Geopolitics and discourse

Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy

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ABSTRACT. This paper argues for the re-conceptualization of geopolitics using the concept of discourse. Geopolitics is defined as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics and represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas. Four theses explicating this re-conceptualization are outlined including the distinction between 'formal' and 'practical' geopolitics. These arguments are illustrated by a general discussion of practical geopolitical reasoning in US foreign policy which includes an analysis of George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' and 'Mr X' article representations of the USSR. The irony of such practical geopolitical representations of place is that they necessitate the abrogation of genuine geographical knowledge about the diversity and complexity of places as social entities. Geopolitical reasoning, it is concluded, ironically works by being anti-geographical.

The Cold War, Mary Kaldor recently noted, has always been a discourse, a conflict of words, 'capitalism' *versus* 'socialism' (Kaldor, 1990). Noting how Eastern Europeans always emphasize the power of words, Kaldor adds that the way we describe the world, the words we use, shape how we see the world and how we decide to act. Descriptions of the world involve geographical knowledge and Cold War discourse has had a regularized set of geographical descriptions by which it represented international politics in the post-war period. The simple story of a great struggle between a democratic 'West' against a formidable and expansionist East has been the most influential and durable geopolitical script of this period. This story, which today appears outdated, was a story which played itself out not in Central Europe but in exotic 'Third-World' locations, from the sands of the Ogaden in the Horn of Africa, to the mountains of El Salvador, the jungles of Vietnam and the valleys of Afghanistan. Of course, the plot was not always a simple one. It has been complex and nuanced, making the post-war world a dynamic, dramatic and sometimes

ironic one—ironies such as Cuban troops guarding Gulf Oil facilities against black UNITA forces supported by a racist South African government. Yet the story was a compelling one which brought huge military-industrial complexes into existence on both sides of the 'East–West' divide and rigidly disciplined the possibilities for alternative political practices throughout the world. All regional conflicts, up until very recently, were reduced to its terms and its logic. Now with this story's unravelling and its geography blurring it is time to ask how did the Cold War in its geopolitical guise come into existence and work?

This paper is not an attempt directly to answer such questions. Rather it attempts to establish a conceptual basis for answering them. It seeks to outline a re-conceptualization of geopolitics in terms of discourse and apply this to the general case of American foreign policy. Geopolitics, some will argue, is, first and foremost, about *practice* and not discourse; it is about actions taken against other powers, about invasions, battles and the deployment of military force. Such practice is certainly geopolitical but it is only through discourse that the building up of a navy or the decision to invade a foreign country is made meaningful and justified. It is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful. How we understand and constitute our social world is through the socially structured use of language (Franck and Weisband, 1971; Todorov, 1984). Political speeches and the like afford us a means of recovering the self-understandings of influential actors in world politics. They help us understand the social construction of worlds and the role of geographical knowledge in that social construction.

The paper is organized into two parts. The first part attempts to sketch a theory of geopolitics by employing the concept of discourse. Four suggestive theses on the implications of conceptualizing geopolitics in discursive terms are briefly outlined. The second part addresses the question of American geopolitics and provides an account of some consistent features of the practical geopolitical reasoning by which American foreign policy has sought to write a geography of international politics. This latter part involves a detailed analysis of two of the most famous texts of the origins of the Cold War: George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' of 1946 and his 'Mr X' article in 1947. The irony of these influential geopolitical representations of the USSR is that they were not concrete geographical representations but overdetermined and ahistorical abstractions. It is the anti-geographical quality of geopolitical reasoning that this paper seeks to illustrate.

Geopolitics and discourse

Geopolitics, as many have noted, is a term which is notoriously difficult to define (Kristof, 1960). In conventional academic understanding geopolitics concerns the geography of international politics, particularly the relationship between the physical environment (location, resources, territory, etc.) and the conduct of foreign policy (Sprout and Sprout, 1960). Within the geopolitical tradition the term has a more precise history and meaning. A consistent historical feature of geopolitical writing, from its origins in the late nineteenth century to its modern use by Colin Gray and others, is the claim that geopolitics is a foil to idealism, ideology and human will. This claim is a long-standing one in the geopolitical tradition which from the beginning was opposed to the proposition that great leaders and human will alone determine the course of history, politics and society. Rather, it was the natural environment and the geographical setting of a state which exercised the greatest influence on its destiny (Ratzel, 1969; Mackinder, 1890). Karl Haushofer argued that the study of *Geopolitik* demonstrated the 'dependence of all political events on the enduring

conditions of the physical environment' (Bassin, 1987: 120). In a 1931 radio address he remarked:

> ... geopolitics takes the place of political passion and development dictated by natural law reshapes the work of the arbitrary transgression of human will. The natural world, beaten back in vain with sword or pitchfork, irrepressibly reasserts itself in the face of the earth. This is geopolitics! (Haushofer translated in Bassin, 1987: 120).

By its own understandings and terms geopolitics is taken to be a domain of hard truths, material realities and irrepressible natural facts. Geopoliticians have traded on the supposed objective materialism of geopolitical analysis. According to Gray (1988: 93) 'geopolitical analysis is impartial as between one or another political system or philosophy'. It addresses the base of international politics, the permanent geopolitical realities around which the play of events in international politics unfolds. These geopolitical realities are held to be durable, physical determinants of foreign policy. Geography, in such a scheme, is held to be a non-discursive phenomenon: it is separate from the social, political and ideological dimensions of international politics.

The great irony of geopolitical writing, however, is that it was always a highly ideological and deeply politicized form of analysis. Geopolitical theory from Ratzel to Mackinder, Haushofer to Bowman, Spykman to Kissinger was never an objective and disinterested activity but an organic part of the political philosophy and ambitions of these very public intellectuals. While the forms of geopolitical writing have varied among these and other authors, the practice of producing geopolitical theory has a common theme: the production of knowledge to aid the practice of statecraft and further the power of the state.

Within political geography, the geopolitical tradition has long been opposed by a tradition of resistance to such reasoning. A central problem that has dogged such resistance is its lack of a coherent and comprehensive theory of geopolitical writing and its relationship to the broader spatial practices that characterize the operation of international politics. This paper proposes such a theory by re-conceptualizing the conventional meaning of geopolitics using the concept of discourse. Our foundational premise is the contention that geography is a social and historical discourse which is always intimately bound up with questions of politics and ideology (Ó Tuathail, 1989). Geography is never a natural, non-discursive phenomenon which is separate from ideology and outside politics. Rather, geography as a discourse is a form of power/knowledge itself (Foucault, 1980; Ó Tuathail, 1989).

Geopolitics, we wish to suggest, should be critically re-conceptualized as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas. In our understanding, the study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states. This definition needs careful explication.

The notion of discourse has become an important object of investigation in contemporary critical social science, particularly that which draws inspiration from the writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (MacDonell, 1986). Within the discipline of international relations, there has been a series of attempts to incorporate the notion of discourse into the study of the practices of international politics (Alker and Sylvan, 1986; Ashley, 1987; Shapiro, 1988; Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989). Dalby (1988, 1990a, 1990b) and Ó Tuathail (1989) have attempted to extend the concept into political geography. Discourses are best conceptualized as sets of capabilities people have, as sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world

and their activities. It is NOT simply speech or written statements but the rules by which verbal speech and written statements are made meaningful. Discourses enable one to write, speak, listen and act meaningfully. They are a set of capabilities, an ensemble of rules by which readers/listeners and speakers/audiences are able to take what they hear and read and construct it into an organized meaningful whole. Alker and Sylvan (1986) articulate the distinction this way:

> As backgrounds, discourses must be distinguished from the verbal productions which readers or listeners piece together. As we prefer to use the term people do not read or listen to a discourse: rather, they employ a discourse or discourses in the processes of reading or listening to a verbal production. Discourses do not present themselves as such; what we observe are people and verbal productions.

Discourses, like grammars, have a virtual and not an actual existence. They are not overarching constructs in the way that 'structures' are sometimes represented. Rather, they are real sets of capabilities whose existence we infer from their realizations in activities, texts and speeches. Neither are they absolutely deterministic. Discourses enable. One can view these capabilities or rules as permitting a certain bounded field of possibilities and reasoning as the process by which certain possibilities are actualized. The various actualizations of possibilities have consequences for the further reproduction and transformation of discourse. The actualization of one possibility closes off previously existent possibilities and simultaneously opens up a new series of somewhat different possibilities. Discourses are never static but are constantly mutating and being modified by human practice. The study of geopolitics in discursive terms, therefore, is the study of the socio-cultural resources and rules by which geographies of international politics get written.[1]

The notion of 'intellectuals of statecraft' refers to a whole community of state bureaucrats, leaders, foreign-policy experts and advisors throughout the world who comment upon, influence and conduct the activities of statecraft. Ever since the development of the modern state system in the sixteenth century there has been a community of intellectuals of statecraft. Up until the twentieth century this community was rather small and restricted, with most intellectuals also being practitioners of statecraft. In the twentieth century, however, this community has become quite extensive and internally specialized. Within the larger states at least, one can differentiate between types of intellectuals of statecraft on the basis of their institutional setting and style of reasoning. Within civil society there are 'defense intellectuals' associated with particular defense contractors and weapons systems. There is also a specialized community of security intellectuals in various public think-tanks (e.g. the RAND Corporation, the Hoover Institute, the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies) who write and comment upon international affairs and strategy (Cockburn, 1987; Dalby, 1990b). One finds a different form of intellectualizing from public intellectuals of statecraft such as Henry Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzezinski who, as former top governmental officials, command a wide audience for their opinions in national newspapers and foreign-policy journals. Within political society itself there are different gradations amongst the foreign-policy community from those who design, articulate and order foreign policy from the top to those actually charged with implementing particular foreign policies and practicing statecraft (whether diplomatic or military) on a daily basis. All can claim to be intellectuals of statecraft for they are constantly engaged in reasoning about statecraft though all may not have the function of intellectuals in the conventional sense, but rather in the sense of Gramsci's 'organic' intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971).

We wish to propose four theses which follow from our preliminary observations on reasoning processes and intellectuals of statecraft. The first of these is that the study of geopolitics as we have defined it involves the *comprehensive* study of statecraft as a set of social practices. Geopolitics is not a discrete and relatively contained activity confined only to a small group of 'wise men' who speak in the language of classical geopolitics. Simply to describe a foreign-policy problem is to engage in geopolitics, for one is implicitly and tacitly normalizing a particular world. One could describe geopolitical reasoning as the creation of the backdrop or setting upon which 'international politics' takes place but such would be a simplistic view. The creation of such a setting is itself part of world politics. This setting itself is more than a single backdrop but an active component part of the drama of world politics. To designate a place is not simply to define a location or setting. It is to open up a field of possible taxonomies and trigger a series of narratives, subjects and appropriate foreign-policy responses. Merely to designate an area as 'Islamic' is to designate an implicit foreign policy (Said, 1978, 1981). Simply to describe a different or indeed the same place as 'Western' (e.g. Egypt) is silently to operationalize a competing set of foreign-policy operators. Geopolitical reasoning begins at a very simple level and is a pervasive part of the practice of international politics. It is an innately political process of representation by which the intellectuals of statecraft designate a world and 'fill' it with certain dramas, subjects, histories and dilemmas. All statespersons engage in the practice; it is one of the norms of the world political community.

Our second thesis is that most geopolitical reasoning in world politics is of a practical and not a formal type. Practical geopolitical reasoning is reasoning by means of consensual and unremarkable assumptions about places and their particular identities. This is the reasoning of practitioners of statecraft, of statespersons, politicians and military commanders. This is to be contrasted with the formal geopolitical reasoning of strategic thinkers and public intellectuals (such as those found in the 'geopolitical tradition') who work in civil society and produce a highly codified system of ideas and principles to guide the conduct of statecraft. The latter forms of knowledge tend to have highly formalized rules of statement, description and debate. By contrast, practical geopolitical reasoning tends to be of a common-sense type which relies on the narratives and binary distinctions found in societal mythologies. In the case of colonial discourse there are contrasts between white and non-white, civilized and backward, Western and non-Western, adult and child. The operation of such distinctions in European foreign policy during the age of empire is well known (Kiernan, 1969; Gates, 1985). US foreign policy towards the Philippines and Latin America during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is also replete with such distinctions (Black, 1988; Hunt, 1987; Karnow, 1989). In Cold War discourse the contrast was, as Truman codified it in his famous Truman Doctrine statement of March 1947, between a way of life based upon the will of the majority and distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion and freedom from political oppression *versus* a way of life based on the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. This latter way of life relied upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections and the suppression of personal freedoms. Such were the criteria by which places were to be judged and spatially divided into different geographical camps in the post-war period.

Our third thesis is that the study of geopolitical reasoning necessitates studying the production of geographical knowledge within a particular state and throughout the modern world-system. Geographical knowledge is produced at a multiplicity of different sites throughout not only the nation-state, but the world political community. From the

classroom to the living-room, the newspaper office to the film studio, the pulpit to the presidential office, geographical knowledge about a world is being produced, reproduced and modified. The challenge for the student of geopolitics is to understand how geographical knowledge is transformed into the reductive geopolitical reasoning of intellectuals of statecraft. How are places reduced to security commodities, to geographical abstractions which need to be 'domesticated', controlled, invaded or bombed rather than understood in their complex reality? How, for example, did Truman metamorphose the situation in Greece in March 1947—it was the site of a complex civil war at the time—into the Manichean terms of the Truman Doctrine? The answer we suspect is rather ironic given the common-sense meaning of geography as 'place facts': geopolitical reasoning works by the active suppression of the complex geographical reality of places in favor of controllable geopolitical abstractions.

Our fourth thesis concerns the operation of geopolitical reasoning within the context of the modern world-system. Throughout the history of the modern world-system, intellectuals of statecraft from core states—particularly those states which are competing for hegemony—have disproportionate influence and power over how international political space is represented. A hegemonic world power, such as the United States in the immediate post-war period, is by definition a 'rule-writer' for the world community. Concomitant with its material power is the power to represent world politics in certain ways. Those in power within the institutions of the hegemonic state become the deans of world politics, the administrators, regulators and geographers of international affairs. Their power is a power to constitute the terms of geopolitical world order, an ordering of international space which defines the central drama of international politics in particularistic ways. Thus not only can they represent in their own terms particular regional conflicts, whose causes may be quite localized (e.g. the Greek civil war), but they can help create conditions whereby peripheral and semi-peripheral states actively adopt and use the geopolitical reasoning of the hegemon. Examples of this range from the institutionalization of laws to suppress 'Communism' in certain states (even though the state may not have an organized Communist movement; the laws are simply ways to suppress a broad range of dissent; e.g. the case of El Salvador) to the slavish parroting of approved Cold War discourse in international organizations and forums.

Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy

Given our re-conceptualization of geopolitics, any analysis of American geopolitics must necessarily be more than an analysis of the formal geopolitical reasoning of a series of 'wise men' of strategy (Mahan, Spykman, Kissinger and others). American geopolitics involves the study of the different historical means by which US intellectuals of statecraft have spatialized international politics and represented it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas. Such is obviously a vast undertaking and we wish to make but three general observations on the contours of American geopolitical reasoning. Before doing so, however, it is important to note two factors about the American case. First, we must acknowledge the key role the Presidency plays in the assemblage of meaning about international politics within the United States (and internationally since the US became a world power). In ethnographic terms, the US President is the chief *bricoleur* of American political life, a combination of storyteller and tribal shaman. One of the great powers of the Presidency, invested by the sanctity, history and rituals associated with the institution—the fact that the media take their primary discursive cues from the White House—is the power to describe, represent, interpret and

appropriate. It is a formidable power but not an absolute power for the art of description and appropriation (e.g. President Reagan's representation of the Nicaraguan *contras* as the 'moral equivalents of the founding fathers') must have resonances with the Congress, the established media and the American public. The generation of such resonances often requires the repetition and re-cycling of certain themes and images even though the socio-historical context of their use may have changed dramatically. One has the attempted production of continuity by the incorporation of 'strategic terms' (Turton, 1984), 'key metaphors' (Crocker, 1977) and 'key symbols' (Herzfeld, 1982) into geopolitical reasoning. Behind all of these is the assumption of a power of appropriateness in the use of certain relatively fixed terms and phrases (Parkin, 1978).

Secondly, we must recognize that American involvement with world politics has followed a distinctive cultural logic or set of presuppositions and orientations, what Gramsci called 'Americanismo' (De Grazia, 1984–85). In particular, economic freedom— in the form of 'free' business activity and the political conditions necessary for this—has been a central element in American culture. This has given rise to an attempt to reconstruct foreign places in an American image. US foreign-policy experiences with Mexico, China, Central America, the Caribbean and the Philippines all bear witness to this fundamental feature of US foreign policy (Agnew, 1983; Karnow, 1989).

The first of our three observations on practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy is that representations of 'America' as a place are pervasively mythological. 'America' is a place which is at once real, material and bounded (a territory with quiddity) yet also a mythological, imaginary and universal ideal with no specific spatial bounds. Ever since early modern times, North America and the Caribbean have had the transgressive aura of a place 'beyond the line', as Dunn (1972: ch. 1) terms it, where might made right and the European treaties did not apply. By its own lore, the origins of the country are mythic and its location divine. In his famous pamphlet *Common Sense*, written in 1776 in support of the American rebellion, Thomas Paine wrote:

> This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster ... Everything that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries 'TIS TIME TO PART'. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America, is a strong and natural proof, that the authority of the one, over the other, was never the design of Heaven. The time likewise at which the continent was discovered, adds weight to the argument, and the manner in which it was peopled encreases [*sic*] the force of it. The reformation was preceded by the discovery of America, as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety. (Paine, 1969: 39, 40–41).

The dramatic hyperbole of Paine's geopolitical reasoning is part of the mythological origins of the American state. In the popular imagination 'America' was 'discovered'; it was a new, empty, pristine place, a New World. Despite the obvious inadequacies of this view, such an imaginary geography can still be found in contemporary American political culture and in the articulation of US foreign policy. Speaking over 210 years later on 2 February 1988 in an address to the nation supporting the Nicaraguan *contras*, President Ronald Reagan remarked:

> My friends, I have often expressed my belief that the Almighty had a reason for placing this great and good land, the 'New World', here between two vast oceans. Protected by the seas, we have enjoyed the blessings of peace—free for almost two centuries now from the tragedy of foreign aggression on our mainland. Help

us to keep that precious gift secure. Help us to win support for those who struggle for the same freedoms we hold dear. In doing so, we will not just be helping them; we will be helping ourselves, our children, and all the peoples of the world. We will be demonstrating that America is still a beacon of hope, still a light unto the nations. Yes, a great opportunity to show that hope still burns bright in this land and over our continent, casting a glow across centuries, still guiding missions—to a future of peace and freedom. (Reagan, 1988: 35).

The continuity between the two texts is evidence of the durability of particular narratives in American political discourse. It is a structuralist fallacy to think of this narrative as having a 'deep structure' or a primordial set of binary oppositions—e.g., Old World : New World, despotism/totalitarianism : freedom—to which everything else can be reduced. As a discourse its existence is virtual not actual and is assembled and re-assembled differently by presidents and other intellectuals of statecraft. Such discourse freely fuses fact with fiction and reality with the imaginary to produce a reasoning where neither is distinguishable from the other.[2] Both narratives read like primitive ethnographic tales: the origins of a tribe from the wanderings of persecuted members of other tribes, the flight from persecution, the chosen land, divine guidance, blessings, precious gifts, beacons and monsters. America's first leaders are known even today in American political culture as the 'founding fathers'.

Secondly, there is a tension between a universal omnipresent image of 'America' and a different spatially-bounded image of the place. On one hand, American discourse consistently plays upon the unique geographical location of 'America' yet simultaneously asserts that the principles of this 'New World' are universal and not spatially confined there. The geography evoked in the American Declaration of Independence was not continental or hemispheral but universal. Its concern was with 'the earth', the 'Laws of Nature and of Nature's God', and all of 'mankind'. In this universalist vision, 'America' is positioned as being equivalent with the strivings of a universal human nature. 'The cause of America', Paine (1969: 23) proclaimed, 'is in a great measure the cause of all mankind'. The freedoms it struggles for are, in Reagan's terms, the freedoms desired by 'all the peoples of the world'. 'America' is at once a territorially-defined state and a universal ideal, a place on the North American continent and a mythical homeland of freedom.

For the late eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, the spatially-bounded sense of 'America' was the one that predominated in US foreign-policy rhetoric. Even though the United States had closer economic, cultural and political ties with Europe than any other place, its foreign-policy rhetoric defined it as a separate and distinct sphere. 'Europe', George Washington observed in his farewell address (1796), 'has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns' (Richardson, 1905, vol. I: 214). Washington's geopolitical reasoning was largely a negative one which defined the American sphere as extra-European (like Persia and Turkey) rather than a system complete and to itself. For others, notably Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, there was a distinct 'American system'. Jefferson, writing in 1813 to the geographer Alexander von Humboldt on the five Spanish-American colonies in rebellion (which the US recognized in 1822; earlier recognition moves were defeated), noted:

> But in whatever government they end, they will be *American* governments, no longer to be involved in the never-ceasing broils of Europe. The European nations constitute a separate division of the globe; their localities make them a part of a distinct system; they have a set of interests of their own in which it is our business never to engage ourselves. America has a hemisphere to itself. It must

have its separate system of interests; which must not be subordinated to those of Europe. (Quoted in Whitaker, 1954: 29).

The 'American system' was not, however, to be a multi-lateralist, pan-American affair or a 'counterpose' to the Holy Alliance as Henry Clay had suggested in 1821. John Quincy Adams, who actively opposed such a policy, did not advocate isolationism so much as oppose any multi-lateral moves on the US's part (in concert with Great Britain or the South American republics). His position was unilateralist not isolationist. In 1820 he wrote to President Monroe:

> As to an American system, we have it; we constitute the whole of it; there is no community of interests or of principles between North and South America. Mr. Torres and Bolivar and O'Higgins talk about an American system as much as the Abbé Correa, but there is no basis for any such system. (Quoted in Bemis, 1945: 367).

The unilateral declaration of what later became known as the Monroe Doctrine affirmed such a position, stating that the political system of the European powers is different from that of America. Therefore, the United States would 'consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety'. An 'American hemisphere', of course, was an arbitrary social construct—for the United States can be located in many different hemispheres, depending on where one decides to center them (e.g., a Northern hemisphere, a so-called Western hemisphere or a predominantly land hemisphere: see Boggs, 1945). Such geopolitical reasoning was imaginary and the putative bonds of affinity between the Latin republics of South America and the white Anglo-Saxon republic of the North equally imaginary.

By the late nineteenth century, the increasing wealth and power of the US state, together with the scramble for colonies among the European powers, produced a foreign policy which subordinated the hemispheral identity of the United States to universalist themes and identities concerning race, civilization and Christianity. McKinley, acting under divine inspiration, saw it as the task of the United States to uplift and civilize the Philippines (while simultaneously preventing it from falling into the hands of commercial rivals France and Germany: Lafeber, 1963) while Roosevelt's famous 'corollary' of 1904 declared:

> Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power. (Richardson, 1905, vol. IX: 7053).

The geopolitical reasoning by which domestic slavery and continental US expansionism worked—i.e. those concerning civilized *versus* uncivilized territories, superior and inferior races, adult and child identifications of peoples with white Anglo-Saxon males as the adults—were drawn upon to help write global political space. The United States was beginning to consider itself a 'world power' with 'principles' that were no longer qualified as contingently applicable to the 'American hemisphere'. McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt's racial script was followed by Woodrow Wilson's crusade for what he and US political culture took to be democracy. That Wilsonian internationalism did not succeed was partly due to the re-invigoration of the mythology that an isolationist 'America' is the true and pure 'America'. Yet while the United States in the 1930s steered clear of political alliances with the rest of the world, its business enterprises continued their long-standing economic expansionism overseas. By the time of the Truman Doctrine, the US no longer

conceptualized itself as *a* world power but as *the* world power. The geopolitical reasoning of Truman, as noted earlier, was abstract and universal. Containment had no clearly conceptualized geographical limitations. Its genuine space was the abstract universal isotropic plane wherein right does perpetual battle with wrong, liberty with totalitarianism and Americanism with the forces of un-Americanism.

A third feature of American discourse is the strong lines it draws between the space of the 'Self' and the space of the 'Other' (Todorov, 1984; Dalby, 1988, 1990a, 1990b). Like the cultural maps of many nations, American political discourse is given shape by a frontier which separates civilization from savagery in Turner's (1920) terms or an 'Iron Curtain' marking the free world from the 'evil empire'. Robertson (1980: 92) notes:

> Frontiers and lines are powerful symbols for Americans. The moving frontier was never only a geographical line: it was a palpable barrier which separated the wilderness from civilization. It distinguished Americans, with their beliefs and their ideals, from savages and strangers, those 'others' who could not be predicted or trusted. It divided the American nation from other nations, and marked its independence.

While such a point is valid, one can overstate the uniquely American character of this practice. Early European experiences, particularly the Iberian *reconquista* against the 'infidel' and the English colonial experience with 'heathens' in Ireland, were factors in the formation of imperialism as a 'way of life' in the United States (Meinig, 1986; Williams, 1980). European discourses on colonialism, we have already noted, found their way into US foreign-policy practice not only in Theodore Roosevelt's time but even in determining the shape of the post-war world. The processes of geopolitical world ordering in US foreign policy in the late 1940s are worthy of some detailed examination. Taylor (1990) provides an account of the practical geopolitical reasoning of British intellectuals of statecraft (chiefly Churchill, Bevin and the British Foreign Office) during 1945. Let us consider the case of the two most famous *American* texts of that period, the 'Long Telegram' and 'Mr X' texts of George Kennan.

The figure of George Kennan looms large in the annals of American foreign policy for it was Kennan who helped codify and constitute central elements of what became Cold War discourse. Kennan himself was, as Stephanson (1989: 157) observes, a man of the North, one to whom the vast heterogeneous area of the Third World was 'a foreign space, wholly lacking in allure and best left to its own no doubt tragic fate'. The crucial division in the world for Kennan and the many others who made up the Atlanticist security community was that between the West and the East, between the world of maritime trading democracies and the oriental world of xenophobic modern despotism. Trained at Princeton and in Germany and Estonia, Kennan developed something of an Old World *weltanschauung* and brought this to bear in his early analyses of the USSR and world politics when working at the US Embassy in Moscow and later as Head of the Policy Planning Staff in Washington DC. In Kennan's two texts one can find at least three different strategies by which the USSR is represented. Each is worth exploring in detail.

The USSR as Oriental

Orientalism is premised, as Said (1978: 12) notes, on a primitive geopolitical awareness of the globe as composed of two unequal worlds, the Orient and the Occident. For Kennan and the Cold War discourse he helped codify, the USSR is part of the 'Other' world, the Oriental world. In his famous 'Long Telegram' Kennan describes the Soviet government as pervaded by an 'atmosphere of oriental secretiveness and conspiracy'. In the 'Mr X' article

published in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947 he expounds on his thesis that the 'political personality of Soviet power' is 'the product of ideology and circumstances', the latter being the stamp of Russia's history and geography:

> The very teachings of Lenin himself require great caution and flexibility in the pursuit of Communist purposes. Again, these precepts are fortified by the lessons of Russian history: of centuries of obscure battles between nomadic forces over the stretches of a vast unfortified plain. Here caution, circumspection, flexibility and deception are the valuable qualities, and their value finds natural appreciation in the Russian or oriental mind. (Kennan, 1947: 574).

In an earlier passage, Kennan had noted the paranoia of Soviet leaders. 'Their particular brand of fanaticism', he noted, 'was too fierce and too jealous to envisage any permanent sharing of power'. In a revealing sentence he then noted: 'From the Russian-Asiatic world out of which they had emerged they carried with them a scepticism as to the possibilities of permanent and peaceful coexistence of rival forces' (Kennan, 1947: 570). Pietz (1988) notes that the Cold War discourse Kennan helped shape was 'post-colonialist' in the sense that it drew upon and was assembled from many familiar and pervasive colonial discourses such as Orientalism and the putative primitiveness of non-Western regions and spaces. Totalitarianism, the theoretical anchor of Cold War discourse, came to be known as 'nothing other than traditional Oriental despotism plus modern police technology' (Pietz, 1988: 58).[3]

The USSR as potential rapist

Another pre-existent source from which Cold War discourse and representations of the USSR were assembled was patriarchal mythology—particularly that concerning fables of female vulnerability, rape and guardianship. In the descriptions being constructed around the USSR and Communism at this time the image of penetration was frequently evoked.[4] The leaders of the USSR were a 'frustrated' and 'discontented' lot who 'found in Marxist theory a highly convenient rationalization for their own instinctive desires' (Kennan, 1947: 569). Marxism was only a 'fig leaf' of moral and intellectual responsibility which cloaked essentially naked instinctive desires. These instinctive desires produced Soviet 'aggressiveness' (another favorite Cold War description of the USSR) and 'fluid and constant pressure to extend the limits of Russian police power which are together the natural and instinctive urges of Russian rulers' (Kennan, 1946: 54).

In the face of this instinctive behavior, the US needed to be aware that the USSR 'cannot be charmed or talked out of existence' (Kennan, 1947: 576). The USSR was a wily and flexible power that would employ a variety of different 'tactical maneuvers' (e.g. peaceful co-existence) to woo the West, particularly a vulnerable and psychologically-weakened Western Europe which was disposed to wishful thinking. Given this situation, the policy of the United States needed to be 'that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies' (Kennan, 1947: 575). The United States needed to act as the tough masculine guardian of Western Europe. If the policy of 'adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy' was patiently followed by the United States, then the weaknesses of the Soviet Union itself would become apparent. Turning the sexual grid of intelligibility on the USSR itself, Kennan (1947: 578) wrote that as long as the deficiencies that characterize Soviet society are not corrected 'Russia will remain economically a vulnerable, and in a certain sense an impotent, nation, capable of exporting its enthusiasms and of radiating the strange charm

of its primitive political vitality but unable to back up those articles of export by the real evidence of material power and prosperity'. A testimony to the durability of this image is the rhetoric of the early Bush administration where Gorbachev's foreign policy was spoken of as a 'charm offensive' aimed at the 'seduction' of Western Europe.

The Red flood

In tandem with the patriarchal mythology described above, one also had the recurring representation of Soviet foreign policy and Communism as a flood. The image of the Red flood was a particularly powerful element in fascist mythology during the inter-war period where, as Theweleit (1987: 230) chronicles in Weimar Germany, the powerful metaphor 'engenders a clearly ambivalent state of excitement. It is threatening but also attractive . . .'. Many different elements are at play here: situations and boundaries are fluid, solid ground becomes soft and swampy, barriers are breached, repressed instincts come bursting forth—water and sea as symbolic of the unconscious, the undisciplined *id*—and conditions are unrestrained, anarchic and dangerous. The response of the Freikorps, in Theweleit's account, is to act as firm, erect dams against this anarchic degeneration of society. With both feet securely planted on solid ground, they contained the Red flood and brought death to all that flowed. The very foundations of society, after all, were under attack. Switching to Kennan's 'Mr X' article, we find the following graphic passage which defines the very nature of the Soviet threat to Western Europe:

> Its [the USSR's] political action is a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, towards a given goal. Its main concern is to make sure that it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power. But if it finds unassailable barriers in its path, it accepts these philosophically and accommodates itself to them. The main thing is that there should always be pressure, unceasing constant pressure, towards the desired goal. (Kennan, 1947: 575).

The image of the flood, which has also a sexual dimension (unrestrained, gushing desire, etc.), is critical, for it is by this means that the geography of containment becomes constituted. If the Soviet threat has the characteristics of a flood then one needs 'firm and vigilant containment' along *all* of the Soviet border. Containment is thus constituted as a virtually global and not singularly Western European task. Effective containment in Western Europe, so the scenario goes, will lead to increasing Soviet pressure on the Middle East and Asia which eventually could result in the USSR spilling out into one or more of these regions. Such an image is easily reinforced by appropriate cartographic visuals featuring bleeding red maps of the USSR spreading outwards, or menacingly penetrating arrows busily trying to break out. The explanation of why US security managers instinctively read the North Korean invasion of South Korea as an act of Soviet expansionism certainly must address the power of such pre-existent images and scenarios. The formal geopolitical reasoning found in the different strategies of containment (Gaddis, 1983) rested, we suspect, on the flimsy foundations of widely shared practical geopolitical preconceptions.[5]

Conclusion

The Cold War as a discourse may have lost its credibility and meaning as a consequence of the events of 1989 but it is clear from the Gulf crisis that intellectuals of statecraft in the West at least, and the military-industrial complex behind them, will try to create a 'new' set

of enemies (the 'irrational Third-World despot') in a re-structured world order. The reductive nature of the practical geopolitical reasoning used in the 1990–91 Gulf crisis by President Bush and Prime Minister Thatcher looks all too familiar. The character of foreign places and foreign enemies is represented as fixed. In 1947 when George Kennan declared that 'there can be no appeal to common mental approaches' (1947: 574) in US dealings with the USSR he was effectively negating his own profession, namely diplomacy. The possibility of an open dialogue between the USSR and the United States was excluded *a priori* because the character of the USSR was already historically and geographically determined and thus effectively immutable. The irony of practical geopolitical representations of place is that, in order to succeed, they actually necessitate the abrogation of genuine geographical knowledge about the diversity and complexity of places as social entities. Describing the USSR then (or Iraq today) as Orientalist, is a work of geographical abstractionism. A complex, diverse and heterogeneous social mosaic of places is hypostatized into a singular, overdetermined and predictable actor. As a consequence, therefore, the United States was put in the ironic situation of being simultaneously tremendously geographically ignorant of the USSR (and today Iraq) yet fetishistically preoccupied with that state and its influence in world politics.

The global economic and political re-structuring of the contemporary age has been both a consequence and a generator of changing geographical sensibilities. The marked 'time-space compression' wrought by modern telecommunications and the globalization of capital, ideologies and culture has bound the fate of places more intimately together but has also opened up a series of possibilities for new types of subjectivities and new forms of political solidarity between places (Agnew and Corbridge, 1989). Globalization has enabled certain critical social movements to make connections between their struggles and the struggles of other critical social movements in very different places (see, for example, Kaldor and Falk, 1987; Walker, 1988). Contemporary geography in deconstructing its own vocabulary and critically exploring the forms of practical geopolitical reasoning that circulate within states can be an ally to these critical social movements. It can help create descriptions of the world based not on reductive geopolitical reasoning but on critical geographical knowledge.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. In attempting to use Foucault and critical international-relations theories in political geography, there is a tendency to speak loosely of the 'discourse of geopolitics' or 'geopolitical discourse'. Such phrases can be unhelpful, for they suggest that geopolitics is a discrete discourse itself. This is not our contention. We prefer to use the term 'geopolitical reasoning' to describe the spatialization of international politics that results from the employment of discourses in foreign-policy practice.
2. Jean Baudrillard (1988: 7) has termed America 'the only remaining primitive society', a society of ferocious ritualism and hyperbolic primitivism that has 'far outstripped its own moral, social or

ecological rationale'. For a discussion of the political and economic realities of living in American mythology, see Davis (1986).

3. Kennan's successor as Head of the Policy Planning Staff was Paul Nitze. In urging that the US develop the H-Bomb or 'Super' as it was known in security discourse, Nitze argued that the 'threat to Western Europe seemed to me singularly like that which Islam had posed centuries before, with its combination of ideological zeal and fighting power' (Nitze, quoted in Talbott, 1989: 52). The influence of a classical education on intellectuals of statecraft (see Luttwak, 1976) with its narratives of fights between civilization and barbarian hordes, seems worthy of further exploration. Inquiry in this area may help explain the appeal of Mackinder's ideas to elements of the security community in this period.

4. In Volume One of his memoirs Kennan (1967), who by this time had supposedly repudiated many of his earlier conceptions of the USSR, nevertheless repeatedly returns to the image of penetration in discussions of Soviet power.

5. There are a series of other strategies by which the USSR is represented in the early Cold War discourse codified by Kennan and numerous others. The writing of territory and states in organic terms prompted a medicalization of certain regions (e.g. Western Europe as a weak patient needing aid against disease) and the use of psychological terms to describe the Other (e.g. the USSR as a paranoid personality). See Yannas (1989).

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