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The Postmodern Geopolitical Condition: States, Statecraft, and Security at the Millennium

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The term "geopolitics" is a hundred years old. Coined in 1899 by the Swedish political scientist and conservative politician, Rudolf Kjellen, the term was used in the twentieth century to describe the broad relationship between geography, states, and world-power politics. In the conventional conceptions that dominated the twentieth century, geopolitics was a panoptic form of power/knowledge that sought to analyze the condition of world power in order to aid the practice of statecraft by great powers. Embedded within the imperialist projects of various states throughout the century, geopolitics generated comprehensive visions of world politics while also proposing particular strategies for states to pursue against their rivals. Its dominant mode of narration was declarative ("this is how the world is") and imperative ("this is what we must do"). "Is" and "we" marked its commitment to, on the one hand, a transparent and legible world and, on the other hand, to a particular state and its cultural/political version of the truth about this world. Critical geopolitics is an approach that seeks to problematize these epistemological assumptions and ontological commitments of conventional geopolitics. It deconstructs its ocularcentric objectifications of world politics, and challenges its commitment to particular state-centric political practices. In doing so, critical geopolitics itself becomes a form of geopolitics—it is drawn into the game of describing a geopolitical condition—but one which seeks to deconstruct hegemonic geopolitical discourses and to question the relationships of power found in the geopolitical practices of dominant states.

The twentieth century was a century divided by geopolitics, an era haunted by two world wars and darkened by the shadow of a potential third. The advent of a new millennium is an arbitrary but nevertheless useful moment to critically reflect on geopolitics. What processes and tendencies characterize world politics and power at the millennium? How are the geopolitical discourses and practices of dominant states responding to these processes and tendencies? What critical questions need to be asked about these geopolitical discourses and practices? These issues are daunting, and this essay provides no more than an introduction to how they might be answered. Its central argument is that the contemporary geopolitical condition is characterized by boundary-transgressing processes and tendencies that are undermining the state-centric assumptions of conventional geopolitics. This is provoking the development of new forms of geopolitical discourse and practice that require critical investigation.

The rhetoric of President Clinton's administration provides evidence of the new forms of geopolitical discourse. Clinton's first inaugural address in 1993 signaled a changing recognition of the condition of states, statecraft, and security in the post-Cold War world. He proclaimed that "[c]ommunications and commerce are global; investment is mobile; technology is almost magical; and ambition for a better life is now universal. . . . There is no longer division between what is foreign and what is domestic—the world economy, the world environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race—they affect us all" (Clinton 1993). These themes of globalization, technological change, borderlessness, and pervasive planetary threats were ones that Clinton returned to throughout his time in office. In an address to the U.N. General Assembly in September 1997, the President vividly described both the promises and dangers posed by a world where national borders are falling and fading. "Bit by bit," Clinton declared, "the information age is chipping away at the barriers—economic, political, and social—that once kept people locked in and ideas locked out" (Clinton 1997). The emergence of a less bordered world, while generally positive, also holds many dangers. "We are all," he noted, "vulnerable to the reckless acts of rogue states and to an unholy axis of terrorists, drug traffickers, and international

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criminals. These twenty-first-century predators feed on the very free flow of information and ideas and people we cherish. They abuse the vast power of technology to build black markets for weapons, to compromise law enforcement with huge bribes of illicit cash, to launder money with the keystroke of a computer. These forces," he proclaimed "are our enemies" (Clinton 1997). A few months later, in February 1998, Clinton reiterated this passage in an address to Pentagon personnel on Iraq, representing that state as just such a "twenty-first-century predator" that must not be allowed to build an arsenal of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons (Clinton 1998). In a less bordered world, the territorial authority and military might of the United States are still needed to keep world order and contain territorial "rogue states and nuclear outlaws" (Klare 1995).

Clinton's vision of a world of deterritorialized dangers grounded in certain territorial "rogue states" is a noteworthy variation on the modern geopolitical imagination. Agnew (1998) argues that the modern geopolitical imagination came into being with the establishment of the modern territorial state system in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. One of its most distinguishing features is what he terms "a state-centric account of spatiality" characterized by three geographical assumptions: (1) that states have exclusive sovereign power over their territories; (2) that "domestic" and "foreign" are separate and distinct realms; and (3) that the boundaries of a state define the boundaries of "society." These long-standing assumptions have always been contestable as descriptions of the spatiality of world politics, but they delimit a bounded territorial imagination historically favored by geopolitical discourses and practices. In recent decades, this territorial imagination has come under question as material and technological changes have transformed the space/time regime conditioning world politics. Globalization, informationalization, and the end of the Cold War have unleashed spatial transformations that have seriously eroded state sovereignty, blurred boundaries between the "inside" and "outside" of states, and produced a common "global society" facing dangers and threats that emanate from no single state but from the successes and excesses of advanced modernity. Dominated for so long by a fused ideological and territorial imagination, contemporary geopolitical discourses are slowly shifting to admit more fluid, flexible, and nonstate-centric accounts of space and security, territory and threats.

Globalization, informationalization, and risk society, I wish to argue, have induced a *postmodern geopolitical condition* in world politics. These interrelated processes openly challenge and confound the boundaries of the modern interstate system by forging new regimes of interconnectedness between places across the globe; transforming scalar relationships between the local, national, and global; introducing unprecedented speeds of interaction and communication; and creating heightened interdependencies and vulnerabilities to dangers across the globe. The postmodern geopolitical condition is one where the boundaries that have traditionally delimited the geopolitical imagination are in crisis. The "post" refers to spatial logics beyond the modern geopolitical imagination—with its hard borders and easy distinctions between inside and outside, domestic and foreign, East and West, "us" and "them"—rather than beyond modernity itself. The fact that these logics are increasingly evident and articulated in discourse, however, does not mean that the modern geopolitical imagination, has been transcended or left behind. The postmodern geopolitical condition problematizes the spatial reasoning associated with the modern geopolitical imagination, but it does not erase its use. There is no necessary incompatibility between the postmodern geopolitical condition and the modern geopolitical imagination. In fact, the intensification of the postmodern geopolitical condition may provoke a deepening assertion of modern geopolitical imaginations and/or hybrid geopolitical imaginations that (con)fuse it with the deterritorializing tendencies associated with advanced modernity into new forms of geopolitical discourse.

The origins of the contemporary postmodern geopolitical condition can be traced to the "sea-change in cultural as well as in political-economic practices since around 1972" that Harvey (1989: vii) identifies as "bound up with the emergence of new dominant ways in which we experience space and time." Harvey's dating of the condition of postmodernity in the early 1970s is connected to certain key geopolitical and geofinancial events—the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil hike and Richard Nixon's break with the Bretton Woods system of pegged exchange rates—but his account has, at its center, a shift in the

organization of capitalism from a Fordist mode of regulation to what he terms flexible accumulation. While the processes and tendencies that characterize postmodernity generally have their origins in the 1960s and 1970s, the postmodern geopolitical condition is best considered a phenomenon of the late 1980s and early 1990s, for it was only then that three broad processes came together in a unique way to create a distinctively new geopolitical environment.

The first of these processes was the intensified globalization of corporations and markets in the advanced capitalist world from the 1960s. A multidimensional process driven by transnational corporations and changing economic divisions of labor, this qualitative transformation in the international economy was marked by the increasing financial interconnectivity of the world's largest economies, expanding trade relations (particularly intracorporate international trade), surging foreign direct investment flows, and the development of global production and marketing strategies (Castells 1996). The second of these processes was the diffusion of new informational and communicational technologies that intensified the time-space distanciation and compression historically associated with modernity (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990). Disembedding social relations by lifting them out of their previous social places and scales of interaction, this converging informational and communicational revolution radically shrunk geographical distance while speeding up social interactions, enabling the development of a postmodern culture of electronically mediated representation and interaction across the globe. The development of transnational media organizations and networks like Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN) helped create a new "global media space" within which the dramas of world politics were envisioned, represented, and acted out.

While both of these processes can be said to have altered international relations as communications by the 1980s, it was the third set of events, the collapse of the Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe and the later break-up of the Soviet Union, that cleared a fresh space for the emergence of a distinctively postmodern geopolitical condition in the 1990s. Preoccupied for decades with a territorial threat, national security policymakers now faced the quite different task of responding to what decades of Cold War militarism had wrought, namely technologies of mass destruction that threatened to proliferate beyond the power and control of the states that invented them, into the hands of smaller states and even nonstate actors. With the Cold War over, policy makers slowly came to terms with the global "risk society" that Cold War military-industrial complexes had unleashed (Beck 1998).

The notion of the "postmodern geopolitical condition" is not meant as a "global" description of world politics at the millennium; the objectivizing tendencies and totalizing claims of this enterprise are inherently problematic. Rather, the notion is a simplified and situated one, simplified in that any modern/postmodern distinction is ultimately crude, and situated within a critical analysis of the geopolitical dilemmas facing U.S. foreign policy.[1] I utilize the notion here as a heuristic: to describe some of the structural transformations and technological conditions that are restructuring geopolitics at the end of the twentieth century, to characterize some contemporary geopolitical discourses and practices in the U.S. associated with these changes, and to identify critical geopolitical questions that need to be asked about these geopolitical discourses and practices. The following three sections consider how the three processes—globalization, informationalization, and risk society—have impacted states and world order, the practice of statecraft, and the conceptualization of security at the end of the twentieth century.

States: The Ambivalences of Globalization and the Crisis of Governance

While Marxists are indeed right to claim that capitalism has always been global, the dominant organizational structure of capitalism in the first half of the twentieth century was preponderantly statist. Each of the great powers had its own bordered and relatively autonomous state economies, characterized by distinctive accumulation regimes (modes of regulation, capital-labor bargains, and technological and legal paradigms) and dominated by favored "national champions." Early geopoliticians like Mackinder tended to be economic nationalists, preferring to see unambiguously British firms employ British labor to build British battleships (though, in this case, the designation "British"

was an imperial one, not confined solely to the "British Isles"). Today, globalization is endlessly asserted to be the defining process of the late twentieth century, a seemingly inevitable transformation from the era of state-structured capitalism to a new era of global capitalism.

The problem with this rhetoric of "globalization," however, is that it is often loosely used and poorly conceptualized. Globalization is best conceptualized as the transcendence of the territoriality of state capitalism, its boundaries, regimes, and horizons, but not territoriality itself. Displacing and replacing the spaces of state capitalism are a series of suprastatist territorialities of capitalism, emergent networks of institutions and actors that are connected by technological systems and binding flows. The best known is the interconnected domain of "global financial space," headquartered in global cities and wired to major world markets and crucial offshore sites beyond international financial regulations (Leyshon 1996). Also well known is the newer spatial division of labor, with its international technopoles, its front-office/back-office divisions, its subcontracting and flexible manufacturing webs, its keiretsu and branch-plant networks, its export-processing zones, and its "just-in-time" production and distribution systems (Cox 1997; Daniels and Lever 1996). Frequently described as global, these economic and technoterritorial complexes are in actuality highly concentrated in certain locations, bypassing and ignoring large portions of the globe.

The development of new technoterritorial complexes associated with finance and manufacturing has profoundly changed the conditions of geopolitical power in the late twentieth century. Our current global financial system emerged as a consequence of many different factors: the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the success of offshore financial markets, the political decision to deregulate financial markets, global telecommunication advances, and the introduction of a new generation of financial instruments and products (Corbridge et al. 1994; Leyshon and Thrift 1997). These factors have "de-territorialized" the old international financial system where states were more powerful regulatory actors than they are now, and created a much more fluid and volatile transnational financial network dominated by private actors and markets beyond the regulatory power of even the most powerful states. Because of its power and reach, this network itself constitutes a type of "phantom state" (Leyshon and Thrift 1997).

The modern geopolitical condition can be said to have been characterized by a general congruence of state power and capitalist territoriality. Each of the great powers had its own distinctive economic base and state forms of capitalism (including the Fordist-inspired state capitalism qua "socialism" in the Soviet Union). The postmodern geopolitical condition, by contrast, is marked by the growing disjuncture between state power and capitalist territoriality. Economic structures and financial power are organized at scales beyond the power of even powerful states. The problematic defining the postmodern geopolitical condition is not the overstated "end of the nation-state" but rather the globalization of the state (Ohmae 1995). This is the process whereby national institutions, policies, and practices are forced to adjust to the evolving dynamics and demands of the capitalist world economy. States must become enmeshed within international networks of finance and commodity flows or become marginalized regions within the world economy (Herod et al. 1998). This globalization, however, has multiple ambivalences. Four in particular are worth noting.

The first concerns the ambivalence of world markets, private actors, and networks toward international regulation. On the one hand, the international financial system, foreign direct investment, and trading relations need predictable and stable sets of rules in order to conduct business in a transparent and effective manner. On the other hand, many of the key private actors in the world economy strive to flee regulation, avoid transparency, and shade rules in order to maximize their profit potential. Structural instability and risk tends to proliferate as a consequence of this quest for super profits. Today's world economy has at its center a "complex, sprawling, volatile and reflexive international financial system . . . which is now, in effect, designed continually to outrun prevailing state norms and rules" (Leyshon and Thrift 1997: 299). This is a recipe for serious volatility and instability in the century to come. Transnational capitalism has, in general, deepened wealth and income disparities across the globe in the last two decades, sharpening class, ecological, and regional conflicts. The historical tendency of capitalism to induce overproduction and underconsumption crises, and this, in turn,

to trigger major institutional instability, political extremism, and mass violence, haunted the twentieth century and threatens to do so, in an even faster and more furious fashion, in the twenty-first.

The second ambivalence concerns the so-called "Washington consensus" among international regulators, transnational business elites, and national policymakers in the Group of Seven (now Eight with the addition of Russia) leading industrialized states. Organized around neoliberal principles of freer trade, regulatory reform, and greater openness on the part of states to the world economy, this consensus has always been an elitist one that has shifted successfully to accommodate new forces, issues, and agendas thrown up by the challenge of managing the world economy over the last decade. There are signs, however, that the consensus is vulnerable. This is evident in the U.S., for example, where populist unilateralism has a strong powerbase in the Congress, particularly in the House of Representatives. With a minority left-wing version stressing workers rights and a right-wing version decrying international bureaucrats and bailouts, this creed has secured some significant victories in the last few years, forcing President Clinton to change his Mexican bailout plans and defeating fast-track authority for the President to negotiate trade agreements. The fact that the U.S. President has to persistently struggle for funding for international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and U.N., and for international peacekeeping operations by the U.S. military, is indicative of a reluctance at the heart of the hegemon to play the role of world stabilizer. This is already hobbling international institutions trying to promote world order and could pose considerable problems in the future. American hegemony and dollar diplomacy, of course, are also opposed by many states and some factions within international institutions. The "Washington consensus" is hardly even an elite consensus anymore.

The third ambivalence concerns those second-tier states who are globalizing themselves, yet striving to do so in ways that preserve their existing political, economic, and cultural orders. Political and economic elites within states like Mexico, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, and China have sought to harness globalization to extend and augment their power while maintaining the domestic structures of power and influence that sustain them. The result has been forms of corrupt "crony globalization" in which domestic elites have used international investments and imposed structural reforms to enrich themselves and their social and familial networks. When such strategies of development have run up against their own limits, they have generated financial and, subsequently, legitimacy crises, such as those experienced by Thailand, South Korea, and Indonesia in 1997 and 1998. The ability of the IMF to "solve" future crises like these is in doubt, given its neoliberal commitments, budgetary constraints, and tendency to blame crises on "states" and not "markets."

The fourth ambivalence concerns those states beyond the select group of first and second-tier states that are struggling with difficult transitions or failing as modern states altogether. For many of these states, globalization has meant declining standards of living and rising levels of indebtedness, deepening deindustrialization, and spiraling crime and corruption. Certain former communist states in Central Europe and Eurasia are experiencing severe problems transitioning from centrally planned to market-capitalist economies (Pickles and Smith 1998). These states face daunting challenges of institutional reform, regulatory change, democratization, and environmental management in conditions where public finances are scarce. Add to these challenges growing Mafia power, illicit capitalist commerce, and the oppression of minorities, and one has conditions for considerable geopolitical instability (Friman and Andreas 1999). In many such situations, geopolitical disputes over territories and borders have been popularized and manipulated by elites for short-term political gain, as the case of the former Yugoslavia tragically illustrates. Failing second-world states, such as Serbia, North Korea, Belarus, and, increasingly, Russia, are joining failed third-world states, from Afghanistan to Haiti and the Sudan, as geopolitical black holes where the modern world political map is unraveling, and chaos increasingly predominates (Bayart et al. 1999). That the once-superpower Russia is on its way to becoming a "failed state" is perhaps the most dramatic geopolitical story of our time, a scenario described by U.S. security analysts as "Weimar Russia" to underscore the danger that Russian democracy might collapse and a revanchist and violent nationalism take its place.

The postmodern geopolitical condition is thus characterized by processes of globalization with systemic contradictions, ideological vul-

nerabilities, political instabilities, and increasingly manifest crises of governance. For internationalist elites in the U.S. government, the ambivalences of globalization present daunting challenges and problems. At least two distinct sets of geopolitical discourses and practices are addressing these challenges. First, considerable effort is devoted to trying to coordinate the management, to the extent that this is possible, of the increasingly complex and unregulated world economy. U.S. decisionmakers are more cognizant of the power of financial networks and nonstatist actors (mutual-fund managers, credit-rating agencies, the financial press, and hedge-fund speculators) to shape world (dis)order. In the 1990s, new discourses, blurring oldfashioned geopolitical rhetoric with new geofinancial concerns, have gained prominence, with teetering emerging markets being described as "dominoes" and threats being cast in terms of financial proximity ("we must prop up Brazil's economy to protect ourselves"). Such hybrid discourses are elite constructions that do not necessarily enjoy widespread popular support. Whether they can be successful in galvanizing political action in the times of crisis that will inevitably come remains to be seen. From a critical geopolitical perspective, these discourses are saturated with relationships of power that represent the interests of a transnational economic elite at the expense of more democratic, egalitarian, and sustainable visions of the world economy.

A second group of new discourses addresses the seething problems of "failed states," from starvation and genocide in sub-Saharan Africa to ethnic cleansing in southeast Europe and public bankruptcy amid lucrative private criminality in Eurasia. A critical geopolitical dynamic in the next century will be how developed states respond to the "coming anarchy" induced by collapsing states and gangster capitalism as it intrudes upon their world in the form of immigrants and fleeing refugees, transnational crime, and daily images of unruly chaos (Kaplan 1994). Political impulses to retreat behind fortified borders and implement policies of containment will do battle with more internationalist policies that champion selective interventionism to establish international protectorates and trusteeship arrangements, a struggle fully evident in responses to the Kosovo and East Timor crises of 1999. Influencing the rich world's response will be how dynamics of "chaos" are represented in the media.

Statecraft: Informationalization, Television, and Geopolitics

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Halford Mackinder (1904) outlined a modern geopolitical condition of "closed space" and competing territorial empires, a "post-Columbian epoch" where proliferating networks of railways and communications were shifting the balance of power toward the heartland of Eurasia. At the end of the twentieth century, advanced systems of transportation and communication are delimiting a geopolitical condition where "cyberspace" and technological empires seem increasingly important, a postmodern epoch of informationalized geopolitics exemplified by intercontinental ballistic missiles, the so-called "revolution in military affairs," and CNN. Informationalization, like globalization, is a convenient name for a complex and multidimensional problematic that is reshaping the spatial relationships between scales and places at the end of the twentieth century. Unleashed by converging computer, communication, and transportation technologies, informationalization has implications for geopolitics that have not been fully articulated.[2] As the conduct of statecraft by hegemonic states, geopolitics is conditioned by a range of technological systems, from intelligence-gathering apparatuses to military defense complexes and transnational telecommunication networks. But geopolitics is more than the practice of statecraft amid technological systems; these very technological systems are extensions of states and civilizations. They form what can be termed "geoinformational empires," enveloping world political space with electronic nets and cultural codes that together, in relationship with statecraft, have the power to define and delimit that which is taken as "real." The relationships between these geoinformational empires and the practice of statecraft in representing world politics are an important aspect of the postmodern geopolitical condition. One crucial aspect of this is the relationship between U.S. statecraft and so-called "global television" in the last decade.

The emergence of television as a dominant mode of mass communication between leaders and populations first impacted the practice of geopolitics in significant ways during the Vietnam war (the broad relationship between popular media and geopolitics goes back to the nineteenth century). In the 1990s, the development

of transnational television networks and the capacity for "real time" coverage of breaking international crises has extended this impact. Television has unleashed what Ignatieff (1997: 10) terms an "electronic internationalism," linking the consciences of the world's "tame zones" to the sufferings of the world's "wild zones," where war, anarchy, and starvation are the rule. It has "contributed to the break-down of the barriers of citizenship, religion, race, and geography that once divided our moral space into those we were responsible for and those who were beyond our ken," creating in the process an emergent "global conscience" (Ignatieff 1997: 11).

Commonly conceptualized as the "CNN effect," after the development of a twenty-four-hour news network system by media mogul Ted Turner, the phenomenon of "global television" is widely perceived to have influenced the popularity of the Gulf War, the decision by the Bush administration to intervene in the Somalian civil war, the subsequent decision by the Clinton administration to withdraw from Somalia after the deaths of U.S. soldiers there, and U.S. strategic calculations about intervening in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor. Studies of the CNN effect by journalists themselves, however, have tended to discredit the view that media images and technology drive the foreign policy decisionmaking process (Gowing 1994; Natsios 1996; Neuman 1996). Strobel (1996: 5) argues that the CNN effect, defined as "the loss of policy control," does not exist; the relationship between the media and foreign policy makers is more subtle and situational. Under the right conditions, the news media can have a powerful effect on process, he claims, but "those conditions are almost always set by foreign policy makers themselves or by the growing number of policy actors on the international stage" (1996: 5). Yet such an argument by cadres working within geoinformational empires tends to reflect their own self-understandings, viewing the media as essentially conduits for news rather than actor-networks determining what is news, why it is news, and how it is to be presented as news (Luke and Ó Tuathail 1997). In seeking to disprove narrow linear models of influence, such studies fail to grasp how contemporary telecommunications envelope world politics in the speed and spectacle of media culture.

The ability of new media organizations to deploy satellite systems that can beam back "live" images from geopolitical hotspots has speeded the pace of diplomacy and statecraft in the late twentieth century. These images provide a unique source of intelligence for foreign policy decisionmakers and viewing publics, enabling them to better visualize how a particular crisis is playing itself out in a remote location (though they hardly capture the complexity of crises). But these image and information flows give crises an immediacy and proximity that can undermine the restricted strategic and moral geographies of foreign policy decisionmakers. Certain persistent television images can create imperatives of obligation and responsibility, particularly cases of egregious human rights violations, in regions that are strategically marginal and geographically distant (Rotberg and Weiss 1996). This can create awkward dilemmas for foreign policy makers as they become caught between the universal geographies of moral responsibility associated with "humanitarianism" and the much more circumscribed geographies of "vital national interests" based on strategic calculations and obligations (Nye 1999).

While television images have the ability to incite and excite a "global conscience," its "electronic internationalism" has clear limits. Contemporary telecommunications and media actor-networks tend to render and represent geopolitical conflict as televisual spectacles featuring clearly coded protagonists in dramatic conflict upon a locational stage. The conceptualization and representation of geopolitical reality tends to be heavily visual, with dramatic pictures and poignant scenes driving the drama and posing searching questions to the audience. Without good visuals—refugees at the border, marketplace massacres, concentration camps, burning buildings, surging demonstrations, troops on the streets—certain events do not make it into the realm of the relevant and "real." Without an easily grasped storyline and pictures to match, certain dramas defy the conceptualization and representation of the mass media. Only those crises with considerable spectacular value tend to break through onto the screens of the public. The principle of entertainment inevitably infects coverage and communication, rendering geopolitical conflicts as high drama with battling protagonists, high stakes, and the potential for high-tech special effects. Also significant is the "crowding out" of geopolitical conflicts and serious foreign policy dilemmas by celebrity sensationalism. The O. J. Simpson trial, the death of Princess Diana, and the Lewinsky-

Clinton affair are instances of celebrity-driven media frenzies that have inflated relatively trivial and minor events into world news. Lost in the vortex of spin are slow-motion geopolitical crises, like Russia's financial crises or the deepening environmental degradation of the planet.

The power of television images to condition geopolitics was evident throughout the evolution of U.S. foreign policy toward Bosnia and Kosovo. The wars in the former Yugoslavia that began in 1991 threatened no classic strategic interests of the Western powers like oil resources or the balance of power. Consequently, the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) initially pursued a policy of circumscribed engagement, representing the crisis as a "humanitarian" but not a "strategic" one. Yet in time, Bosnia became a symbolic location for the Western powers because of the successive failures of the European Union, the U.N., and then NATO to firmly end the ethnic cleansing in the region (Ó Tuathail 1999). Persistent television images and media reports of massacres and genocide in this marginal region of the European continent undermined the justifications for NATO expansion on the continent. Bosnia became a "strategic sign," a location that owed its significance to its media centrality, symbolic value, and relative geographic proximity to "the West." Eventually, under American leadership, NATO intervened decisively in August, 1995 by bombing the Bosnian Serbs, and the war was brought to a conclusion with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords.

When television images of new massacres of civilians in Kosovo were broadcast to the world in 1998 and 1999, the credibility of NATO as an institution that could keep the peace in Europe was challenged once again. For Western policymakers, Kosovo was significant in the region as a potential "ethnic domino" whose instability threatened to embroil neighboring populations and states. Kosovo "jumped scale" from being a local Balkan conflict to becoming a European crisis and a worldwide sign of the persistence of genocide at the end of the century of Auschwitz. Like Bosnia before it, Kosovo was de-Balkanized, Europeanized, and universalized in Western geopolitical discourses. It too became a "strategic sign," a morality play in "the heart of Europe" about a century-long struggle to create a free, peaceful, and stable Europe. Kosovo became the stage for a war that was described as a "humanitarian action," a real war that was more important as a symbolic war to reassert NATO's credibility as the preeminent security institution in Europe (not to mention the credibility of a tarnished U.S. president). Propelled by television images, this "war" was a morally circumscribed one appropriate to places that are "strategic signs," confined to the relative safety of 15,000 feet in the air lest any unsightly images of NATO casualties blemish the geopolitical show of force. Like many televisual dramas, strategic sign wars are designed to avoid real death and dying by the Western actors.

The reciprocal relationship between geopolitical practices and the mass media raises many critical questions about power and the signification of world politics. How and why do certain geopolitical crises become global media events, and not others? Why, for example, was Kosovo projected as a global crisis requiring a concerted military response, but not events in Chechnya, East Timor, or Angola, where the killing has been equally bloody and horrific? Answering such a question foregrounds the persistent importance not only of continental geography and geopolitics, but also of the implicit cultural geographies of identity and community informing how and what mainstream media screens (in both senses of the word). "Strategic signs" owe their symbolic value to a media centrality that is itself dependent upon geographical and cultural factors: they are not media creations alone. Although projected as "borderless" and "global," television images and the networks that transmit them are embedded in particular states, cultural formations, and identity systems. They are parochially global at best and implicated in the exercise of geopolitical power even in spite of themselves.

The problematic of informationalization and geopolitics is much greater than the question of television and geopolitical crises. Information technology systems, from the military's C_4I_2 (command, control, communications and computers; intelligence and interoperability) "system of systems" to the NAVSTAR global positioning system and the Internet, are some of the technical means by which the United States maintains its dominant position in the world. While the management and manipulation of information is crucial to the practice of geopolitics at the millennium, the implications and consequences of the U.S.'s "information dominance" are not always easy to discern (Nye and Owens

1996). Informationalized command and control systems may enable unprecedented integration and coordination in institutions like the military, but overlooked computer bugs and stealthy viruses can disable these same cybersystems. An orbital network of surveillance satellites may help detect a potentially threatening missile launch, but the malfunctioning of the same system, as has happened a number of times in the last two decades, could provoke an accidental war. It is in instances like this that the problematic of informationalization blurs into the problematic of a global risk society.

Security: Global Risk Society and Deterritorialized Threats

The modern geopolitical imagination is dominated by narratives concerning balance of power politics between competing territorial states. Security is overwhelmingly conceptualized in territorial terms, with friendly blocs and zones to be protected and consolidated against external threats from the unfriendly blocs and enemy space. The territorial extent and reach of the enemy is to be curtailed and contained. Today the security problematic faced by states is infinitely more complex, with some defense intellectuals proclaiming a "threat revolution" or "new threat paradigm" as a consequence of globalization, informationalization, and technoscientific developments (Carter and Perry 1999; Krause and Williams 1996). While the territorial dimensions and imperatives of security have not disappeared—the Western security establishment holds that "rogue states," like North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Cuba, still have to be contained—risks, like economies, states, and societies more generally, have become globalized, and threats can no longer be spatialized in territorial terms. Indeed, the last decade has seen a remarkable proliferation of deterritorialized dangers and attempts by dominant military complexes and security alliances to come to terms with the globalization of the risk produced by technoscientific modernity (Ó Tuathail 1998). Former Israel prime minister Shimon Peres (1993) declared that threats are increasingly coming from nonterritorial "dangers" and not just territorial "enemies," though, as President Clinton argues, there is often a relationship between the two. Other security analysts describe a condition of "postmodern terrorism" where threats now come from decentered bands of transnational terrorists more than from centered and hierarchically organized states, and where threats are posed not to territories and borders but to "the space of flows"—to strategic transportation systems, vital economic centers, and critical infrastructures (Gray 1997; Laqueur 1996). Images of terrorists building weapons of mass destruction or hacking into central cyberspatial infostructures have lead some security intellectuals to conjure up a specter of "catastrophic terrorism" (Carter et al. 1998). Many of these dangers are not new, but their significance and profile, on the eve of an uncertain Y2K, has increased dramatically.

The deterritorial threat that most concerns Western security institutions is the proliferation of the information, expertise, and material needed to construct weapons of mass destruction. Betts (1998: 27) notes that weapons of mass destruction no longer represent the technological frontier in warfare. Increasingly they are weapons of the weak, the only hope of aggrieved groups and poor states to fight back against the overwhelming military force of the U.S. or other dominant powers. While considerable technological expertise is still needed to construct chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, that expertise is now more diffuse, and available for hire. The U.S. national security community is very concerned about "loose nukes" in the former Soviet Union, as well as "loose weapons scientists," as former Soviet weapons experts seek gainful employment beyond the borders of the old Soviet Union (Sopko 1996). Containing the proliferation of the expertise and material needed to construct weapons of mass destruction is a priority within the Western security alliance system, but it is a challenge that poses enormous problems. A study by the Harvard University Center for Science and International Affairs of the problem of "nuclear leakage"—the sale, theft, diversion, or abuse of the nuclear weapons and material from the former Soviet nuclear program—declares that while the probability of nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia has decreased dramatically, the probability that a nuclear weapon will detonate in Russia, Europe, the Middle East, or the U.S. has increased (Allison et al. 1996: 3). A number of serious nuclear leakage incidents have already occurred and, given economic upheavals and institutional disintegration in Russia, more are likely, making serious

incidents involving fissile material a distinct possibility. Nuclear leakage, they conclude, "remains the great unanswered challenge of the post-Cold War nuclear agenda" (1996: 3). In a world order where the U.S. is militarily unmatched, they note, the desire by aggrieved parties to strike back in a dramatic way could become strong. Deterrence does not work in such situations since, as defense intellectuals point out, retaliation requires knowledge about who might launch an attack and where they are located, both unknowns in a fast and fluid postmodern world.

One way of understanding this concern with proliferating weapons of mass destruction is within the terms offered by Ulrich Beck's notion of "risk society" (1992). Risk society, for Beck, is a new order of modernity, a second modernity following the classic or simple modernity that produced industrial society, where the "side effects" and unintended consequences of modernization are encountered and confronted. This involves what Beck terms the "reflexive modernization" of industrial society, a second wave of modernization that attempts to grapple with the unprecedented and heretofore unacknowledged and invisible risks produced by the institutions, structures, and attitudes that characterized simple modernity. Although simple modernity had always produced dangers in the form of social and environmental side effects for industrial communities, the development and the subsequent problems of nuclear and biochemical technologies in the second half of the twentieth century marked a revolutionary but unremarked transition to a borderless, global risk society, a social order where hazards are no longer restrained by borders. The defining event of this social order was the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which spewed toxic radioactivity across Europe and the world.

Beck comments surprisingly little on the specific origins of global risk society, but it can be said to have begun in 1945 with the development of the first atomic bombs. A technological triumph for industrial modernity now offered the means of destroying modern cities and states. The very success of modernity generated its potential to destroy itself. Geopolitical conflict provoked the birth of global risk society, but its radical implications were contained as Cold War geopolitics displaced questions about qualitative change in the nature of modernity itself. As Beck (1998: 145) notes, the Cold War "gave order to a world that had skidded into the atomic age, an order of terror to be sure, but one that made it possible to shift internal crises off on to external causes, that is, enemies." The revolutionary implications of the continued operation of technoscientific modernization were never fully grasped. National-security discourses justified development of some of the most deadly weapons and substances ever invented by technoscientific civilization. Blindly produced and conveniently legitimated during the Cold War, these technoscientific achievements have now diffused, as a consequence of spying and "normal scientific progress," beyond the laboratories and states that invented them.

The contemporary geopolitical condition is consequently one where countries like the U.S. are having to confront the "side effects" of the Cold War and what has been termed "blowback," the boomerang effect of weapons complexes now creating insecurity because of the uncontrollable diffusion and/or permanent toxic legacy of their deadly products. The scandal in the U.S. surrounding charges of Chinese espionage in nuclear laboratories is one recent example of "blowback," where weapons designed for "national security" end up threatening everyone's security by diffusing to potential enemies. That a few decades of the Cold War created so many deadly weapons, toxic substances, and polluted places that will threaten humans for all of the next millennium is the more general and inescapable "blowback" (Kuletz 1998). For Beck, risk society is an objective condition where states and societies are forced to confront the side effects of a modernization that can no longer be externalized and treated as mere "side effects." It is also a moment of political choice when states and citizens can grasp that the plurality of unprecedented risks created as a normal matter of course in instrumentally rational activity, like the production of "national security," calls the very calculus of rationality and risk into question. Reflexive modernization, according to Beck, can be a truly reflective modernization that questions the rationality, utility, and safety of pursuing a particular modernization logic, or it can be a modernization that reconsolidates instrumental rationality and seeks to "solve" the problem of "side effects" with more of the same rationality that produced them in the first place. Beck's framing of risk society as involving a choice between a "good" reflexive modernization and a "bad" reflexive

modernization is perhaps overly broad, but it nevertheless is a useful starting point for thinking about contemporary national security debates over how to defend against strategic missiles and chemical/biological weapons (Falkenrath et al. 1998). Whether contemporary "national security" policy reduces or, more likely, actually deepens and proliferates risk is a question that is particularly apposite as we leave the most violent century in human history.

For critical geopoliticians, a pertinent question that touches upon the same issue is how deterritorialized dangers are constructed and represented by "national security" institutions. One interesting feature of deterritorialized threat discourse—with its stock images of worldwide conspiracies, terrorist networks, and prohibited weapons of mass destruction—is its tendency to return these threats to a territorial register, to pour formless global threats into old territorial bottles. Thus, for example, the question of managing the hazards posed by aging Cold War military-industrial complexes becomes a question of "nuclear leakage" in Russia only. Likewise, the threat from weapons of mass destruction becomes a question of containing "rogue states" (even though the equipment and scientists making these weapons are often Western). The threat of transnational terrorism becomes the threat of foreign states sponsoring terrorism. The general tendency is to project the threat as being "out there" with "them," without acknowledging that the threat is also "in here" with "us." The threat to all posed by our own aging and toxic weapons complex is rarely conceptualized or addressed by security intellectuals.[3] Fundamental questions about the production, distribution, and management of risks, the heretofore-unseen and unproblematized products of our Cold War technoscientific modernity, are not confronted. A territorial logic of "here" and "there" and an easy ethnocentric hubris that has "us" as different and superior from "them" still enframes many contemporary Western security discourses (Shapiro 1997).

Conclusion

Tendencies toward exaggeration, overstatement, and hyperbole are common problems with the literature seeking to specify the postmodern world. It is important, therefore, in seeking to characterize a postmodern geopolitical condition, that we are careful to specify the postmodern as a distinctive moment in the geopolitical history of modernity as a whole and not as a radical rupture from it. Long protected from serious problematization and questioning by the apparent stasis of Cold War geopolitics, the domain of geopolitical inquiry and theorization never fully grappled with the profound economic, technological, cultural, and political changes underway during the last three decades of the Cold War. Reliant on naive observation, ahistorical categorizations and ideological dogma, Cold War geopolitics represented a modernization of traditional and classical geopolitical visions and explanatory principles. It continued to be dominated by a territorial and statist vision of world politics, while its methods of explanation were procedurally *modernist*, appealing to a fully formed external world, depth hermeneutics, and ahistorical essences (Dalby 1990). While the growing significance of the world economy, the waning imperial power of the largest territorial states, and the diffusion of technological expertise and military capability were partially acknowledged in the 1970s, the 1980s saw a return to a more Manichean and simpleminded vision of world politics with the presidential election of Ronald Reagan.

With the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the emergence of new crises from the Balkans to Asia, geopolitics has been forced into a reflexive modernization, an inevitable second wave of modernization that has moved it beyond Cold War geopolitical principles and visions. Geopolitical theorization and conceptualization is now actively grappling with the problematics of globalization, informationalization, and proliferating borderless risks. The changes these unfolding dynamics have wrought for the envisioning of world political space, the meaning of national security, and the practice of foreign policy has forced geopolitical theorization, sometimes reluctantly, beyond simple ideological/territorial and statist imaginations. New geopolitical discourses engaging the fast, fluid, and formless dangers of the late twentieth century are being constructed as a result of this reflexive modernization, discourses that seek to address deterritorialization logics while not necessarily abandoning modern geopolitical imaginations.

Though the problematic of geopolitics is now ineluctably postmodern, this does not mean that geopolitical discourse and practices have

become *postmodernist*. In fact, contemporary geopolitical discourses are still relentlessly *modernist* in method, deploying an uncritical Cartesian perspectivalism to render the world as already manifestly meaningful, disciplining unruly complexity by appeal to unproblematized authority and expertise, reducing deterritorial questions to familiar territorial registers, and falling back upon an unquestioned exceptionalism. All of these problems mark the Clinton administration's discourse on emerging threats, threats that are as much about our advanced modernity as they are about "rogue states and nuclear outlaws" (Dalby 1998). A critical *postmodernist* approach toward new geopolitical discourses and practices is needed, one that can provide an account of our contemporary condition without objectifying it, and, at the same time, question the relations of power persisting in geopolitical discourses. As an open-ended problematic concerning states, statecraft, and security in world politics, geopolitics in the new millennium is much too important a problematic to be left to uncritical geopoliticians.

Notes

1. The complexity of world politics exceeds the categories of conventional and critical geopolitics. Notions of modern and postmodern geopolitics are crude ethnocentric categories that are specified based on the experiences of the dominant states in the world system. "Modern geopolitics," to the extent that this notion is even meaningful, is associated with the Westphalian idea of discrete territorial states, a conceptualization of the relationship between geography, identity, and sovereign power that had its origins in Western Europe and was subsequently exported to the rest of the world. This eurocentric schema never adequately described the messy conjunctures of territories, identities, and multiple competing sovereign power structures that characterized world politics from the seventeenth century onwards. "Postmodern geopolitics," to the extent that this notion can be meaningfully specified as associated with the idea of transnational flows rather than territorial fixities, is equally particular to the experiences of a relatively small community of advanced capitalist states rather than to all states and peoples in the world system. I have focused on U.S. foreign policy dilemmas for, although the U.S. makes up only a small portion of the world's population, it enters the new millennium as the *primus inter pares* state in the contemporary world system.
2. The relationship between "geopolitics" and "technology" has never been adequately theorized. Technologies of warfare, transportation, and communication are crucial in shaping the geopolitical condition, but neither conventional nor critical geopoliticians have explored the relationships between sociotechnical networks and geopolitical practices in any depth. For a start, though, see Mattelart (1994).
3. In their outline of a "new security strategy for America," Carter and Perry (1999) identify what they call "the threat within." This threat is not, however, one that might be posed to American citizens by the American defense establishment and weapons complex. For them, it is the threat of complacency that might lull the U.S. into not spending enough to keep modernizing its military forces.

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