that were or aspired to become "Great Powers." Geopolitics was a problem-solving form of discourse about interstate politics dedicated to serving the leaders of the state. It sought to educate state leaders about the struggle for power in world affairs and how to conduct statecraft and organize military resources to secure more power and

influence for their state. In the twentieth century it developed more popular variants that strived to inform the state's population about the nature of world affairs, which states were the supposed enemies of "their state," and what types of threat these states posed to their welfare and survival. As the century progressed, the term "geopolitics" gradually came to define the knowledge used by leaders and ordinary citizens to make sense of the game of power politics across the world (Sharp 2000). What is significant about geopolitics, above all, is that it is the form of knowledge and reasoning favored by the most powerful forces in a state: coalitions of politicians, military institutions, defense contractors, research scientists, and others with a vested interest and commitment to a state-centric and Darwinian survival-of-the-strongest vision of world politics. Geopolitics is not a language of the poor but of the powerful.

The operation of this traditional form of geopolitics, which we will term "orthodox geopolitics," has been challenged in recent decades by an alternative approach to world affairs called critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics challenges the state-centrism and Darwinian philosophy of orthodox geopolitics. Instead of operating from the perspective of powerful institutions and groups within dominant states, it articulates the perspectives and arguments of a transnational coalition of peace movements, human rights activists, and environmental organizations. Critical geopolitics seeks to challenge how orthodox geopolitics presents the world as "us" and "them," and how it defines "national security threats" in terms of military threats from other states and outlaw groups. It rejects the ethnocentric and chauvinist geopolitics of "us versus them" in favor of a more complex vision of world politics characterized by states dominated by power structures and technological systems that threaten the conditions of habitation and survival on the planet as a whole. Critical geopolitics, in other words, rejects state-centric reasoning and questions the monopoly of the powerful over the definition of "national security" (Ó Tuathail 1996).

Critical geopolitics uses four distinct concepts to analyze the history of geopolitics:

- 1 Geopolitical world order, the distribution of power, and the configuration of alliances across the world political map. Geopolitical world orders are characterized by a hegemonic state and its allies, which are usually under challenge by an alliance of less powerful states.
- 2 Techno-territorial complexes, the assemblages of technologies of communication, transportation, and warfare that condition and shape world strategic space. In compressing space and time, techno-territorial complexes influence the relationship between defense and offense in warfare and help shape the practice of geopolitical power.
- 3 Geopolitical economy, the geopolitical order governing economic production, trade and consumption of goods across the world, and the geoeological consequences of this order.

Table 12.1 Three distinctive "geopolitical worlds."

Geopolitical "worlds"	Geopolitical world order	Techno-territorial complex	Geopolitical economy	Geopolitical discourse
Inter-imperialist rivalry, 1870–1945	Conflict between the "great powers" over their relative power and position across the globe.	The British imperial navy and the emergent naval and airpower complexes of other states. The electrical, telegraph, radio, telephone, and radar networks.	Competing forms of national capitalist modernization with an emphasis on self-sufficiency and obtaining protected markets. Pollution ignored.	Imperialist discourse represents world politics in terms of racial divisions and civilizational hierarchies, justifying the rule of the strong over the weak.
Cold War, 1945–91	Conflict between the superpowers over their spheres of influence, ideology, and relative power position across the globe.	The nuclear weapons complexes of the superpowers. The communications and entertainment networks of the West.	Dominated by a geopolitically organized form of liberal capitalist modernization in the West and Soviet-style socialist modernization in the Eastern bloc. More extensive and toxic forms of pollution ignored.	Cold War discourse represents world politics as a worldwide struggle between, in Western terms, a "free world" and a "totalitarian world." In Soviet terms, the struggle was between Western "imperialist states" and liberation under communism.
Post-Cold War, 1991 to present	Relative predominance of the United States and unpredictable challenges to its power, influence, and symbols across the globe. Persistent regional antagonisms.	The aging nuclear weapons complexes of the superpowers. The internet, wireless communication and pervasive computer-controlled infrastructures. The catastrophic potential of accidents and information system crashes.	Neoliberal globalization based on an ideological commitment to unregulated markets, privatization, and the virtues of advanced technological systems. Embedded corruption across large parts of the world. Pollution and toxicity too encroaching to fully ignore. Growing energy crises.	"Global dangers" discourse represents world politics as characterized by a range of borderlessness threats. Debates over which threats are the most pressing and how states should pursue "national security."

- 4 Geopolitical discourse, the rhetorical and symbolic forms of reasoning used by powerful coalitions within dominant states to explain world politics and justify the exercise of power by their own state. Geopolitical discourses are shifting cultural and political explanatory systems used by state leaders to give meaning to their actions and justify them in the eyes of the public.

Taken together these concepts help us delimit the contours of geopolitical power and conflict that have marked the twentieth century (Ó Tuathail, Dalby, and Routledge 1998). They help us specify the political geographic structures of “geopolitical worlds” as they have come together after a general war and subsequently developed until a new crisis or war changes the order of power. Over the last century and a quarter we can identify three distinctive “geopolitical worlds”: a world of imperialist rivalry between the “Great Powers” that produced two cataclysmic worldwide wars, a Cold War world of superpower rivalry and ideological competition across the world’s major geographic regions that fortunately ended relatively peacefully, and a contemporary post-Cold War world that is slowly being defined by the technoscientific dangers that characterize it (see table 12.1).

Giving definition and meaning to these worlds are the geopolitical discourses used by the hegemonic state and that used by the leading challenger to that state and its system of alliances. A number of generalizations can be made about these discourses. First, as already noted, these discourses are discourses championed by coalitions of powerful interest groups within the dominant state and across allied states. These coalitions are complex but they conventionally feature an “iron triangle” of conservative politicians, military institutions, and powerful corporations in a state. The conservative politicians normally articulate an exclusivist conception of “the nation” and celebrate its history as a history of “national exceptionalism” and greatness. Marginalized by this discourse are “minority groups” within the state. One clear example of this is the US state’s decision to test its nuclear weapons in the American desert on lands claimed and lived upon by native American nations. What was home to these groups was represented by the dominant white Euroamerican nation as “wasteland” and converted into the Nevada Test Site (Kuletz 1998). The US state subsequently conducted numerous atmospheric nuclear explosions upon this site, doing the same upon the homelands of marginalized Pacific islanders.

Second, these discourses seek to monopolize the definition and interpretation of the threats faced by the “nation-state.” Geopolitical discourses are discourses of danger that specify a parade of threats powerful interest groups consider important. This discourse defines the meaning of “national security” and, most importantly as far as defense contracting corporations are concerned, sets the agenda for the state spending necessary in order to address these threats. That this definition of “national security” is question-

able is evident from a consideration of the environmental legacy of the nuclear weapons complexes created by the superpowers. The largest polluter in the United States is the US state, most specifically the "national security" departments of Defense and Energy. The facilities created by the US state to manufacture nuclear weapons are some of the most toxic places on the North American continent; sites like the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state and Rocky Flats in Colorado (Hevly and Findlay 1998). In Russia the environmental legacy of weapons production across a network of ten closed nuclear cities is even worse. All locations suffer from dangerous levels of radioactive contamination. One location near the formerly secret city of Chelyabinsk-65 (now Ozersk) has been termed the most polluted spot on earth, for one can receive a fatal dose of radiation there in less than an hour (Athanasios 1996: 120). Producing "national security" by poisoning places with radioactivity that lasts tens of thousands of years, not to mention exposing workers and communities close to these facilities to deadly toxins and genetic damage, raises questions about just how "national security" is defined.

Third, geopolitical discourses are frequently simplified spatial visions of world affairs that organize the complex political struggles across the globe into abstract conceptual categories and geographic zones. During the Cold War, world politics was given meaning by Western geopoliticians by the claim that the Soviet Union was an inherently expansionist empire that sought to achieve world domination by spreading the creed of communism (Dalby 1992). Western geopolitics, as a consequence, became a somewhat paranoid discourse that saw a "worldwide communist conspiracy" everywhere it looked. In the 1980s, for example, the struggle of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress to end apartheid in South Africa, the fight of ordinary Filipinos against dictatorship, and the movement of Central American peasants for social justice were all interpreted by the Reagan administration as examples of "worldwide communism" rather than as the diverse place-specific struggles for justice that they were. Geopolitical discourses, in other words, are frequently conspiracy discourses in which self-generated anxieties are projected onto externalized foreign others and rendered as colossal threats organized on a worldwide scale to the very existence and "way of life" of the virtuous "nation." A characteristic of the operation of Nazi and Stalinist discourses, this form of reasoning was also found in the West on occasions of crisis during the Cold War. In the last decade new forms of geopolitical reasoning have emerged around scenarios of civilizational clashes and threats from global terrorist networks (Huntington 1998; Weaver 2000). The catastrophic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have generated a strongly moral and religious geopolitical discourse that envisions a permanent war between "virtuous civilized states" and "barbarian networks of global terrorists" and those that harbor them. The failed state of Afghanistan, however, is a poor and absurd substitute for the USSR's Cold War role as the territorial home of "evil."

The Hyperpower versus the Demodernizing Power

Perhaps the most striking feature of the post-Cold War era is the contrasting contemporary condition of the Cold War superpowers. During the Clinton years the United States enjoyed the longest economic expansion in the state's history. Technological developments opened up new domains of economic activity, like wireless communication and e-business. The stockmarket reached record highs while unemployment reached record lows. The United States was also the unquestioned military power in the world, the "sole remaining superpower" according to some, though others, like the French Foreign Minister, found the term "superpower" inadequate and spoke instead of the "hyperpower" of the United States. Though US military spending declined from its Cold War highs in the mid-1990s, it still dwarfs that of the rest of the world. Today US military spending is on the rise again. The \$305.4 billion US military budget request for 2001, for example, is more than five times the size of the current Russian military budget, the second largest military spender.¹ It is more than twenty-two times as large as the combined spending of the seven countries traditionally identified by the Pentagon as "rogue states" (Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria) (Center for Defense Information 2000). Remarkably, despite this overwhelming military superiority and lack of a clearly defined territorial state enemy, the United States is committed to continue increasing its levels of military spending well into the twenty-first century. The reasons for this are largely domestic and political, with little relation to any realistic assessment of the external threats it faces. The US military-industrial complex has been reluctant to adjust to the end of the Cold War. Unlike Russia, where economic crisis has forced painful change, the US military bureaucracy has been remarkably successful in resisting any serious reorganization of its structure, mission, and force. Some force reforms are now underway but an entrenched "iron triangle" of military bureaucrats, defense contractors, and conservative politicians wields enormous power in determining the US defense budget. It is not unusual for powerful politicians funded by defense contractors to add items to the US defense budget not even requested by the Pentagon, principally because these items are made in the constituency of these politicians.

The situation across the former territories of the Soviet Union could not be more different. Instead of economic expansion, the various independent states that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet empire have suffered severe economic contractions and crises. Moving to a market economy after decades of state-directed collective production and planning was always going to be difficult. In practice, this so-called "transition" has been a disaster for the vast majority of the peoples of the former Soviet Union. GNP has fallen by at least half in Russia since the end of the Cold War, while three-quarters of the population have seen their living standards plunge to a condition of impoverishment or near-impoverishment. Some

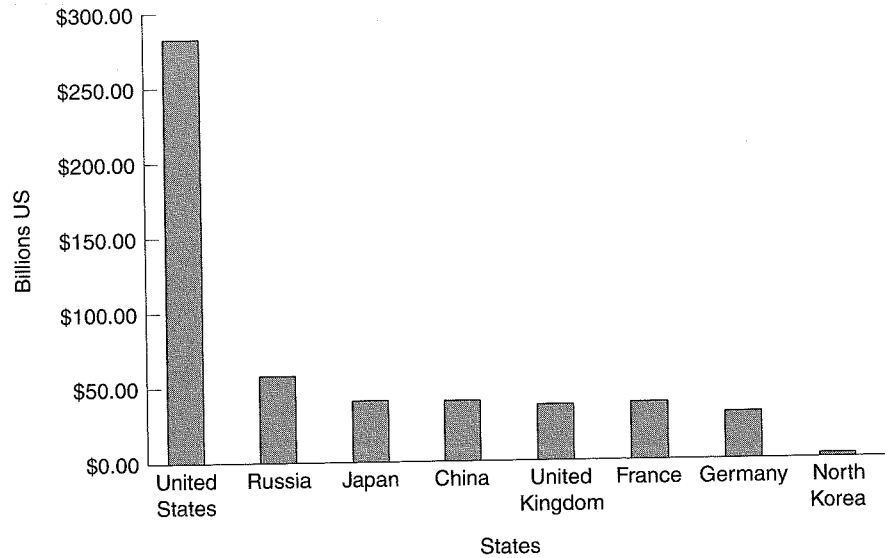


Figure 12.1 Military expenditures, 1999.

50 percent of Russians live below the official poverty line of \$30–35 a month and probably another 25 percent are very near to it (Cohen 2000: 49). The neoliberal dream of Russia's transition to "market capitalism" has become the nightmare of transmutation into the "crony capitalism" of oligarchic domination and mafia rule. A hasty and ill-conceived 1995 plan to mortgage the "commanding heights" of the Russian economy for private financial loans from oligarchic controlled banks, a so-called "loans for shares" program supported by Western economists, provided an occasion for corruption, theft, and misappropriation of state assets on a grand scale. Under the rule of Boris Yeltsin, a small cabal of Russian oligarchs quickly gained control over the collective assets of the state and used these to accumulate vast personal fortunes in overseas banks. Control over the rich state oil and natural gas sector was acquired by private interests, as was control over state broadcasting and media networks. Coopting the government of Yeltsin and silencing opposition to their conduct, the oligarchs used their newly acquired power to finance the re-election of Yeltsin and secure their political position close to the center of power. Under Yeltsin's handpicked successor, Vladimir Putin, they have consolidated this power, occupying some government positions themselves and placing proxies in other influential positions of power (Wolosky 2000). Complementing this "top-down" corruption is the "bottom-up" corruption of local mafia groups in cities across Russia who operate through bribes and kickbacks in an alliance with local politicians, state officials, and the law (Handelman 1995).

The wealth of the few has come at the expense of the many. Russian state tax receipts are meager and state institutions are reeling from a generalized funding crisis. Legions of state employees and beneficiaries – teachers, doctors, nurses, postal clerks, planners, factory workers, research scientists, professors, and retirees – are suffering through erratic payment of their wages and benefits. Inflation and currency devaluation have reduced these payments to a pittance. Essential infrastructures of modern life have lost decades of investment and are barely functioning. Though Russia is overwhelmingly urban, it is estimated that three out of four people there now grow their own food (Cohen 2000: 42). One indication of the collective impact of the contemporary Russian depression is that life expectancy fell six times over the last decade of the twentieth century to an average of 65.9 years for both men and women in 2000, about ten years less than the United States and on a par with levels in Guatemala (Wines 2000).

The Russian military has been dramatically affected by Russia's multiple crises. Budgets have been slashed, equipment is aging, and its various branches are grappling with crises of mission and morale. Like others in the society, high-ranking generals have sought to exploit their positions for personal gain, selling state equipment to arms merchants and abusing their power over conscripts to enrich themselves (Odom 1998). The army performed poorly in the first Chechnya war of 1994–6 and only marginally better in the second war of 1999–2001 – a politically inspired war to elect Putin – while being guilty of widespread human rights abuses. Despite the thousands of deaths, population displacements, and recapture of Grozny and surrounding territory, this conflict is still not over. Other regional challenges to the central power and authority of Moscow in the Russian Federation have emerged as local communities and regional bosses eke out survival strategies amid economic depression and institutional collapse (Nunn and Stulberg 2000).

According to some, Russia's "economic and social disintegration has been so great that it has led to the unprecedented demodernization of a twentieth-century country." Russia has "dropped out of the community of developed nations." The political struggles between different factions to monopolize and strip the assets of the state in the 1990s have resulted in the "collapse of modern life" across the country (Cohen 2000: 41). Yet, despite the starkness of the contrast between the "hyperpower" of the United States and the "demodernization" of Russia, the Russian state remains a "superpower" in one crucial respect. It still controls more than enough nuclear weapons to destroy the United States and all of its allies. Table 12.2 contains estimates of the strategic (long-range) and non-strategic (short- and medium-range) nuclear weapons currently controlled by the world's nuclear powers.

The nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia are governed by the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I). Both states subsequently negotiated a START II which promises to reduce warheads to 3,000–3,500

Table 12.2 World nuclear arsenals, 2000.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Suspected strategic nuclear weapons</i>	<i>Suspected non-strategic nuclear weapons</i>	<i>Suspected total nuclear weapons</i>
China	290	120	410
France	482	0	482
India	60+?	0	60+?
Israel	100+?	0	100+?
Pakistan	15–25?	0	15–25?
Russia	6,000	6,000–13,000	12,000–19,000
United Kingdom	100	100	200
United States	7,300	4,700–11,700	12,000–19,000

Source: Center for Defense Information (2000)

each by the end of 2007. After seven years of delay this treaty was finally passed by the Russian Duma in 2000. A START III to reduce levels even further is promised but uncertain. Bilateral arms control agreements, however, assume two equivalent and modern functioning states. With the Russian state, economy, and technological infrastructure disintegrating, the nature of the “Russian threat” has changed quite dramatically for the West. Instead of Russian state strength being a threat, the weakness of Russia as a state is now a pressing source of danger. There are four distinct nuclear dangers in Russia today:

- 1 The danger of an accidental nuclear war caused by an early warning system accident (Blair 1993). In 1995 the launch of a Norwegian scientific rocket triggered yet another false alarm in this system that reached Yeltsin for a possible retaliatory response. Russia’s early warning system is now so decayed that Moscow is unable to detect US intercontinental ballistic missile launches for at least seven hours a day and can no longer see missiles fired from US submarines. At most, only four of Russia’s 21 early warning satellites are still working (Hoffman 1999a). This techno-territorial “blindness” only fosters anxiety and danger, especially with the nuclear forces of both superpowers remaining on hair-trigger alert status.
- 2 The danger of “nuclear proliferation” caused by the illegal commercial sale of Russian nuclear warheads to independent parties or states. With economic times so desperate, the possibility of black-market sales of Russian nuclear technology, material, and expertise is considerable (Allison et al. 1996).
- 3 The danger of nuclear blackmail and chaos caused by current and future “civil wars” inside the Russian Federation. For the first time in

history, a fully nuclearized state is confronted with significant levels of internal political instability.

- 4 The danger posed by accidents or catastrophic failures within Russia's nuclear power systems. None of the Soviet-era reactors at electrical power plants or on naval submarines are considered safe by Western standards. The accidental sinking of the nuclear-powered submarine *Kursk* in August 2000 is hardly likely to be the last technological disaster for Russia and the former Soviet states, technological failures that first came to the world's attention with the Chernobyl explosion in 1986.

Problems also exist with the continued manufacture and storage of biological and chemical weapons (Alibek 1999). What all of these dangers have in common is that they are threats to everyone. The threat is as great to the Russian state and peoples as it is to the surrounding states, to the former Soviet republics, Western Europe, and to the United States. The nature of the contemporary "Russian threat," in other words, is a distinct departure from orthodox geopolitical thinking. Rather than being a territorial threat posed by one state to another, these contemporary threats are dangers arising from a disintegrating technoscientific modernity that imperils all surrounding states and the planet in general. These are dangers that "know no borders" for they are produced by the normal and routine (mal)functioning of complex technoscientific systems. As the world learnt when Chernobyl exploded, radioactivity does not respect national borders. It does not have any national allegiance or ideological preference. Undetectable by the human senses, if it is released it travels with the prevailing weather patterns through the atmosphere, raining down toxic fallout on those in its path with consequences that last across generations. Unlike previous wars and disasters, a nuclear explosion would pollute the gene pool of a whole people and generate victims years after any catastrophe.

In a move unthinkable during the Cold War, the United States Senate in 1992 acknowledged the dramatic shift in the nature of the "Russian threat" by funding the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program to aid disarmament and denuclearization initiatives across the former Soviet Union. The program has had some significant successes, including helping Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan move nuclear warheads from their territory to locations in Russia. Funded until at least 2006, it currently aims to accelerate the elimination of Russian missiles, bombers, submarines, and land-based missile launchers to meet START requirements, improve the safety, security, control, and accounting of Russia's nuclear warheads, end Russia's production of weapons-grade plutonium, and build a storage facility for the tons of fissile material from Russia's dismantled nuclear warheads. This relatively small program is guided by security thinking that departs in noteworthy ways from orthodox geopolitics in order to address the common security challenges of the contemporary geopolitical condition.

The Contemporary Geopolitical Condition: "World Risk Society"

Dangers from accidents, technological failures, and systems vulnerabilities, as well as the environmental challenges posed by deadly substances like plutonium, are not confined to Russia. Rather, the situation there is symptomatic of a much broader feature of the contemporary geopolitical condition. This condition is defined by the struggles of varied imperfectly modern states to address, adapt, and adjust to the multiple consequences and impacts of technoscientific modernization. Everyday life in modern states is secured, surrounded, and sustained by complex technoscientific systems – carbon fuel energy, global transportation and telecommunications webs, capitalist relations of production and consumption, biochemical industries – that deliver short-term "progress," "development," and "growth" but also long-term dangers to human health and the ecosystems that sustain life on the planet. The normalized and taken-for-granted functioning of ever more complex and pervasive formations of technoscientific modernization has produced a range of "manufactured uncertainties" at the very heart of modernity; many, like nuclear energy, hazardous chemicals, genetic engineering, and agro-industrial food systems, with catastrophic potential, either from "normal accidents" or terrorist attacks. This condition has been termed "world risk society" (Beck 1999). It is a condition marked by the globalization and proliferation of potentially catastrophic risks produced not only by the decay and disintegration of the modern, as found in Russia, but also by the successes and excesses of an uncritical embrace of technoscientific modernization, as found in the United States.

The desire of national security managers in powerful states is to control and contain potential threats and dangers. The vexing feature of technoscientific modernization and globalization for them is that it is producing "global dangers" that cannot be controlled and contained by national security institutions. "Global dangers" are threats that know no borders. These can be divided into

- borderless socioenvironmental threats like AIDS and BSE/CJD, acid rain and toxic chemicals, global warming and rising sea levels;
- borderless politicoeconomic threats like transnational crime and narco-trafficking, cyberattacks and global terrorism (Lake 2000);
- borderless catastrophic threats like nuclear energy accidents and proliferating weapons of mass destruction.

"Global dangers" are produced not by warring states but by the regular and taken-for-granted operation of technoscientific modernization and capitalist globalization as they expand and deepen our dependence on complex production systems, fossil fuels, information networks, and technoscientific processes and products. The contemporary geopolitical condition is characterized by the "boomerang effect" of technoscientific progress. That to which we

attribute our prosperity and security is also that which threatens us with infrastructural vulnerabilities, systemic failures, environmental degradation, and a range of potential catastrophes. "Global dangers" can be both fast and slow: they range from dramatic explosions in nuclear power plants or skyscrapers to the slow-motion poisoning of the planetary ecosystem by industrial toxins. Because of their spectacular nature, the media tends to focus on the former to the neglect of the latter. Political leaders tend to neglect slow threats by thinking only in terms of the next election cycle. This bias towards short-term thinking makes it exceedingly difficult to develop public policy to address the long-term problems of advanced modernity.

"Global Dangers" and Geopolitical Discourse

"Global dangers" are systemic contradictions in technoscientific modernity that require conceptualization and a sustained coordinated policy response at the global level. Unlike orthodox geopolitics, the enemy is not "out there" but the deep technoscientific modernity that envelops the advanced world. Some state leaders have grown to appreciate that "national security" can only be achieved through mutual security systems at the global level (Gore 1992). International regulatory accords and agreements like the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, or the Kyoto Accords on the reduction of greenhouse gases articulate a vision of security that recognizes that individual state security is best obtained through collective common security. Put differently, no one state can be secure without all states having a shared measure of security. This is hardly a new idea, but it is one made all the more relevant by the "global dangers" that define the post-Cold War world. According to this reasoning, for example, the West's long-term security is best assured by helping Russia to overcome its economic depression and technoscientific disintegration through programs like the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program.

Orthodox geopolitical discourse, however, refuses to accept this analysis of the contemporary geopolitical condition and persists in defining "national security" in state-centric and territorial terms. Its proponents speak of "global dangers" but interpret them narrowly as dangers posed to "us" by being (mis)used by "them." The rhetoric of "global dangers," in other words, is folded back into an orthodox geopolitical discourse in which a virtuous internal homeland must be secured from a threatening evil foreign power. The world is still primarily defined in terms of threatening "rogue states," "international terrorists," and "mad men" who pose a threat to the "Western way of life." "Security" and "defense" for "the nation" are to be obtained through institutionalizing a "national security state" at home, bombing these enemies abroad, and deploying even "bigger and better" technoscientific military systems.

It was reasoning of this type that led the Republican-dominated US Senate to reject ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1999 and oppose the Kyoto Accords, acts that make the United States a "rogue state" in the eyes of peace activists, environmentalists, and some states. Another example of the persistent power of orthodox geopolitical thinking is the powerful coalition within the United States pushing the expenditure of over \$60 billion to construct a National Missiles Defense system. This "Star Wars" system promises to shoot down nuclear missiles launched by "rogue states" at the territory of the United States. Its deployment has a formidable political momentum even though there is no solid scientific evidence that the system will ever work as intended. In supporting even more spending than that proposed by the Clinton administration, George W. Bush noted that "one of the things we Republicans stand for is to use our technologies in research and development to the point where we can bring certainty into an uncertain world" (Bush 2000). The statement reveals the uncritical faith many in America place in technological solutions to geopolitical problems, indeed in technology as a means of salvation and deliverance more generally (Noble 1999). Bush's position reveals the profound disjuncture between orthodox geopolitical discourse, with its clear distinction between "us" and "them," and the contemporary geopolitical condition, with its borderless technoscientific dangers. In a world where technoscientific modernization has created systems and structures with catastrophic potential and global dangers that know no borders, absolute security and "certainty" for states is not possible. Threats from states come from their own vulnerable and polluting technoscientific systems as much as from foreign powers. Yet, rather than acknowledge this and restructure their modernity on safer and more sustainable grounds, the quest for absolute security and salvation via technoscience persists. Deployment of the National Missile Defense system may see the US break the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, undermine the deterrent doctrine of "mutually assured destruction," and, as a consequence, produce greater levels of insecurity among the world's major states. If this is the case, then twenty-first century geopolitics will end up a lot like twentieth-century geopolitics, which is not an appealing prospect.

NOTE

- 1 The 2001 request was submitted by the Clinton administration and marks a significant increase over the \$293.283 billion budget in 2000. President George W. Bush has promised to increase military expenditures even further. Translated into dollars at the prevailing market rate Russia's official defense budget for 2000 amounted to \$5 billion, roughly equivalent to the defense expenditures of Singapore and less than that of Argentina or Sweden. The International Institute of Strategic Studies (2000: 119) estimates the purchasing power parity of the rouble as five times that of the US dollar (i.e., the materials 1 rouble will

buy in Russia would cost \$5 in the US). This, together with their estimate of military-related expenditures not part of the official defense budget, led them to the calculation of \$57 billion for Russia's military expenditures in 1999. In contrast to President Bush, President Putin has announced significant military expenditure cutbacks so Russia's figures are likely to drop below \$50 billion.