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4

GEOPOLITICS

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The chapter¹ provides a broad overview of the fluctuating connections between the controversial and ambiguous field of modern geopolitics and Russia. Given the pivotal significance of the Russian challenge within the early hypotheses of Mahan and Mackinder, the chapter first explores those distinctive geographical and spatial considerations that helped shape the development of the Russian Empire. The place of geopolitics in the Cold War is then reviewed, including both its policy orientation and the exchanges between the proponents of geopolitical realism and liberal internationalism. In conclusion, the chapter examines the post-Cold War renaissance of geopolitics, reviewing both theoretical developments and policy implications for Russian foreign policy.

Imperial geopolitics: Mahan and Mackinder

Although commentators have employed geopolitical reasoning from the days of Herodotus and Thucydides, the term ‘geopolitics’ was coined in 1899 by the Swedish political scientist, Rudolf Kjellen, at a point when the first fully inter-connected ‘closed’ global international system of states was emerging in which any significant changes in the global balance of power would unavoidably trigger ‘zero-sum game’ struggles between rival great powers (Osterud, 1988; Black, 2009: 107–110).

As continental Europe’s greatest powers, Imperial Germany and the Russian Empire attracted the attention of two of the founders of modern ‘classical’ geopolitics: Rear-Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840–1914) and Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947). Having served two terms as president of the United States Naval War College, Mahan’s studies had focused on the geostrategic importance of sea-power. However, in his geopolitical study, *The Problem of Asia*, published in 1900 (new ed., 2003), he drew attention to the ‘vast uninterrupted mass of the Russia Empire’ within the mega-continent of Eurasia and concluded that Russia would seek to use its land power to secure better access to the sea. In Mahan’s judgement, the containment of Russia (and probably its ally France) would require an extensive naval and land coalition (Mahan, 2003: 20–22, 68, 107–109). By 1910 he no longer saw Imperial Germany as the natural partner in such a coalition to contain Russia, but instead advocated Anglo–American cooperation to contain what he saw as the greater danger of Imperial Germany’s bid for mastery of Europe (Sprouts and Sprouts, 1962: 318–325).

In his famous lecture, ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’, delivered at the Royal Geographical Society in London on 25 January 1904, the British geographer, Halford Mackinder, argued that the ‘Columbian age’ of overseas imperial rivalry between maritime powers such as Britain, France, Spain and the Netherlands was coming to an end. Fearful of the challenge posed to the global status of the British Empire by the rise of large continental powers, which by combining both land power and sea power might prove to be virtually impregnable, Mackinder pointed at the size, central geographical location, resource abundance and even distinctive morphology of Imperial Russia, which he saw to be the current occupant of a critical geographical ‘Pivot Area’ of Eurasia and world politics, surrounded by a vast ‘Inner Marginal Crescent’ which had nurtured the great civilizations of Europe, the Middle East, India and China. (Mackinder, 1904: 436–437; Parker, 1982: 147–158; Hauner, 1992, chapter 6). Subsequently fearful that Germany, or a German-Russian combination, might add ‘oceanic frontage’ to the ‘resources of the great continent’ and come to dominate the Pivot Area, he welcomed the formation in 1907 of the Anglo–French–Russian Triple *Entente* to contain Imperial Germany (Sprouts and Sprouts, 1962: 326–329; Heffernan, 2000: 32–36).

Witnessing the defeat of both Germany and Russia in World War I, in his 1919 book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Mackinder renamed the Pivot Area as the ‘Heartland’ of Eurasia and identified the east-central European states emerging from the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires as constituting an unstable ‘Strategic Annexe’, stretching between the Baltic and the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Judging that these states would remain the geopolitical target of both German and Russian designs, Mackinder urged the victorious Allied powers to support their development, issuing his famous dictum, ‘Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island [Eurasia plus Africa]: Who rules the World-Island commands the World’. And having served as British High Commissioner to South Russia in 1919–20, in a scheme prepared for the British Cabinet he urged the establishment of additional ‘buffer states’ such as White Russia (Belarus), Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Daghestan. Although these latter proposals failed to win the support of a war-weary British government, his observations with respect to east-central Europe uncannily anticipated western inter-war efforts to construct an anti-Soviet eastern *cordon sanitaire*, the reversal of this process was the establishment of a Soviet sphere of influence in the region at the end of World War II, and the post-Cold War geopolitical contests for the allegiance of the east-central European states and the successor states of the ‘post-Soviet space’ (Mackinder, 1919; Parker, 1982: 163–175, 220; Blouet, 1987: 164–177; Sloan, 1999: 30–31; Kaplan, 2012: 68–74; Ashworth, 2014: 141–143).

Mahan and Mackinder have been portrayed as western imperialist commentators, worried by the growing strength of Russia and Germany, whose writings reflect an ‘offensive racism’ and are divorced from the reality of the twenty-first century (Rieber, 1993: 317; Bassin and Aksenov, 2006: 111–112; Hobson, 2012: 43, 124–130; Kaplan, 2012: 69). For English navalists such as Andrew Lambert and Chris Parry, and the Russian international relations analyst, Sergei Karaganov, Mackinder’s expectations that railways would displace the sea-based transport of world trade were misplaced (Lambert, 1995: 194; Karaganov, 2013; Parry, 2014, chapter 2). For Paul Kennedy and John Darwin, however, Mackinder’s identification of the way industrialization was shifting the balance of forces in the world towards the potential of large continental powers with a network of railways able to mobilize vast resources has proved superior to Mahan’s faith in the efficacy of sea power (Kennedy, 1983: 83–85; Darwin, 2007: 19, 300). Whatever the balance of this equation, Mackinder’s ‘Heartland thesis’ remains the most intensively debated grand proposition of geopolitics (Parker, 1982: 159–162; Sloan, 1999; Coones,

2005; Gray, 2005; Hooson, 2005; Kaplan, 2012: 61). In the light of his geopolitical propositions, to what degree did special geographical and spatial factors shape the distinctive pattern of development of what Mackinder termed 'the Russian tenant of the Pivot region' (Mackinder, 1904: 437)?

Russia: the geopolitics of periphery

The rise of Russia

Following the rule of Kievan Rus from the ninth to the thirteenth century, the subsequent two and a half centuries of rule by horsemen of the Mongol-Turkic hordes delayed Russia's development at a time when the remainder of Europe was experiencing the Renaissance. Released from the 'Tatar Yoke' (*Tataro-Mongolskoye Igo*), the rulers of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy confronted a harsh and predatory international environment within a vast flat Eurasian plain lacking natural geographical barriers. Compensating for its geographical vulnerability by means of territorial expansion, Moscow's location proved to be ideally suited as a point from which deep thrusts could be launched against rivals (Wohlforth, 2001: 217; Trenin, 2002: 32–33; Le Donne, 2004: 4). Meeting negligible resistance from nomadic tribes, Russian rule was quickly extended eastward across the relatively empty flatlands of Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, incorporating a third of the Asian landmass into what was by culture and history a European state. Assured of a relatively stable eastern hinterland, Russia was then able to turn west and wage successive wars with the declining Polish-Lithuanian, Swedish, Ottoman and Persian kingdoms (Kennedy, 1988: 120).

By the eighteenth century Imperial Russia had secured ice-free footholds on the Baltic and Black Seas. Although these outlets provided only constrained and limited access to the world's oceans through the 'choke-points' of the Danish and Turkish Straits and the mouth of the Mediterranean, which realistically Russia could never hope to control, by comparison with the sharply different and conflictual regions of Europe, divided from each other by mountain ranges and rivers, Russia's occupation of the Northern Eurasian land-mass made for homogeneity and unity. Russia's vast space (*prostranstvo*) therefore came to be seen as a guarantor of the wider stability of the Eurasian land-mass (Bogaturov, 1993: 32–34). Yet despite the enhanced security provided by its 'strategic solitude' on the periphery of Europe and its interior lines of communication, Russia's speedy mobilization and despatch of adequate forces to points of strategic deployment along its enormous borders in sufficient time proved to be difficult (Kokoshin, 1998: 111). Like other continental empires, Imperial Russia therefore sought to protect its vulnerable western and southern borders by fostering protectorates, spheres of influence, and buffer zones or borderlands in contiguous territories. These privileged positions helped to protect Russia's 'Heartland' from intrusion (Curzon, 1907; Thaden, 1984; Le Donne, 1997; Munkler, 2007).

Following Russia's further annexation of predominantly Muslim territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia through the nineteenth century, an asymmetric 'Great Game' was conducted between the British Empire and the Russian Empire as Whitehall sought to contain and even cut back the enormous territories of its Russian rival. It generated only one great-power war, the so-called 'Crimean War' of 1853–1856, the focus of which was the protracted siege by the combined forces of Britain, France, Turkey and Sardinia, of the great naval bastion of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula, home of Russia's Black Sea fleet (Jelavich, 1974; Gillard, 1977; Hauner, 1992, chapter 5; Lambert, 1995, 2011; Berryman, 2017a).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Russia had acquired some 17 million square kilometres of new territories and 18,000 kilometres of borders over the preceding 300 years, a scale of

expansion which no other state has matched. The Russian Empire therefore found itself the world's largest country and the third largest empire in history. Imperial Russia's vast interior helped it frustrate the invading *Grande Armée* of Napoleon, underpinned its claim to great power status, and was a source of pride and self-identity for many of its peoples. However, military defeat in the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War underlined that territorial size per se was not to be equated with power, especially since the empire had become a huge multinational conglomerate of 170 million, comprising well over 100 different nationalities plus religious minorities. Ruling so diverse a population in an era of growing ethno-nationalism would prove to be an intractable challenge for the authorities in both Imperial Russia and the USSR (Wesson, 1974; Fuller, 1992: 452; Lieven, 2003: 274–287).

Imperial Russia and Imperial Germany: the road to war

Thanks to their joint participation in the partition of the Polish Kingdom, and the containment of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, the post-1815 settlement saw the establishment of the 'Holy Alliance' of the conservative monarchies of Prussia and the Russian and Habsburg Empires. However, in return for Russia's military intervention in support of the Habsburg Empire, crushing the Hungarian Revolt in 1849, Austria 'astonished the world with its ingratitude' by supporting Russia's enemies in the Crimean War, turning St Petersburg firmly against Vienna. As a consequence, thanks to the benevolent neutrality of Russia, in two wars with Austria and France Otto von Bismarck was able to forge a Prussian-dominated united Germany (Lieven, 2015: 26). Concerned to isolate France, apart from establishing the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary in 1879 and widening the agreement to include Italy in the Triple Alliance of 1882, Bismarck established a *Dreikaiserbund* (Three Emperor's League) 1873–1878 and a Three Emperors Alliance 1881–1887 to hold together the three empires of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary. Only in 1890 did disagreements over a German grain tariff and a boycott of Russian bonds precipitate Bismarck's dismissal by the new Kaiser.

In the short term, Berlin's refusal to renew the secret 1887 Reinsurance Treaty with Russia pushed St Petersburg to recognize the geopolitical logic of a security arrangement with republican France, directed exclusively to contain Imperial Germany – a significant breach in the Bismarckian system. By 1894 diplomatic and military agreements were reached between St Petersburg and Paris (Fuller, 1992: 350–360; Schimmelpenninck, 2006: 567). While German power was a source of concern in St Petersburg, fears of the spectacular acceleration of Russian power fuelled consideration within Berlin of preventive war with Russia (and its ally France). It has been suggested that had the opportunity offered by Russia's military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War been seized, Germany almost certainly would have won such a war (Copeland, 2000, chapter 3; Lieven, 2016: 12–17). Nonetheless, critics have argued that a Russo-German military clash was not inevitable and that a shift by Russia away from its traditional alliances with conservative powers on its borders towards the 'fateful alliance' with France was a misstep in empire geopolitics which in 1914 propelled Imperial Russia into an unnecessary and disastrous war (Kennan, 1984; Fuller, 1992: 360; Burbank and Cooper, 2010: 356; Tsygankov, 2012: 89–93).

Soviet-German geopolitics 1917–1947

Brest-Litovsk

Although Imperial Russia's military and economic effort in World War I exceeded many expectations, with the political collapse of the home front in February 1917 and the seizure of

power by the Bolsheviks in October, Russia's military position became unsustainable (Jones, 2002; Lieven, 2002: 286). Confronting the advance of German forces on Petrograd, to buy time for expected revolutionary developments within Germany, in March 1918 Lenin insisted upon the need to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which would require Russia to relinquish all the western territories it had acquired since the seventeenth century. Over the next eight months, 1 million German and Austro-Hungarian troops occupied the former Russian territories of Finland, Poland, the Baltic, Ukrainian and Belorussian provinces, plus Crimea and Georgia. With its grain and coal, Ukraine was Germany's greatest prize. As Andreas Hillgruber emphasizes, 'The Russian recognition of Ukraine's separation exacted at Brest-Litovsk represented the key element in German efforts to keep Russia perpetually subservient' (Hillgruber, 1981: 47). In the event, despite the transfer of one-third of its *Ober-Ost* forces (40 divisions) to the western front, unable to secure victory Germany was forced to relinquish its eastern territories, vindicating, albeit in an unexpected fashion, Lenin's colossal gamble (Kennedy, 1988: 351; Herwig, 2014: 326, 369–374).

The geopolitics of Soviet-German relations

If the grand concepts of Mackinder were overlooked within Imperial Russia, which was developing its own geopolitical traditions, after 1917 his concepts were dismissed on ideological grounds as 'false science' (*lzhenuka*), providing 'a bourgeois reactionary conception which [used] selectively interpreted facts of physical and economic geography for the formation and propagation of the aggressive policies of imperialist states' (Parker, 1982: 148, 184; Hauner, 1992, chapter 7). In Weimar Germany, however, a large school of *Geopolitik* was established at the Institute for Geopolitics in Munich under the direction of Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), a Professor of Geography in the University of Munich. Drawing on Mackinder's 'Heartland thesis', earlier 'organic state' theories of Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolf Kjellen, and inspired by Germany's brief occupation of the Ukraine, Crimea and the Baltic states in 1918, Haushofer's institute sought to rebut the hated 1919 Versailles *Diktat* and shape German geopolitical designs to re-secure *Lebensraum* to the East. Moreover, concluding that the defeat of both Russia and Germany in World War I had enabled the western sea powers to secure their world hegemony, Haushofer looked to the possibility of establishing a 'Heartland' German-Russian-Japanese transcontinental bloc 'from the Elbe to the Amur' which could challenge the Anglo-Saxon sea powers (Parker, 1982: 176–182, 1985: chapter 5; Hauner, 1992, chapter 8; Deudney, 1997: 93–96; Black, 2009: 126–135; Hobson, 2012, chapter 7; Kelly, 2016: 49–52).

Soviet-German relations initially followed the Bismarckian tradition of German-Russian cooperation as trade and secret military cooperation agreements were signed, followed by the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo re-establishing diplomatic relations between Berlin and Moscow. Without abandoning its revolutionary anti-capitalist perspectives, Moscow sought 'peaceful coexistence' with the established international order, stabilizing its borders by negotiating non-aggression and friendship treaties with its neighbours. Following Hitler's accession to power in 1933, although the possibility of closer Soviet-German ties was never completely shelved, Soviet diplomacy initially focused on securing a defensive pact with London and Paris to contain Nazi Germany. Thanks to western anti-Bolshevism and failure to secure the right of passage for Soviet forces to transit the 'buffer states' of Poland or Romania to gain access to Germany, by the summer of 1939 it was clear that this track had failed. Having kept his options open until the very last moment, a cautious but flexible Stalin now abandoned pursuit of collective security and turned to a balance of power strategy to enable the Soviet Union to stand on the periphery and stay out of any forthcoming war. August 1939 therefore saw the signing of the Nazi-Soviet

Non-Aggression Pact, opening the way to the German-Soviet invasion and fourth partition of Poland, thereby facilitating subsequent Nazi expansion westward. However, Germany's swift conquest of most of western Europe in 1940 dramatically reduced the 'breathing space' (*peredyshka*) which the Soviet Union had hoped could be utilized would be available to prepare its western defences. On 22 June 1941, without concluding hostilities with Britain, Hitler unleashed *Operation Barbarossa*, his 'war of annihilation' (*Vernichtungskrieg*), on the Soviet Union. For Moscow, the respite provided by the Non-Aggression Pact had therefore lasted only twenty-two months (Nation, 1992; Kissinger, 1994; Raack, 1995; Roberts, 1995; Weeks, 2002; Tsygankov, 2012, chapters 7, 10; Moorhouse, 2014). Having welcomed Germany's earlier military and economic cooperation with the USSR and the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, following the opening of *Operation Barbarossa* Haushofer now looked to the forging of a German-Russian-Japan bloc by force rather than by alliance (Weigert, 1942; Hauner, 1992: 177; Herwig, 1999).

For John Darwin:

As the German armies tore into Russia and raced across the Ukraine, a huge geopolitical revolution was under way. There was every sign that within a year the Germans would control the Soviet land mass west of the Urals, as well as the Caucasus with its supplies of oil. They would have built an empire on the grandest of scales. They would command what Mackinder had called the 'heartland' and be the dominant power in continental Eurasia, driving Britain (and America) to its maritime fringes and the Outer World beyond.

(Darwin, 2007: 419).

In the event, operating at the end of their extended lines of communication, German armed forces met stubborn resistance from Soviet armed forces, buttressed by a formidable Soviet military-industrial complex located east of the Urals, deep within the 'Heartland' (Hauner, 1992: 194–196). And following the victories of Stalingrad and Kursk, Soviet forces drove west to the heart of Germany, opening the way for the consolidation of a huge new Soviet geopolitical salient in east-central Europe containing 95 million people, more than half the population of the USSR itself, which dwarfed Imperial Russia's post-1815 Polish salient (Kennedy, 1988: 469; Kramer, 1996). With the British withdrawal from India in 1947, the USSR therefore emerged as 'unquestionably the greatest single power in Eurasia with far more capacity to influence events throughout the continent than either the British or Russian governments had possessed in the nineteenth century' (Gillard, 1977: 180).

Cold War geopolitics

The containment consensus

Following America's entry into World War Two, in 1942 a study of *America's Strategy in World Politics* (Spykman, 2007) by Nicholas Spykman (1893–1943) updated Mackinder's Heartland thesis, renaming the vast 'Inner Marginal Crescent' as the 'Rimland' and reversing Mackinder's dictum into: 'Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world'. And drawing on his understanding of Britain's grand strategy of off-shore balancing in relation to the balance of power in Europe, Spykman urged the US to bolster the 'Rimland' states in both Europe and East Asia to maintain a balance of power in post-war Eurasia (Haslam, 2002: 178–181; Spykman, 2007; Ashworth, 2014: 209–213; Bew, 2016: 196).

Notwithstanding the titanic Soviet victory in its 'Great Patriotic War', in the judgement of the American career diplomat and Russia specialist, George Kennan, the ideologically aggressive but dysfunctional Soviet system looked likely to collapse in some ten to fifteen years. In his influential 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs* he therefore advocated a 'long term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies . . . by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy' (X, 1947: 575–576). Concerned to prevent the resources and military-industrial potential of Eurasia passing into the control of a single hostile power, but recognizing that Russia's rulers had always sought to insulate Russia from outside influence by establishing buffer zones along its borders, Kennan argued that the United States should accept the reality of the Soviet sphere of influence in east-central Europe and concentrate on blocking Soviet penetration of the neighbouring 'Rimland' states of Western Europe and Japan (Kaplan, 2012, chapter VI; Kennan, 1967: 246–251). His recommendations accorded closely with the conclusions reached by the policy studies of the Truman administration, and for the next half century US Cold War Grand Strategy was based on the 'containment consensus' – the view that in relation to Eurasia the United States was an island power with inferior resources and that its position would not be secure if the markets and raw materials of Eurasia and the 'Rimland' states fell under the domination of a hostile single power or group of powers (Gaddis, 1982, chapter 2; Layne, 2006; Iseri, 2009; Petersen, 2011, chapter 3).

Pursuing an active military geostrategy, Washington mobilized a global maritime coalition and established a chain of alliances (NATO, CENTO, SEATO) along the Rimland of Eurasia, which together with US air and naval bases, circumscribed the reach of the land fortress of the USSR. In an echo of the earlier Anglo-Russian 'Great Game', the Cold War became a contest between 'the insular *imperium* of the United States and the "Heartland" *imperium* of the Soviet Union . . . for control/denial of control of the Eurasian-African "Rimlands"' (Gray, 1977: 14). By virtue of its strategic isolation in the remote American hemisphere, the United States was seen to pose no direct threat to the security of the Eurasian Rimland states. As an off-shore balancer, the United States was thereby able to offer attractive security guarantees to these Eurasian states. By contrast, the continental geopolitical proximity of the immense landmass of the Soviet Union was perceived to pose a potential security threat to the neighbouring Rimland states (Walt, 1987: 23–24, 277; Levy and Thompson, 2010).

Geopolitics in America and the Soviet Union

Tainted by its connections with the *Geopolitik* of the Third Reich, with the exception of the works of Robert Strausz-Hupe and Saul Cohen, for almost three decades after World War II the academic study of geopolitics in the United States was shunned (Black, 2009: 147–151; Kaplan, 2012: 82–88; Bew, 2016: 193). However, with the spread of Cold War rivalry to the Third World and America's rapprochement with China in the 1970s, President Nixon's German-born National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, began to use geopolitics as a synonym for an unemotional *realpolitik* pursuit of what he termed 'global equilibrium', while studies by the Polish-American scholar, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the English scholar, Colin Gray, and NATO examined the geopolitics of the Cold War (Gray, 1977, 1988; Zoppo and Zorngibe, 1985; Brzezinski, 1986; Haslam, 2002: 162; Black, 2009: 151–158; Bew, 2016: 240–241, chapter 15). By contrast, although the ideological and geostrategic 'Brezhnev Doctrine' provided justification for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, within the Soviet Union geopolitics

was still seen to provide little more than an intellectual rationale for Washington's Cold-War strategy of 'encirclement' of the socialist world (Vigor, 1985; Hauner, 1992, chapter 9; Kolossov and Turovsky, 2002: 143, 163 n. 7).

Post-Cold War geopolitics

International theory and geopolitics in the West

Since the peaceful transition of 1989 seemed to demonstrate the possibility of peaceful change and the superiority of non-realist approaches to international relations, neoliberal international relations scholars argued that in the emerging interdependent globalized post-Cold War world gains through commerce were displacing gains through the acquisition of territory. It was argued that much as nuclear deterrence had diminished the strategic significance of territory in international security, geo-economics had supplanted a backward-looking geopolitics (Richardson, 1993; Rosecrance, 1999; Fettweis, 2003; Grygiel, 2006; Wohlforth, 2006: 265–266; Guzzini, 2012, chapter 1; Jackson and Sorensen, 2016: 103–107). Indeed, the post-modern project of European integration required that member states of the European Union (EU) turn their backs on both geopolitical precepts and the balance-of-power system as an ordering mechanism in Europe (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 361–362; Cooper, 2004). The American liberal-internationalist scholar, Daniel Deudney consequently dismissed geopolitics as a slippery amalgam of the natural and social sciences, a heterogeneous body of insights that had failed to coalesce into a rigorous set of social-scientific propositions, while Charles Clover of the *Financial Times* concluded that 'few modern ideologies are as whimsically all-encompassing, as romantically obscure, as intellectually sloppy, and as likely to start a third world war as the theory of "geopolitics"' (Deudney, 1997; Clover, 1999: 9).

In response to these criticisms, defenders of 'classical' geopolitics argued that, notwithstanding the globalization of economic activity and the emergence of significant transnational and non-state actors, territorially based and defined states still constitute the basic building blocks of the international system. In this view, the perspective provided by geopolitics did not rest simply on the grand reductionist concepts of Mackinder but demonstrated ways in which the exercise of international political power was shaped and limited by geographical and spatial imperatives (Gray, 1996; Owens, 1999; Grygiel, 2006; Walton, 2007, chapter 1). Moreover, providing a focus on the interaction of geographical and political forces in the social construction of geographical space, it was argued that both 'classical' and 'critical' post-modern geopolitics complemented the ideal emphasis of the new social constructivist approach to the study of international relations, recognizing that perceptions of international realities by policymakers and opinion-formers were shaped not just by power political imperatives but also by historically rooted and geographically shaped foreign policy calculations and security identities (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993, chapter 1; Hopf, 2002; Suny, 2007: 35–36; Jackson and Sorensen, 2016, chapter 8. For critiques of critical geopolitics see Kelly, 2006; Guzzini, 2012: 13–16; Kelly, 2016: 55–62). By moving beyond the parsimonious propositions of neo-realist structural theory, geopolitics has therefore helped fill something of a gap, advancing understanding of foreign policymaking, strategic culture and international security (Croft, 2008: 505; Buzan and Hansen, 2009; Lantis and Howlett, 2016).

Geopolitics in Russia

Two years after the termination of the Cold War the self-liquidation of the USSR created a black hole in the very centre of Eurasia. It was as if the geopoliticians' Heartland had been

suddenly yanked from the global map' (Brzezinski, 1997: 87). Thanks to the eruption of ethnic and national rivalries generated by the new geographical configurations arising from the breakup of the national-federal structures of both the USSR and Yugoslavia, Moscow found itself operating within a Eurasian environment 'shot through with geopolitical manoeuvring to a degree unseen at the present stage in any other part of the world' (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 414). Since the new external boundaries of the Russian Federation and many of the fourteen post-Soviet successor states had not been designed to be international boundaries but had been drawn to serve administrative and political functions in the periods of imperial and Soviet rule (Rieber, 2007: 257). The contest for control of Eurasia therefore re-emerged as the great prize of post-Cold War geopolitics (Rieber, 2007, p. 257; Mead, 2014).

Over the next five years, as Russia reduced its military forces from 3 million to 1 million, more than 1 million former Soviet troops, civilian personnel and family members withdrew 1,500 kilometres east from former Warsaw Pact states and Soviet republics, characterized by one RAND analyst as 'one of the most extensive and least appreciated force withdrawals in modern times' (Lambeth, 1995: 94). And much as 12 million Germans found themselves located outside the borders of defeated Germany in 1918; after 1991 25 million Russian nationals were now located outside the borders of the Russian Federation, half of them in Ukraine and the rest in the other thirteen post-Soviet republics. Like Weimar Germany, Russia therefore looked to geopolitics to help explain and articulate its new international identity and provide some guidance as to its national destiny and foreign policy (Erickson, 1999; Goble, 2005; Guzzini, 2012, chapter 3).

Seeking to theorize Russia's political identity and place in the post-Soviet space, since the late 1990s the geopolitical discourse within the Russian Federation has ranged from specialist academic studies, university textbooks and policy-oriented polemics, to poems and geopolitical or military-political novels. Two interrelated and mutually reinforcing discourses on geopolitics and Eurasianism have emerged (Morozova, 2009: 68). In the Yeltsin years it was argued that since Russia could no longer pretend to be a global power with a capacity to exercise significant influence in Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia, if it wished to remain a great power it needed to remain the strategic axis of Eurasia. Pointing up the historical legacy of Imperial Russia and the USSR, Russia's natural resources, hegemonic size and central locational position within continental Eurasia, statist commentators and policy makers such as Sergei Rogov, Andranik Migranyan and Yevgeni Ambartsumov advocated a pragmatic geopolitics, emphasizing the importance of maintaining Russia as a multinational Eurasian great power, while Alexei Bogaturov, one of Russia's leading international relations scholars, concluded that 'henceforth Russia's stabilizing function is naturally converted from a predominantly European one into a properly Eurasian one' (Bogaturov, 1993: 41; Kerr, 1995; Kolosov and Turovsky, 2002; Solovyev, 2004; Bassin and Aksenov, 2006; Zheltov and Zheltov, 2009; Tsygankov, 2016: 69). By contrast, the civilizational geopolitics of Vladimir Tsymbuskii, Gennady Zyuganov and Nikolai Nartov proposed that Russia focus on its development as an autarkic ethno-civilizational 'island' (*ostrov*) within Eurasia. Tsymburski urged that Russia abandon its efforts to incorporate the Caucasus and Central Asia within its geopolitical body, while Kamaludin Gadzhiev advocated new security structures for the region (Zyuganov, 1997; Gadzhiev, 2000; Tsygankov, 2003, 2011; Tsymburskii, 2007; Nartov and Nartov, 2016). Meanwhile 'hard-line' Eurasianists such as Aleksandr Dugin and Aleksei Mitrofanov insisted on the continued land-sea opposition of Atlanticism and Continentalism and advocated a Eurasian continental coalition of Russia, Germany, Iran and possibly Japan (Dugin, 1997, 2011, 2014; Mitrofanov, 1997; Tsygankov, 1998; Laruelle, 2008; Clover, 2016). Dismissing Eurasianism as 'a dead-end: a pretentious neither-nor position [that] erects an unnecessary barrier on the Russian-European

border, while doing nothing to strengthen Russia's position in Asia, or even the greater Middle East', Dmitri Trenin has argued that Russia should stress its European identity and seek to engineer its gradual integration into a Greater Europe (Trenin, 2002: 36, 311). How far have these contrasting geopolitical perspectives helped to shape and guide Russia's post-Cold War foreign policy?

The geopolitics of Russian foreign policy

From Cold War to cold peace: the Yeltsin years 1992–1999

Following a 60 per cent fall in Soviet GDP between 1985–1991, the resignation of Soviet President Gorbachev and the implosion of the USSR in December 1991, it could be expected that the exaggerated expectations of Gorbachev's Western-inspired liberal-institutionalist 'new political thinking' would be abandoned. However, looking to secure substantial Western financial assistance and a swift integration of Russia into Western institutions, President Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, judged that they had little option but to follow the Western-oriented accommodationist grand strategy of Gorbachev while proposing that the security governance of a 'Greater Europe' be based on the non-bloc pan-European Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), established by the 1975 Helsinki Accords. In the event, despite assurances by some Western policymakers of the desirability of developing such pan-European security institutions, for both the Bush and Clinton administrations the post-Cold War enlargement of NATO was seen to provide the only reliable geostrategic instrument to deter a 're-imperializing' Russia, block any attempts by the EU to serve as the primary security actor in Europe, and thereby enable the United States to maintain its preponderant influence in Europe (Layne, 2006, chapter 5; Shiffrinson, 2016). As Henry Kissinger emphasized in 1994:

America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia's two principal spheres – Europe or Asia – remains a good definition of strategic danger for America . . . [and] . . . Russia, regardless of who governs, sits astride the territory Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical heartland.

(Kissinger, 1994: 813–814)

For his part, mindful of the central geographic position and size of Germany, and echoing Mackinder's concerns as to its hegemonic potential, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that provided Germany's interests remained congruent with or sublimated within the EU or NATO, Europe could continue to serve as the Eurasian bridgehead for US power (Brzezinski, 1997: 42, 73–74, 86).

With the crumbling of the 'Atlanticist' strategy, in December 1995 Kozyrev was dismissed and over the next four years a 'Eurasianist' geopolitical consensus prevailed under Russian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov. Although reliance on geopolitics to the detriment of geo-economics contributed to the failure of his grand design of a tripolar partnership of Russia with India and China, unable to block NATO enlargement, Primakov was nonetheless able to secure the signing in 1997 of the *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, which provided assurances (albeit carefully qualified) that NATO had no immediate intention of deploying nuclear weapons or permanently stationing substantial combat forces on the territory of new NATO member states. In March 1999 Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary entered NATO against the backdrop of a three-month bombardment of Russia's 'ally' Serbia by 1,200 NATO aircraft, an

operation less about relieving the suffering of the Albanian people and more about Washington demonstrating the ability of NATO to conduct a successful operation without the authorization of the UN Security Council. On New Year's Eve 1999, Acting President Vladimir Putin assumed power (Trenin, 2002: 308; Wohlforth, 2006: 271–278; Berryman, 2009: 167–169, 2017b: 168–170; Tsygankov, 2016: 27–28, 127–130).

From cold peace to a new Cold War? The Putin years 2000–2017

Although Moscow had earlier warned that NATO membership for the Baltic states might trigger Russia's deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad, March 2004 saw the 'big bang' entry into NATO of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, followed in May by the even more extensive enlargement of the EU. Having witnessed the limits of Primakov's 'Eurasianist' foreign policy, Putin had adopted a centrist course of pragmatic realism, looking to preserve Russia's territorial integrity and enhance its commanding presence within the post-Soviet space (Morozova, 2009; Karaganov, 2013). However, recognizing that Russia's international position was still weak, he chose not to pick a fight he could only lose. NATO's military infrastructure accordingly moved east along the Baltic Sea to the very border with Russia within 100 miles of Russia's second city of St Petersburg, enclosing Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad. Meanwhile the entry to NATO and the EU of Romania and Bulgaria ensured that by 2007 both institutions now had an enhanced presence in the Black Sea region. In view of the eastward extension of the spheres of influence of these two major Western institutions, from which Russia was firmly excluded, Moscow concluded that prospects for the construction of some form of a Euro-Russian confederacy of 'Greater Europe' from Lisbon to Vladivostok were now remote. Russia was once more consigned to geopolitical isolation on the periphery of Europe (Berryman, 2009: 169–173; Yost, 2014: 227–229).

Alarmed by what it perceived to be the role of the United States in the 'Colour' revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), and the efforts (albeit unsuccessful) of the United States to persuade its European partners to offer NATO membership to Ukraine and Georgia at the April 2008 Bucharest NATO summit, the rash authorization by Georgian President, Mikheil Sakaashvili, of a military attack on South Ossetia in August 2008 offered Moscow the opportunity to utilize its locally superior military assets to block Georgia's membership of NATO. At the conclusion of a strictly limited five-week Russo-Georgian war, Moscow recognized the independence of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and two Russian military brigades were deployed in these territories, together with units of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Abkhazian port of Ochamchira (Berryman, 2011: 233–239; Bugajski and Assenova, 2016: 326–331). With Georgia's prospects of entry to NATO remote, Ukraine now became the focus of attention.

Given Berlin's efforts in both world wars to secure Ukraine as a vital counter-weight to Russia, in the fluid post-Cold War geopolitical environment Ukraine once more came to be seen as a potential 'pivot state' on the Eurasian chessboard – its status derived not just from the sensitive strategic location of its 1,925 kilometre land border with Russia, only a few hundred miles from Moscow, but from the deep internal divisions within Ukraine between communities enjoying different civilizational identities. In view of the evident determination of the Washington and Ukrainian political elites to override popular opposition and lever Ukraine into NATO, Moscow began to consider the possibility of supporting Crimean irredentism and to play with ideas of a major geopolitical redesign of the northern Black Sea region in which Russian-majority territories in eastern and southern Ukraine, extending beyond Crimea and Odessa to include even Transnistria, would secede from Ukraine and Romania (Trenin, 2011: 46, 100;

Berryman, 2015: 186, 197–201; Tsygankov, 2015: 10–12). Although the 2010 announcement by the new government of President Yanukovich that Ukraine would no longer seek NATO membership restored a measure of equilibrium, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative of the EU to advance its ‘civilizational choice’ into its ‘shared neighbourhood’ with Russia by offering Association Agreements (AA), was seen by Moscow to be another zero-sum effort to advance the West’s sphere of influence, this time geo-economic and piously geo-ideational in character (Charap and Colton, 2017: 29–30, 95–100).

Caught between Brussels and Moscow, the rejection by Yanukovich of the AA in November 2013 triggered protests which climaxed in an armed coup in Kyiv which swept away the EU-brokered crisis settlement of 21 February 2014 and ousted elected President Yanukovich. Worried that far-right elements exercising significant control of security structures within the new authorities in Kyiv might in short order terminate Russia’s basing agreements in Crimea and apply for NATO membership, buttressed by a hastily organized referendum in the Crimean peninsula, Putin authorized swift pre-emptive armed intervention to secure Crimea and Sevastopol, and subsequently provided covert military support to deny Kyiv the ability to smash the separatist revolt by the 8 million-strong largely Russian population of the Donbas (Putin, 2014; Berryman 2015: 200–203; Tsygankov, 2015: 14–15). For liberal Western observers it was ‘nonsense to think that Moscow had no viable alternatives to the use of force; none was seriously tried after the fall of Yanukovich’, while the Kremlin’s allegations that NATO aimed to bring Ukraine into its fold was ‘a self-serving falsehood’, but one which was ‘nevertheless a reality to the Russian leadership’ (Merry, 2016: 42–43; Lo, 2015: 20; Nixey, 2015: 35). For realists, by contrast, Putin’s response was not an expression of Russian expansionism or imperial nostalgia but rather reflected the unsurprising determination of a great power to take pre-emptive actions as it might deem necessary to deny potentially hostile powers the discretionary availability of military and naval facilities on territory geopolitically proximate to its borders – in the case of the Crimea the vital naval base of Sevastopol and the other 189 military bases on the peninsula (Ruhl, 1997; Berryman, 2011: 239, 2017a: 63; Marshall, 2015: 13–18). As the realist scholar, John Mearsheimer, put it, ‘Washington may not like Moscow’s position, but it should understand the logic behind it. This is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory’ (Mearsheimer, 2014: 82).

Generating security concerns among the sixteen states which enjoy common borders with the Russian Federation, Russia’s open challenge to the post-Cold War and post-Soviet settlement in Europe has triggered something of a ‘New Cold War.’ NATO has authorized rotational, and thereby quasi-permanent, troop reinforcements, heavy weapons deployments, and enhanced military exercises in those eastern member states close to or on the borders of Russia, while NATO naval and air forces in the Baltic and Black Seas have been reinforced. In response, new divisions have been added to Russia’s Western and Southern Military Districts, the tempo of large-scale ‘snap’ military exercises has been stepped up and *Iskander-M* short range surface-to-surface ballistic missile platforms, S-400 *Triumph* anti-aircraft systems and K-300 *Bastion-P* coastal defence anti-ship cruise missiles have been deployed to create Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) bastions in the Crimea, the Kaliningrad region and the Arctic, while the Russian air force has undertaken increasingly assertive reconnaissance patrols in the Baltic, Black and North Seas and the Arctic. The dangers posed by these new military postures and exercises of NATO and Russian forces are therefore clear (Trenin, 2016a; Berryman, 2017a, 2017b). And within the context of a highly charged media war, Western accusations of the threat to Europe posed by Russia’s ‘neo-imperialist geopolitical project’ have been met with Kremlin suggestions that economic sanctions are part of a Western geo-economic strategy to weaken Russia and prepare the way for regime change and possibly even the break-up of the Russian Federation (Van

Herpen, 2014; Tsygankov, 2015: 16–21; Bugajski and Assenova, 2016: 4–10; Legvold, 2016: 118–119; Trenin, 2016b, chapter 1). What then are the prospects for Russia and Eurasian security following the Ukraine crisis, and what judgements can be reached as to the worth of the notoriously ambiguous literature of geopolitics?

Conclusions

Since Europe's post-Cold War security architecture has been built on the foundations of two institutions – the EU and NATO – which do not include Russia, it has been recognized that, unlike the peaceful incorporation of France into the Concert of Europe after 1815 or the successful re-integration of Germany and Japan into the international community after 1945, the treatment of Russia at the end of the Cold War has represented something of a missed opportunity (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2009–10; Menon and Rumer, 2015: xix, 162). It is therefore suggested that a new European security system is required with Russia and Ukraine as key players (Tsygankov, 2015: 21). However, building on the 'Normandy format' of Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine responsible for the political management of the Ukraine crisis, a Concert-style framework for conflict resolution by regional powers has been proposed, together with suggestions of a wider Eurasian security framework embracing the EU, OSCE, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and China's 'One Belt One Road' (Trenin, 2016b: 104–110; Berryman 2017b: 179–181). Since prospects for the construction of any such new security arrangements are remote, it has been suggested that Georgian and Ukrainian membership of the EU but not NATO may provide a geopolitically sensitive way forward (Berryman, 2011: 239–240; Kissinger, 2014; Lo, 2015: 163; Wolff, 2015: 1117–1121).

Thanks to the economic sanctions of the US, EU and some other states, and the reciprocal Russian economic sanctions, the volume of EU-Russia trade and Russia's trade with Ukraine has dropped by more than half, and China has been able to gain wider access to Russian energy, other natural resources and military technology and is now Russia's biggest trading partner. Arguing that Russia has the potential to retain its civilizational attachment to Europe but economically attach itself more fully to East Asia, Sergei Karaganov has urged that Russia look to turn itself from a peripheral European state into a great Asian-Pacific Eurasian one, constructing a Greater-Eurasia partnership open to Europe (Kaplan, 2012: 179; Bugajski and Assenova, 2016, chapter 6; Trenin, 2016b: 65–68; Gabuev, 2017; Karaganov, 2017). While Beijing currently displays no wish to undertake the role of security manager in Inner Eurasia, in the longer term it is possible that enjoying unimpeded access to the world's oceans and with substantial human and natural resources, China may supplant Russia as the new geopolitical 'Pivot' in Eurasia. Although there are those in Washington who look to the possibility of US-Chinese security management of eastern Eurasia, so long as the United States pursues Mackinder's geopolitical imperative of denying a single power or combination of powers preponderance over the entire Eurasian land mass, a new contest between China and the United States for mastery of Eurasia can be expected. In such a circumstance, Russia may align with China or look to assume the role of a balancer (Karaganov, 2013; cf. Trenin, 2014).

With respect to the recent 'renaissance' of geopolitics within both academia and the media, while providing a corrective to the claims of post-modern globalism, the validity and relevance of the grand propositions of Mackinder are still contested, while the grandiose claims of 'hard line' Eurasianism have likewise failed to convince (Kortunov, 2015). However, a more policy-oriented variant of neoclassical geopolitics has suggested that the size, topography, resource endowments, and spatial and strategic locations of states can influence, but not determine, national politics, international relations and grand strategy (Guzzini, 2012: 70; Kelly, 2016:

23, 167; Ortmann and Whittaker, 2016; Youngs, 2017: 21–25, 34). Employed as ‘strategic realism with attention to geography’ or ‘standard-issue *realpolitik* with special attention to attaining influence over particular countries or areas’, such a geopolitical lens can continue to provide useful insights into contemporary international relations and Russian foreign policy (Deudney, 2000: 100; Charap and Colton, 2017: 29).

Note

1 The chapter builds on Berryman 2012.

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