

Geopolitical Security of Russia: Remarks on the Problem Statement

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EVENTS DIGEST

GEOPOLITICAL SECURITY OF RUSSIA: REMARKS ON THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

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This paper summarizes the results of the seminar “Geopolitical Security of Russia: Remarks on the Problem Statement”, held on August 26, 2022, at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad. During the seminar, the Institute of Geopolitical and Regional Studies of the university announced an initiative to devise a system of monitoring the geopolitical (regional) security of Russia. The debate centred around the development of a conceptual framework and a geopolitical security model as a prerequisite for the system. The discussion also covered other relevant issues, including the definition of geopolitical security and geopolitical space as well as the types of geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities. Another topic on the agenda was the analysis of theoretical approaches applicable to monitoring the geopolitical security in Russia. A constructivist approach based on discursive practices was viewed as the most promising for tracking changes in geopolitical threats. In this work, the emphasis should be placed on regional issues, i.e. the situation in particular regions. Other promising avenues for further research are the operationalization of relevant concepts and the development of a set of indicators of geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities, which Russia has already faced and may face in the future.

Keywords:

geopolitical security, geopolitical space, geopolitical threats, geopolitical vulnerabilities, geopolitical monitoring

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Introduction

Yana A. Vorozheina. In the present era of heightened international tensions, the need for strong national and international security has become all too apparent. The geopolitical implications of this issue are particularly noteworthy. In response, the Institute of Geopolitical and Regional Studies at IKBFU has undertaken active research into the area of national and international security, with a particular focus on the development of a monitoring system known as the ‘Security Equation,’ designed to monitor Russia’s geopolitical security.

The implementation of the project involves a series of stages, beginning with the creation of a conceptual model for assessing Russia’s geopolitical security. As part of this initial stage, a seminar was held to explore key concepts related to geopolitical security, including the definition of geopolitical space, threats, and vulnerabilities. This seminar aimed to establish a foundation of shared understanding among project stakeholders and to ensure that subsequent stages of the project are built on a robust conceptual framework. Among those who participated in the discussion were prof. Klemeshev, Doctor of Political Sciences (President of IKBFU, Scientific Director, IKBFU); prof. Fedorov, Doctor of Geography (Director of the Centre for Geopolitical Studies of the Baltic Region, IKBFU); prof. Komleva, Doctor of Political Sciences (Director of the Centre for Geopolitical Analysis of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems); prof. Druzhinin, Doctor of Geography (Director of the North Caucasus Research Institute of Economic and Social Problems, SFU, Leading Researcher of the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences); Dr Voloshenko, Candidate of Economic Sciences (Director of the Centre for Social and Economic Research of the Region, IKBFU); prof. Belozеров, Doctor of Political Sciences (Head of the Department of Political Science, member of the Scientific Council under the Security Council of the Russian Federation). The key points of the discussion are presented below.

Geopolitical Security and Geopolitical Space

Andrey P. Klemeshev. The importance of Russia’s national security issues in the contemporary geopolitical landscape is widely recognized. However, the task of monitoring the country’s geopolitical security requires a strong foundation in theory, methodology, and technical expertise.

We view the geopolitical security of the country as an integral component of national security. This distinction is based on the nature and location of threats that pose risks to Russia's geopolitical stability. Given the critical importance of national security and the need to protect the country against a range of potential threats, including those with geopolitical implications, it is imperative that we adopt a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and safeguarding the security of the nation.

The concept of geopolitical space refers to a set of ideas that describe the power dynamics of international politics. At its core, it involves a competition among actors, primarily states, to compete and gain control (in various forms) over specific territories at the global, regional, and local scales, as well as within various sectors of international relations and security, including the political, military, socio-cultural, and economic realms. The structure of the geopolitical space is constantly evolving, reflecting changes in the international balance of power over time. At the level of political discourse, these ideas coalesce into a distinct geopolitical worldview that is transmitted to the mass consciousness (and the collective unconscious), where it becomes entrenched as attitudes, stereotypes, and archetypes.

The Cold War era was characterized by a global power struggle between two dominant superpowers, each possessing a formidable arsenal of nuclear weapons. This confrontation played out on a global stage, with both sides vying for dominance in the ideological, political, and socio-economic realms. The all-encompassing nature of this conflict meant that it extended to all levels and sectors of international relations and security. At its core, the Cold War was a competition for control over the global geopolitical space, with both superpowers striving for hegemony in a world that was increasingly polarized and divided.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, only one superpower remained in the international arena with a claim to world hegemony. The United States used to consider and still considers it possible to interfere in issues of not only global but also regional and local scale and nature. The Russian Federation retains the status of a great power, as institutionally it acts as a legal successor to the Soviet Union, being, for example, a member of the UN Security Council, and possesses an appropriate arsenal of nuclear weapons. However, at the global level, it enjoys a very narrow 'corridor of freedom'. The economic and socio-cultural potential, as well as partly the military potential of modern Russia, corresponds to the level of the geopolitical region, the post-Soviet space. Thus, the geopolitical space

of modern Russia in terms of territory is primarily its post-Soviet surroundings. This is where its geopolitical boundaries lie. Within these boundaries, there are geopolitical threats that determine the character of Russia's geopolitical security with its clearly territorial dynamics [1].

The threats and scope of nuclear confrontation are obvious. The United States and its NATO allies have begun not just to “penetrate” the post-Soviet space but to ‘overlay’ with their interests the interests of the countries that form the post-Soviet space as a geopolitical region and a regional security complex [1].¹ As a result, Russia's geopolitical space has turned into a vector field with confrontation in all sectors of international security. In each of these sectors, in each of the countries of the post-Soviet space, geopolitical threats manifest themselves primarily as vectors negative towards Russia. The United States and its allies strive to make the vectors of all security segments in every country of the post-Soviet space negative towards Russia. There is now a struggle to change the vector geopolitical space of Russia, which begins (and continues) with rewriting history, reformatting both the consciousness of elites and mass consciousness and ends with colour revolutions and proxy wars. We proceed from the fact that monitoring geopolitical threats is an acute issue. Identifying them at an early stage would allow negating them with the minimum risks and damage. The current events in Ukraine are the most persuasive evidence of the need for such a monitoring system.

Natalia A. Komleva. It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the phenomena and concepts of national and geopolitical security. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation² defines national security as “a state when the national interests of the Russian Federation are being protected from external and internal threats, the implementation of constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens, decent quality and standard of living, civil peace and harmony in the country, protection of the sovereignty of the Russian Federation, its independence and state integrity, social and economic development of the country are being ensured”.³ In other words, national security is a state of pro-

¹ We use the model of superpower intervention in regional security complexes developed by Buzan and Waever.

² Approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation № 400 of 02.07.2021.

³ On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation № 400 of 02.07.2021, *President of Russia*, URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046> (accessed 10.10.2022). For more details on aspects of national security, see: [2; 3].

tection provided to the interests of the individual, the state and the society. This very hierarchy of interests is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

Numerous studies investigate the essence of national security, while geopolitical security has not received proper research attention. There are practically no papers that purposefully consider geopolitical security as a separate phenomenon. The only exception is “Geopolitical Security of Modern Russia” by Morozov [4], however, oddly enough, there is no definition of the concept included in the title in the text of the article. Some papers closely link national and geopolitical security, for example, those by Zimichev [5], Zubkov [6], Moskvitin [7], etc. However, as a rule, they offer either no definition of geopolitical security or provide similar ones to the following: “Geopolitical security is a state of geopolitical interests of the country being protected” [5].

Therefore, identifying the nature and features of geopolitical security is an urgent research task. I view geopolitical security as a phenomenon that is *a state of the geopolitical space of a society being protected from threats and vulnerabilities to ensure the unhindered survival and development of the society*. I proceed from the fact that the geopolitical space has four major forms: geographical (the main actor is the state), economic (the main actor is corporations producing goods and services), information and ideological (the main actor is the media, academic, artistic, literature communities, teaching and management staff in education), information and cybernetic (the main actor is software and network developers).

Structurally each form of the geopolitical space consists of three main elements: 1) actors, 2) resources, and 3) ways of struggling for resources.

We define resources as the means of survival and development of human communities representing the foundation and the objective of the geopolitical struggle.

Here, we understand resources as follows:

- raw materials (natural resources);
- people, the totality of its quantitative and qualitative characteristics (natural and social resources);
- the economic system of a society, the totality of the dominant form of ownership and the main way of managing the production of goods and services (economic resources);
- methods and technical means of influencing mass and individual consciousness to form a system of values determining social behaviour;

— software, information and cybernetic technologies (information resources).

Thus, *geopolitical security is an aspect of the national security of a given society ensuring a favourable course and the outcome of the struggle for the resources for its survival and development.*

Alexander G. Druzhinin. It is necessary to focus on the fact that the geographical (territorial) aspect is extremely important in geopolitical security. Haushofer, one of the founders of geopolitics, defined this science as “space from a state’s perspective” [8]. Lacoste, another prominent geographer, understood it as a scientific discipline studying the “power rivalries over territory” [9]. Russian researchers develop similar approaches [10–13]. According to Kolosov and Mironenko [14], geopolitics is a subject area aimed at fixing and predicting the spatial boundaries of power fields. Turovsky believes it is “the geography of relations between the centres of political power in the world” [15, p. 30]. There is also an even more “geographic” approach, where the subject of geopolitics is “the impact the features of the territory have on the policy of the state located in this territory” [16, p. 113]. Geopolitical issues are often considered in conjunction with security ones [17; 18]. Modern research in Russia devotes close attention to this area [19–21].

Taking into account the above definitions of geopolitics, *geopolitical security can be defined as a state (a set of factors, processes and their consequences) in which a particular country can steadily and effectively, in cooperation with other (sometimes competitive) centres of power, control a territory (and equip it, develop, use its communicative, resource, military-strategic and other capabilities) falling within its political, economic and humanitarian interests.*

Vasily K. Belozerov. Russia’s geopolitical security deserves close attention from researchers. Taking into account instrumental and applied considerations and the latest developments in the international arena, it makes sense to view Russia’s geopolitical security as *the security of its geopolitical space.*

I would like to emphasize that problems and obstacles are virtually inevitable in the course of the theoretical study of this topic and its promotion as a concept. I identify two approaches to theoretical studies of space in political science: utilitarian and value-ideological. Note that (1) there is no impenetrable wall between them, and (2) they both manifest in real-life politics.

The first approach identifies political space with the territory. According to it, space is “the real extent of the territory of historically predetermined political life or political influence” [22, p. 296]. The reference to historical circumstances

limits the political subject's claims to the land, i.e. utilitarian, space. Practically the same ideas serve as the foundation for the geographical paradigm of politics. They have been the basis for classical geopolitical concepts for quite a long time. For instance, the famous German military theorist General Hans von Seeckt (1866–1936) stated that “the most real political foundation is homeland” [23, S. 11].

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that for some years our country has been conceptualizing state policies aimed at the development and protection of its geographical space. We can find relevant provisions in the country's major doctrinal document, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President in the summer of 2021. Interestingly, current Russian legislation identifies defence as the armed protection of the Russian Federation, and the integrity and inviolability of its territory.⁴ Such an approach inevitably restricts both the perception of Russia's geopolitical space and measures aimed at ensuring its security.

In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the understanding of the political space as a value-ideological one, which is characteristic of the second approach. According to it, it is the scope of politics, the area of influence of political subjects determined by the prevalence, strength and effect of their ideas, theories, programmes and their acceptance by society [24, p. 301]. Understanding the geopolitical space requires a peculiar perception of its limits and boundaries. Geopolitical boundaries do not always coincide with state borders. State borders cannot constrain the geopolitical space, the area claimed by a subject. A Russian geopolitician Vandam (1867–1933) in his work “Our situation”, published in 1913, provided the following assessment of the steps taken by the Russian foreign affairs department to establish borders in the east of the country: “It is often that being frequently repeated many words lose their deep inner meaning. For instance, the word “border” means a barrier constraining the attacker and benefiting the defender. China, which has long lost its aggressiveness and shifted to defence, being closed from the sea and having surrounded all its cities with high stone ramparts, embodied the idea of the border in its famous Great Wall. Since on its left flank, Russia was the offensive side, it is clear how erroneous the initiative of our diplomacy was”.

⁴ See Article 1 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation dated May 31, 1996 № 61-FZ “On Defence”, 1996, *President of Russia*, URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/9446> (accessed 10.10.2022).

Threats and Factors of Geopolitical Security

Andrey P. Klemeshev. We believe that a constructivist approach focused on discursive practices is a promising direction for monitoring the dynamics of geopolitical threats. An example is the Buzan-Waever concept of securitisation providing a broader understanding of the security and threat construction process [26].

Natalia A. Komleva. To define the essence of the geopolitical security of modern Russia, I would propose a threefold scheme for considering threats and vulnerabilities.

The main threats are:

1. In geographical space: military aggression of NATO countries and, more broadly, the countries of the “collective West” against our country, expressed in military actions in Ukraine using western weapons, western instructors and western PMCs, as well as possible NATO’s military expansion to the Union State of Russia and Belarus [27; 28].

2. In the economic space: sanctions against Russia.

3. In the ideological space: ideological subversion of mass consciousness to change the traditional value system and disinformation against Russia.

As I see it, the systemic threat to our geopolitical security is currently based on three main vulnerabilities of Russian society:

1. The most important element of the geopolitical security system is the optimal communication between the ruling and the subordinate, in other words, between the authorities and administration, on the one hand, and the public, on the other.

2. The performance discipline of administrative authorities is breaking down, they are more interested in KPI grabbing than in tangible results. This contributes to the distortion of political communication in the “ruling and subordinate” bundle.

3. Lack of moral censorship in literature and art, as well as in the media (including the blogosphere).

For each type of threats and vulnerabilities, I propose to distinguish between

- 1) relevant;

- 2) potential;

- 3) preemptive (though they may or may not form, they still require monitoring).

Alexander G. Druzhinin. The current situation calls for a comprehensive and systematic approach to analyzing the various aspects and factors of geopolitical security that need to be taken into consideration:

1) within the framework of the danger — security dichotomous assessment scale (as a combination of significant challenges and threats and, at the same time, opportunities, interests, and priorities);

2) as a set (system) of chronological (consecutive) and spatial (varying from place to place, i. e. unique to specific regions) situations;

3) as a conjugation (and hierarchy) of the global (Earth-wide structures and processes), macro-regional (for Russia it is, for example, the Baltic region or the Black Sea region) and regional (Crimea, the Kaliningrad region, etc.) levels.

It is important to realize that in real geopolitics (when the rivalry between the key players is becoming increasingly fierce [29]), any sustainable security of a country (even a leading powerhouse) is achievable only in theory. This allows focusing on the level of security, or rather, on the level of geopolitical risks, which often complement and sometimes substitute each other (for example, the danger of confronting the geopolitical hegemon and its military-political bloc and the risk of total subordination, loss of geopolitical subjectivity).

Talking about the priorities of the combination of geo-situational, dynamic and multiscale approaches based on the spatial analysis [30]. It is important to note that when analyzing the components of Russia's geopolitical security or risks, one must consider the systemic duality of the Russian Federation and its external geopolitical context. The focus of attention should be on identifying the risks generated by the existing geopolitical architecture of the world, as well as its major transformations, including the transition to a multipolar model accompanied by general turbulence [31] and the formation of regional powerhouses along almost the entire perimeter of the Russian borders. Thus, we have to reconsider both multifaceted risks and dangers generated by Russia's position [11] in global and Eurasian geopolitics, including those associated with the transition to an open confrontation between the Russian Federation and the collective West [32; 33].

Gennady M. Fedorov. It is important to closely monitor Western geopolitical concepts, as many of them have been formulated by Western geopoliticians in a manner that is unfriendly towards Russia. Following the ideas of Mackinder and Speakman, they initially aim at fighting the continental 'Heartland' (by definition conservative, even reactionary, despotic and barbaric) opposed to the oceanic

democratic and civilized 'Rimland'. We need to carefully study Western articles and books on international relations concerning our country, especially foreign university and school textbooks on history and geography. Then it will become clear what kind of relationship our potential partners aim at and whether equal cooperation (and cooperation in general) is possible.

Geopolitical Security and Regions

Alexander G. Druzhinin. Developing and defining the category of *geopolitical security*, it is crucial to focus on the circumstances of Russia's internal development that are essential for its stable geopolitical position, on the situation in specific regions, their economic, demographic, ethnocultural dynamics, on regional identity, inclusion in all-Russian and international centre-peripheral interdependencies. Here, geopolitical studies are directly connected with socio-geographical analysis, and the latter must inevitably be 'geopolitised' acquiring a definite subject-thematic aspect.

It is not only the territory of the Russian Federation that requires geopolitical structuring and typologising but also the adjacent spaces (limitrophes, areas of outgoing threats, and vital territories). Attention should also be focused on the identification of areas and zones of interest of global and regional geopolitical actors within the Russian Federation (similar to the geopolitical structure of the 'Turkish world', which in recent years has been gaining its increasingly clear outline [33]). It is equally important to generate systemic (taking into account the actual situation and interests of the regions as well) ideas about the relevant and promising sphere of geopolitical interests of Russia (in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Black Sea region, in Central Asia, etc.) [35, p. 218; 36].

Andrey P. Klemeshev. Discussing the geopolitical space of Russia and the corresponding geopolitical threats, we must not forget that the actors are not only the United States but also countries close to the Great Limitrophe [37; 38], the multivalent 'strait-territories' [39], which are relatively independent players interfering in the balance of power in the post-Soviet space as a geopolitical region, a regional security complex [1]. A notable example is the position of Turkey in the Karabakh conflict.

Under certain conditions, for instance, sociocultural, including confessional, such interference will affect the regions of the Russian Federation. Talking about the Great Turan, we must be aware of the effect such a structure might have in some Russian regions.

Vasily K. Belozеров. Few people doubt that it is short-sighted and even dangerous to limit the provision of the security of Russia's geopolitical space to its territory and borders. The geopolitical security of our country, being an integral phenomenon, is also made up of the totality of the security of its regions. Moreover, the security of a subject of the Russian Federation is not limited to its territory and state borders. The geopolitical status of the subjects of the Russian Federation is diverse.

Ksenia Yu. Voloshenko. I agree that the national security of Russia is the generic concept of its geopolitical security,⁵ its part that corresponds to the national interests in "maintaining strategic stability, strengthening peace and security, and the legal foundations of international relations".⁶ Its safeguarding and promoting are achieved through the implementation of the strategic national priority of enhancing strategic stability and mutually beneficial international cooperation. Thus, the terminological foundations of geopolitical security are linked to a foreign policy aimed at protecting Russia's national interests and strengthening its international security. A question arises whether the term *geopolitical security* can apply to a region and the role of each Russian region in advancing it.

Considering the territorial peculiarities of Russian regions, both geopolitical research and socio-geographical approaches are significant for addressing geopolitical security issues. Different (geo-)strategic roles and geographical locations (including their closeness to the border) of the regions mean completely different tasks in implementing strategic national priorities, including in terms of ensuring geopolitical security.

Geopolitical security issues are of utmost urgency for Russia's geo-strategic territories,⁷ and they require deep theoretical understanding. It is through the socio-economic development of geostrategic territories that the national security of the Russian Federation, and therefore its geopolitical security, is ensured.

⁵ On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation №400 dated 2.07.2021, *President of Russia*, URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046> (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ On approval of the Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025: Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation №207-r dated 13.02.2019, *Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation*, URL: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/directions/regionalnoe_razvitiye/strategicheskoe_planirovaniye_prostranstvennogo_razvitiya/strategiya_prostranstvennogo_razvitiya_rossiyskoy_federacii_na_period_do_2025_goda/ (accessed 17.08.2022).

However, due to their border location, the geostrategic territories, in turn, need to ensure their own geopolitical security, but only insofar as it is within the powers of the region or concerns the scope of external and internal threats.

Current situation, prospects and problems

Alexander G. Druzhinin. Identifying and evaluating the parameters of geopolitical security is crucial in understanding the military confrontation between Russia and the collective West, which has resulted from the ongoing situation in the SMO and has turned the entire territory of the Russian Federation into a space of hybrid war.

In this context, Russian geopolitics is rapidly getting more ‘territorialized’. An extremely wide range of regional development issues is becoming geopolitically significant: from local identity and socio-political activity to the financial and economic capabilities of the territory, its place in the existing ‘centre-periphery’ relations, and the importance of cross-border contacts and foreign partnerships. Against this background, the geopolitical ‘specialness’ of individual territories and their groupings has become particularly pronounced. The spatial development of our country is becoming an important area of geopolitical confrontation. It also generates systemically significant geostrategic risks. At the same time, it serves as an incentive and resource in playing for high geopolitical stakes sharply intensified in the context of the SMO.

Vasily K. Belozerov. We propose the following objective (expected result) of the work on assessing Russia’s geopolitical security:

- 1) development and definition of the concept of “geopolitical security”;
- 2) identification of criteria, indexes and indicators of geopolitical and regional security of Russia;
- 3) clarification of the following issues:
 - changes in challenges, risks, dangers and threats (CRDT) to Russia’s geopolitical security by region;
 - current social and political tension in the regions;
 - nature of external factors and their impact in a particular region;
 - geopolitical status of Russian regions in the context of national security;
 - classification of Russian regions and subjects by their established geopolitical status.

Andrey P. Klemeshev. A conceptual model of geopolitical security is a prerequisite for the development of a system for monitoring Russia's geopolitical security. We need the tools for this kind of monitoring. Today attention will largely focus on various discursive methods: discourse analysis, frame analysis, and content analysis. However, creating such a monitoring system requires selecting a relevant technical approach. Collecting and analyzing information from open sources (OSINT) appears to be the most promising approach

Conclusion

Yana A. Vorozheina. The discussion allowed us to draw several conclusions. First, no one doubts the urgency of raising the problem of Russia's geopolitical security, and ways to monitor it in a given period and in certain zones of the country's geopolitical space. Secondly, it is also clear what requires additional substantive study. It is geopolitical security, geopolitical space, geopolitical picture of the world, geopolitical borders, threats and vulnerabilities. The most important thing is to determine what distinguishes geopolitical issues from all others related to national security. Not simply repeating the word 'geopolitics' but assigning it a clear meaning is what we should do to be able to use it in our further work. Thirdly, with the contours of the conceptual model of geopolitical security already visible, an important long-term task is the operationalization of the relevant concepts and the creation of a set of indicators for the already known geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities. It is important to identify them to choose relevant monitoring tools and instruments.

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