THE POLITICS OF USING MACKINDER'S GEOPOLITICS: THE EXAMPLE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Introduction— Two Approaches to Mackinder

As both recent scholarly publications, and colloquia in London, Glasgow and Tashkent demonstrate, there remains considerable interest in the thinking of Halford Mackinder. Two major streams of scholarship can be identified—the study of the application of his theories to international relations, and the investigation of their intellectual provenance. This paper will focus on the second of these concerns, making use in particular of a body of scholarship on Mackinder known as "critical geopolitics," especially the work of Gearóid Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal). It will consider what new insights can be gained from the application of this approach to studies of contemporary Central Asia that themselves use Mackinder's ideas. It asks not, "what does Mackinder's theory reveal about the world and Central Asia's place in it?," but, "what does Mackinder's theory reveal about Mackinder" and, crucially, "how have citations of Mackinder's theory been used to construct contemporary geopolitical narratives about Central Asia?"

The first approach to Mackinder takes his Pivot/Heartland theory as a model with predictive capacities that can be tested against the "course of events," and from which policy recommendations can be derived. Such a method was used principally to analyze the Cold War, and was particularly

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popular with international relations theorists. It has almost entirely relied on limited readings of three of Mackinder's works, his 1904, 1919, and 1943 iterations of the Heartland thesis.[1] It does not connect these to the wider corpus of Mackinder's writings, and attaches minimal importance to his biography. A typical example of this approach is the work of Colin Gray, who argues that Mackinder correctly recognized the Heartland as "an enduring geostrategic reality of the first importance," and that his theory proved accurate in the twentieth century and may well prove so in the twenty-first.[2]

The second approach, developed by geographers, contextualizes the Heartland thesis in two ways. On the one hand, it locates the three famous "geopolitical" texts in the context of Mackinder's wider thought and political and professional activities, and was built upon biographies published in the 1980s.[3] On the other, it situates Mackinder's thought in wider contemporary social and political circumstances, such as international diplomacy,[4] and debates on British engagement with Central Asia,[5] imperial defense policy,[6] and military reform.[7] Kearns has developed an innovative variation on this technique, contrasting Mackinder's approach to topics as diverse as imperial economic reform,[8] exploration,[9] and the purpose of geography,[10] with those of close contemporaries. Whilst some of these writers have been hostile to the Mackinder legacy, and others have celebrated it, all have agreed that his three most famous texts cannot be detached from the time and place of their production and the biography and guiding vision of their author.

This paper is a development of the author's earlier exploratory application of a critical geopolitical perspective on the contemporary use of Mackinder to analyze Central Asia.[11] Whereas that introduced the ideas of both Mackinder and critical geopolitics in general, this will develop these in more depth. Furthermore, the former article surveyed a wider field of writing on the international relations of Central Asia, but the present one will explore the work of two authors in a more sustained engagement with the theoretical literature. The essay will begin by outlining what Mackinder's overall vision was, and aspects of Ó Tuathail's commentary on it. It will then discuss the application of Ó Tuathail's approach to two foreign policy intellectuals who use Mackinder to construct their position on Central Asia. It will conclude by considering the implications of this discussion for Ó Tuathail's own arguments.

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[1] See: H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal,* Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904; H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction,* Constable and Company, London, 1919; H. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 21, No. 4, 1943.

[2] C.S. Gray, "In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On," in: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, 2005.

[3] See: W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft,* Clarendon, Oxford, 1982; B. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography,* Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1987; G. Kearns, "Halford John Mackinder: 1861-1947," in: *Geographers Bibliographical Studies*, *9*, ed. by T. W. Freeman Mansell, London, 1985.

[4] See: P. Venier, "The Diplomatic Context: Britain and International Relations in 1904," in: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West*.

[5] See: S. O'Hara, M. Heffernan, G. Endfield, "Halford Mackinder, the 'Geographical Pivot,' and British Perceptions of Central Asia," in: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West.*

[6] See: R. Butlin, "The Pivot and Imperial Defence Policy," in: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West*.

[7] See: D. Stoddart, "Geography and War: The 'New Geography' and the 'New Army' in England, 1899-1914," *Political Geography,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 1992.

[8] See: G. Kearns, "Prologue: *Fin de siècle* Geopolitics: Mackinder, Hobson, and Theories of Global Closure," in: *Political Geography of the Twentieth Century: A Global Analysis*, ed. by P. J. Taylor Bellhaven, London, 1993.

[9] See: G. Kearns, "The Imperial Subject: Geography and Travel in the Work of Mary Kingsley and Halford Mackinder," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 22, 1997.

[10] See: G. Kearns, "The Political Pivot of Geography," *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, 2004.

[11] See: N. Megoran, "Revisiting the 'Pivot': The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan's International Relations," *Geographical Journal,* Vol. 170, No. 4, 2004.

The Imperial Vision of Halford John Mackinder

All informed commentators on Mackinder agree that commitment to the cause of the British Empire was an overarching passion in his life. Critical geopolitics insists that this concern was not incidental to his conception of geography/geopolitics: it was essential to it. It is therefore important to explore it in some detail.

Whereas modern geography has tended to coalesce in a physical-human subdivision, Mackinder sought to craft an integrated vision of the interaction between the physical environment and human life in it—what he called "the human habitat." This conceived of geography not as simply the collection of facts about places and landform processes, but a "concrete philosophy based on science,"[12] necessarily antecedent to the subject of history. This vision drew on various ideas in circulation at the time of his intellectual formation. These involved *geological* (the extraordinary age of the earth compared to human civilization) and *biological* (the influence of the environment on animals in evolutionary struggles) factors. They also embraced influences that included the *historical* (the idea that a new era of global interconnectedness had dawned with the European completion of the world map), the *racial* (the enduring qualities of individual races, and the general superiority of white races), and the *imperial* (the moral rectitude of empire).

The basic building block of Mackinder's grand vision of the "human habitat," the key that mapped these abstract ideas onto the concrete reality of the world, was what he called the "natural region." He saw this as "a fundamental fact" in understanding human history.[13] Natural regions were framed by their environments' abilities to sustain life, and by natural barriers to the movement of people between them. These natural regions fostered the development of particular human cultures with unique characteristics. In calling these "national cultures" or "nations," he identified them with a dominant ideology of political-territorial organization at the time. He adduced what he called "Englishry" as an example. The "English plain," as a typical natural region with uniform climate and soil, favored social continuity and impeded intermarriage with other groups: "Within this natural region we have the English blood, one fluid, the same down through the centuries, on loan for the moment in the forty million bodies of the present generation."[14]

Such national cultures, which he sometimes called "organisms," grow, expand and develop "momentum"—a form of inertia that results from them taking on lives of their own, tending toward the preservation of the national culture in the medium term. The whole process of growth may lead to regions being fused together and conflicts between these nations. This is because the world is a "closed system"—there is only limited territory over which they may expand, and thus all the natural regions are inherently inter-related. Geographers should strive at a single vision of the world that is able to grasp this picture in its entirety. For Mackinder, the "facts of geography"—the combination of lands and seas, of fertility and routes of movement framed by the environment—lent itself not only to "the growth of empires," but, ultimately, the emergence of "a single World Empire."[15] "Nature is ruthless," he insisted, and only those states that matched it would survive.

This particular conception of geography clearly underpinned Mackinder's "geopolitical" thought. He considered the British Empire to be an "organism" that had grown out from its original "natural

[12] H. Mackinder, "The Music of the Spheres," *Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society 63* (1936-1937), 1937, p. 179.
[13] See: H. Mackinder, "The Human Habitat," *The Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. 47, No. 6, 1931, p. 327.
[14] Ibid., p. 326.
[15] H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, pp. 2-3.

area," and existed in a state of "permanent struggle"[16] with a small number of similar organisms that had come to divide up much of the world between them. From a British perspective, he could thus argue that "the most important facts of contemporary political geography are the extent of the red patches of British dominion upon the map of the world, and the position of the hostile customs frontiers. They are the categorical expression of the eternal struggle for existence as it stands at the opening of the twentieth century."[17]

His 1904 Pivot paper is a clear example of process—major powers competing in a closed world system, where they could now only grow at the expense of each other. In this paper, he identified the "Pivot" or "Heart-land" (a "natural seat of power") as a natural region, like Britain. However, due to technological change, it was the natural region most likely to grow into an organism that would become the "World Empire."

This state of affairs presented not only a profound challenge to British power, but spelled potential disaster for the whole world. Whereas some less developed peoples may be readily absorbed, great nationalities will continue to expand and collide, eventually taking civilization down with them in blind internecine warfare. At least five major proposals to address this twin challenge can be identified in Mackinder's work:

- Firstly, at the geopolitical scale, planning should create a "balanced" world, without one power dominating, a world that would thus be "happy" and "free."[18] This demanded a knowledge of the geographical regions, and in particular of the place of the Heartland. Practically, it dictated that Eastern Europe be divided into many small nations, to "reduce the German people to its proper position in the world."[19] As British High Commissioner to South Russia in 1919-1920, he advocated an aggressive anti-Bolshevik policy of British support of a chain of independent states from the Caspian to the Baltic, in order to prevent either Germany or Russia controlling the whole Heartland.
- Secondly, Britain should strive for "national efficiency" of its "man-power." Because Britain was locked in a state of "ruthless" and "permanent struggle," "we must build a Power able to contend on equal terms with other Powers."[20] There no longer being room for easy territorial expansion, the empire must be consolidated. This was to be done at two levels. At home, Mackinder was disturbed that the "physical, intellectual and moral" state of British laborers was in decay, placing Britain at a relative disadvantage. He thus advocated state-led social interventions such as the replacement of slum housing, an end to sharp unemployment cycles, the imposition of a minimum wage, temperance, and education. At the imperial level, Britain had to ensure that the Empire was grown into a "compact and symmetrical organism" by drawing on their "reservoirs of white man-power,"[21] and preventing racial degradation through miscegenation with non-white races.
- Thirdly, he argued that international capital and free trade were a threat to the British position, and should be controlled. Alarmed that surplus British capital was being invested in the infrastructures of rival states, and that these competing powers were allowed to exploit British imperial territories through the export of goods, he came to espouse the idea of the Empire as a single economic area—albeit structured toward British interests. Although he

[16] H. Mackinder, "Man-power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," *The National Review,* Vol. 45, No. 265, 1905, pp. 140-141.
[17] H. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas,* Clarendon, Oxford, 1907 (1902), p. 343.
[18] H. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," p. 605.
[19] H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, p. 203.
[20] H. Mackinder, "Man-power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," p. 143.
[21] Ibid., p. 40.

initially advocated free trade as a member of the Liberal Party, his shift to the Conservatives in 1903 was largely due to this new conviction. In his successful campaign to become MP for Camlachie in 1910, he argued that he wanted to see, "a group of nations … the Britains, with one fleet on the ocean … and one foreign policy."[22] Imperial preference was a policy he pursued in work on the Imperial Shipping Committee and the Imperial Economic Committee.

- A fourth challenge was posed by democracy at home. Mackinder believed that as the men who governed democracies were not trained with the requisite geographical vision, they were thus unable to grasp that they were in a permanent struggle with other organisms, a struggle in which Britain might be permanently supplanted by a Heartland-based world empire. Because they could not see this they were not planning for war and attempting to break-up the Heartland, leading Mackinder to conclude that democracy was "incompatible with the organization necessary for the war against autocracies."[23] Lamenting the growth of industrial democracies, he saw a better model in bygone city-states such as Athens and Florence and in the traditional English countryside, where (he supposed) "leaders visibly serve the interests of their weaker brethren."[24] He thus advocated restricting the electoral franchise to prevent women and more lower-class people being able to vote—at least until the latter were properly educated. He voiced these concerns in his work as a parliamentarian and a writer.
- A fifth concern of Mackinder's was that Britain would fall behind in this ruthless struggle because its population—in the U.K. and throughout the Empire—would fail to identify with, and remain committed to, the project of imperialism. It was here that geographical education played a role. It did not merely exist to instruct its statesmen and generals in grasping the big picture of the relationship between territory and power, but was also vital to inculcate an ideology, to teach people to "identify themselves with the British Empire."[25] He was highly partisan about this, urging that, "above all, let our teaching be from the British standpoint, so that finally we see the world as a theatre for British activity." In furtherance of this objective, he wrote textbooks for use in schools, and was an active member of the Visual Instruction Committee of the Colonial Office. This produced slide-shows for lectures about Britain and the Empire to be used throughout the Empire.

Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland theory of geopolitics is inextricable from his beliefs about the intersection of physical geography, race, and culture. These led him to conclude that war and imperialism were natural phenomena, the laws of which the committed academic should understand in order to assist his country in gaining strategic advantage over rival states.

Critical Geopolitics of Mackinder's Thought

The geographer Gearóid Ó Tuathail has subjected Mackinder's thought to a sustained critique by way of his own "critical geopolitics." This begins with a critical appraisal of the classical geopo-

[22] *Glasgow Herald* quoted from: B. Blouet, op. cit., p. 147.
[23] H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, p. 20.
[24] Ibid., pp. 226-227.
[25] H. Mackinder, "The Teaching of Geography from an Imperial Point of View, and the Use Which Could and Should Be Made of Visual Instruction," *The Geographical Teacher,* No. 6, 1911, p. 84.

litical tradition as represented by Mackinder, Haushofer, Spykman and others. He characterizes it as essentially problem solving theory for statecraft, taking existing power structures for granted and working within them to give advice to statesmen. Its dominant modes of discourse are declarative ("this is how the world is") and imperative ("this is what we must do"), and its central plot is the global balance of power and future strategic advantage in a world of competition.[26] Ó Tuathail contends that such geography is not an innocent body of scholarship. Rather, it is an active description of the world by imperial, centralizing states and their advocates, anxious to control space.[27] He insists that Mackinder's geopolitical vision is inextricable from his commitment to a racist and militarist strain of British imperialism.

The use of Mackinder by security intellectuals, contends Ó Tuathail, has overlooked this. In a narrow reading of Mackinder as a "geopolitician," based on up to three of his Heartland texts, that *neglects the original context* and ideology of his place and time, Mackinder has been used like a cardboard cut-out in western security discourse.[28] Such use overlooks a twin irony which, in Ó Tuathail's opinion, is at the heart of Mackinder's "geopolitics:" that his theories are both anti-geographical and de-politicizing. His work also maintains that Mackinder's corpus has a highly ambiguous relationship to democracy.

It is *anti-geographical* in both its conceptualization and representation of the world in that it "depluralizes" the earth by dividing it up into essential zones, such as the "Pivot" and the "Outer Crescent."[29] Such a scheme can be sensitive neither to the particularity and diversity of the world's states, nor to global processes and challenges that transcend state-centric analysis. For example, his 1904 statement that it was "inevitable" that a vast and separate economic world should develop in the Heartland appears thus far to have been misguided, argues Ó Tuathail, as subsequent events showed that his understanding of railways was superficial. What is more, in arguing that the end of the "Columbian" period of world history meant states diverted their energies from territorial enlargement to the struggle for relative efficiency, Mackinder ignored those who defined it as the struggle for cultural and territorial independence—phenomena that would largely spell the demise of European empires in the second half of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Ó Tuathail insists that Mackinder's thinking is *de-politicizing* in that it presents deeply subjective and contested ideologies of imperialism, militarism, and territorial expansionism as an inevitable response to global realities.[30] Mackinder was a passionate imperialist who advocated the consolidation of empire overseas. His representation of the globe as newly "closed space" now that uncontrolled segments of its surface had finally been claimed did not recognize that it had been owned and divided up before, but not by Europeans.[31] At home, continues Ó Tuathail, he championed social imperialism and fostered a romantic mythology of a pre-modern age of hierarchical organic community. This enabled him to avoid considering uncomfortable social change, such as the rise of working class socialism. Provocatively, Ó Tuathail argues that Mackinder's thought was itself an incitement to violence, fostering an imperial mentality in the British population and seeking to use social reorganization to make them fit for taking up the "white man's burden"—a type of thinking and organizing that made the blind slaughter of World War I possible.[32] Yet in all this, he resolutely claimed his was an objective science.

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[26] See: G. Ó Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 2/3, 1999, pp. 107-124.

[27] See: G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space,* Routledge, London, 1996.

[28] See: G. Ó Tuathail, "Putting Mackinder in His Place: Material Transformations and Myth," *Political Geography,* Vol. 11, No. 2, 1992, p. 102.

[29] G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space,* p. 53.

[30] See: Ibid., pp. 53-54.

[31] See: Ibid., p. 22.

[32] See: Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Finally, Ó Tuathail questions Mackinder's *commitment to democracy*. He maintains that Mackinder's vision was patriarchal rather than democratic in the modern sense—leadership was best left in the hands of an experienced elite.[33] His harking back to Medieval England and ancient Athens, contends Ó Tuathail, did not recognize the unequal social relations and exploitation that characterized actual life in either the English countryside or classical "civilization." Indeed, quips Polelle developing this argument, "*Democratic* Ideals and Reality" was a misnamed book.[34]

In spite of this comprehensive critique, Ó Tuathail is still left with the challenge of explaining why Mackinder's thought has proved so enduring. Indeed, as he himself observes, even Ronald Reagan used Mackinder's language of the Heartland to frame his national security strategy.[35] Ó Tuathail suggests that geopolitics in the Mackinderian tradition appeals to those who seek timeless truths, who yearn to see the world in simple ways, and those with whom its fantasies of organic conservatism resonate. He reckons that historically, it generally appeals to "right wing countermoderns."[36] Its twin suppression of both geography and politics constitutes a form of power politics that critical geopolitics "strives to expose … to scrutiny and public debate in the name of deepening democratic politics."[37]

Therefore, Ó Tuathail's critical geopolitics does not see Mackinder's *Pivot* paper as a morally neutral discovery of eternal spatial truths. Rather, it insists that Mackinder (like all geopolitical experts) did not present a "view from nowhere," but was embedded in economic, political, ideological and military networks of power. He did not see "reality," but *interpreted and constructed* a certain geopolitical vision as "reality."[38] Thus, Mackinder is read as a way of "de-geographizing" and depoliticizing imperialism to represent the interests of the British state in apparently scientific language, a movement that, it might be argued by extending this discussion, compromised his avowed commitment to democracy. This is not to say it was cynical: Ó Tuathail is not suggesting that Mackinder did not believe his own words and simply wrote propaganda as part of some conspiracy. Instead, he proposes that all geopolitical discourse is best conceived of as "storytelling" about international politics—and as these stories are wielded to serve the political ends of the narrator, geopolitics itself is a form of power politics.

This paper will now go on to test this thesis in the contemporary use of Mackinder, by examining the writings of a Russian and an American who cite Mackinder to advocate particular foreign policy positions of their governments toward Uzbekistan.

The Use of Mackinder by Oleg Zotov

The first example of the use of Mackinder in studying contemporary Uzbekistan to be considered here is the work of Oleg Zotov, of the Oriental Studies Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.[39] Zotov has critiqued U.S. interest in Uzbekistan both before and after October 2001, when the

[33] See: G. Ó Tuathail, "Putting Mackinder in His Place: Material Transformations and Myth," p. 115.

[34] See: M. Polelle, *Raising Cartographic Consciousness: The Social and Foreign Policy Vision of Geopolitics in the Twentieth Century,* Lexington, Oxford, 1999, p. 12.

[35] See: G. Ó Tuathail, "Putting Mackinder in His Place: Material Transformations and Myth," p. 101.

[36] G. Ó Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," p. 113.

[37] Ibid., p. 108.

[38] G. Ó Tuathail, "Imperialist Geopolitics: Introduction," in: *The Geopolitics Reader*, ed. by G. Ó Tuathail, S. Dalby, P. Routledge, Routledge, London (forthcoming).

[39] This example is expanded from an earlier article (see: N. Megoran, op. cit.) and reworked here with the permission of Blackwell Publishing.

U.S. based military forces in the country for its invasion of Afghanistan. For Zotov, Uzbekistan is vital because it is at the heart of Eurasia, the most densely populated state in Central Asia, and the target of bitter competition by rival external factions.[40]

Zotov locates the war that began in the fall of 2001 not as Cooley does in the history of U.S. engagement with, and manipulation of, militant Islam,[41] but in the context of what he sees as fierce competition for influence in Central Asia between hostile and friendly forces. There are two hostile powers. The first is "Western hegemony," manifest in what he regards as U.S. proxy organizations such as GUUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Moldova)[42] and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The second is "international terrorism" and "Islamic extremism," as represented by al-Qa'eda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (a guerrilla group which launched attacks on Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000). Friendly forces are genuine Eurasian powers, that is to say Russia and China in alliance with the Central Asian republics, represented by such organizations as the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization of China-Russia-Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan).

Zotov does not believe that the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and its subsequent alliance with Uzbekistan is primarily strategic (the destruction of al-Qa'eda), nor is it ideological (the fostering of human rights and democracy), nor even economic (control over hydrocarbon resources). Rather, for Zotov, *geopolitics* is the primary explanation.[43] Eurasian powers seek the good of Eurasia, on the one hand, and forces of international terrorism and western hegemony on the other seek its harm. The behavior of any state is determined by its location. Onto this geopolitical framework he maps the characters and empires of Eurasian history. He admires the tactics of empire builders such as Alexander of Macedonia and Genghis Khan of the Mongols, who he believes pursued strategies of territorial aggrandizement that recognized the enduring importance of Central Asia for control of Eurasia. However, his icon of geopolitical genius is Amir Timur.

Amir Timur (1336–1405) was a descendant of both Mongol and Turkic dynasties and constructed an empire based in Samarkand that extended into India, Persia, Anatolia, and the Steppes.[44] Although excoriated by Soviet-era historians as an enemy of the working class, he has been reworked in independence as the example *par excellence* of patriotic Uzbek statesmanship.[45] This hagiographic scholarship emphasizes not his external conquests, but his cultural contributions to Samarkand's architecture, art and science, and the model statecraft that underlaid the supposed stability of his rule.

Zotov indeed lauds Timur for "eliminating chaos, establishing order, safe existence and development." However, Zotov is really interested in his external conquests. Through his knowledge of geopolitics, claims Zotov, he reconstructed the empires of Alexander and the Genghisides. On the one hand, he opposed extremism and western hegemony—by defeating Golden Horde ruler Tokhtamysh-Khan and the Crusaders. The other side of his strategy was to ally with other Eurasian states—Russia

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[40] See: O. Zotov, "Outlooks of the Bishkek Treaty in the Light of Timur's Geopolitics and Political Development Trends of Late XX-Beginning of XXI Century," *Central Asia,* 8 December, 2000: available at [http://greatgame.no.sapo.pt/asia_central.htm, 2000]; idem, "Pro-American Military and Political Blocs around the Caspian Basin Livening Up": available at [http://greatgame.no.sapo.pt/acopiniao/pro_american_military_and_political_blocs.htm, 2001].

[41] See: J. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, Pluto, London, 2002.

[42] See: Uzbekistan actually withdrew from GUUAM in 2005, what was widely interpreted as cooling of relations with the West and a movement toward Russia.

[43] See: O. Zotov, "Pro-American Military and Political Blocs around the Caspian Basin Livening Up."

[44] See: B.F. Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; T.W. Lentz, G. Lowry, *Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1989.

[45] See: *Mustaqillik: Izoxli Ilmiy-Ommabop Lug'at*, ed. by A. Jalolov, X. Qo'chqor, Sharq, Tashkent, 2000; G. Khidoyatov, "The Builder of a New Maverannahr," *Labyrinth: Central Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1996, pp. 42-45; M. Thaulow, "Timur Lenk før og nu- et spørgsmål om image," *Jordens Folk*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2001, pp. 13-18.

and China. Thus this enlightened ruler constructed Eurasia's only superpower, bringing peace and stability to Eurasia, without wanting world domination.

Needless to say, this interpretation stretches the boundaries of historical credibility. For example, Timur sought to impose Islamic Shari'a law; and he died on his way to invade China, not ally with it. He also wreaked horrific violence on cities he subjugated, such as Baghdad and Delhi, facts about which Zotov is silent, claiming merely that his foreign policy was "not excessively belligerent." Indeed, he notes with apparent approval, that when engaging Crusaders, "by way of persuasion he fired with a catapult their cut heads at the European warships."[46]

Crucially for Zotov, these engagements are not mere history: indeed, "Today the principles of his exceptional geopolitics are instructive as never before." He collapses political time into timeless geopolitical space, arguing that "the problems and directions of his geopolitics were the same ones that Central Asian states face today." Zotov sees the supposed contemporary struggle for Uzbekistan as simply the latest stage of this transcendent geopolitical struggle between timeless certitudes. Today, the international terrorists and extremists are the Islamists who have assailed Uzbekistan, and the forces of Western hegemony are pro-Western military and political blocs, such as GUUAM, NATO, and the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

For Zotov, the antidote is the formation of authentic Eurasian unions, including the CIS and the SCO, creating a "more global basis of security on the continent." In drawing to a grand conclusion, Zotov cites Mackinder as confirmation of the importance of this area and the truth of his thesis.

To return to Ó Tuathail's critique of Mackinder, Zotov's analysis falls foul of his major objections. It fails to locate Mackinder or other geopolitical thinkers in their original, imperialistic, contexts. It is anti-geographical in that it sees Central Asia merely as a vacuum for competition between outside powers, devoid of agency and initiative, undifferentiated in terms of the states that make up the region. It refuses to acknowledge the complexity of international relations in the region or the reasons for Islamist violence, and neither does it accept the possibility of a plurality of U.S. interests in Uzbekistan. It de-politicizes geopolitics, presenting a clear and subjective argument for Russian dominance of the region, but articulating it as the natural and historical outworking of geopolitical truths derivable from the unchanging realities of world geopolitics. Finally, democracy does not even appear to be a concern of Zotov's. Thus, Zotov's cosmetic deployment of Mackinder is readily susceptible to Ó Tuathail's broadside against geopolitics.

The Use of Mackinder by Chris Seiple

Whereas Oleg Zotov's engagement with Mackinder is superficial, the work of U.S. foreign policy intellectual Chris Seiple is marked by a reading of a number of Mackinder's works. The author's earlier article on this theme contained an overview of these.[47] This paper will examine two subsequently published papers by Seiple in the light of Ó Tuathail's criticisms. These both advocate a particular U.S. foreign policy toward Uzbekistan.

Seiple is concerned with formulating and advocating a coherent U.S. foreign policy toward Uzbekistan,[48] informed by a restatement of Mackinder's Heartland thesis. The two most recent state-

[46] O. Zotov, "Outlooks of the Bishkek Treaty in the Light of Timur's Geopolitics and Political Development Trends of Late XX-Beginning of XXI Century."

[47] See: N. Megoran, op. cit.

[48] As well as currently writing a dissertation about U.S. foreign policy toward Uzbekistan, he is President of the Institute for Global Engagement, a Washington-based think-tank that develops policy on religious freedom and state engagement.

ments of this position in the public domain are a web briefing for *Foreign Policy Research Institute,*[49] and an article for the journal *Orbis* which represents the first published scholarly article from his doctoral research.[50] Both essentially make the same argument, but in different formats. They claim that Mackinder devised a formula that neatly captured the enduring importance of Eurasia for the global balance of power. In making suggestions for foreign policy, claims Seiple, Mackinder appreciated its twin nature of both geostrategic *hard power* (military interventions and alliances) and geopsychological *soft power* (understanding how particular societies think and work).

Seiple posits Central Asia's importance in reference to Mackinder's "timeless formula" contained in his Pivot/Heartland thesis. Seiple believes that just as Mackinder updated the particulars of his 1904 articulation to take account of dynamic realities in 1919 and 1943, it is justifiable to do the same today. Although the details of the contemporary situation have changed, the essential spatial truth grasped by Mackinder has not. For Seiple, Central Asia is now at a key point of the Heartland, Mackinder's "greatest natural fortress on earth." It is "sitting atop the crescent of crisis that rises from North Africa to Central Asia before descending into Southeast Asia,"[51] a coded designation of majority Muslim lands. It is also located strategically between the nuclear powers of India, Pakistan, China and Russia (and soon Iran), and "on the frontlines against militant Islam." Situated thus, it is "the backyard that everyone shares" and "the geographic fulcrum of global balance." Within Central Asia, Uzbekistan is the key state, contiguous to every other country in the region, and has its largest military and greatest population. With 60 percent of its population under 25 years old and lacking sufficient economic opportunities, it is a fertile ground for al-Qa'eda. Indeed, claims Seiple boldly, "it is in Uzbekistan and the rest of Central Asia that we can prevent the next Bin Laden."[52] He contends that the U.S. has been very slow to grasp the importance of Uzbekistan in the Heartland, and that it has only been since September 2001 that it has belatedly scrambled to acknowledge the strategic significance of the region.

Thus far, Seiple departs little from many others who have used Mackinder to advocate greater external intervention in the region. However, as noted above, Seiple reads Mackinder as an advocate of both hard and soft power interventions. On this basis he is critical of the Clinton administration for failing to pursue a hard power interventionist policy of military alliances, and welcomes the Bush administration's rectification of that. However, he believes that current U.S. policy is failing to give proper attention to the soft power that Mackinder realized was so important.

By this, he means sensitivity to the internal social and political dynamics of Uzbekistan. To expound on this, he devotes the majority of his *Orbis* article to the "geopsychology" of Uzbekistan.[53] He traces the development of modern Uzbek identity and social structure back through history. This is informed not only by the scholarly literature in history, political science, sociology and anthropology, but by formal and informal discussions with a wide variety of people within the country. He concludes that the primary contours of Uzbek society are local *mahalla* neighborhoods infused with a tolerant form of Islam and a patriarchal social structure, and regional clans whose elites jostled for power during and after the Soviet period. By attempting to create patterns of civil society modeled on the individualistic U.S. example, American and other international development agencies have failed to take account of alternative, non-American but viable and stable existing forms of civil society. He believes that these could form the basis of future democratic development in a culturally appropriate way.

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[49] See: C. Seiple, *Heartland Geopolitics and the Case of Uzbekistan*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1 June, 2005: available at [http://www.fpri.org].

[50] See: C. Seiple, "Uzbekistan: Civil Society in the Heartland," *Orbis,* Spring 2005.

[51] Ibid., p. 246.

[52] C. Seiple, "Heartland Geopolitics and the Case of Uzbekistan."

[53] See: C. Seiple, "Uzbekistan: Civil Society in the Heartland," pp. 247-254.

Seiple concludes by thus advocating a mix of geostrategic and geopsychological forms of engagement with Uzbekistan, which recognize both the pivotal position of the country in the Heartland and also the specificities of Uzbek political culture. This, he contends, is vital to promote democracy and "win the war of ideas in places not yet under the sway of militant Islam." He acknowledges that "there have been extensive human rights violations in Uzbekistan" which certainly must not be condoned, but believes that the best way to address them is not by punishing Uzbekistan, but engaging in the way outlined above. He is sure that Mackinder, who recognized the inherent inability of democracies to think strategically, and who "sought to balance the hard power of military might with the soft power of civil society," would have agreed.[54]

So, how susceptible is Seiple's use of Mackinder to Ó Tuathail's critique?

- Firstly, although he tends toward it thus far, the jury must be said to be out as to whether Seiple uses Mackinder as a decontextualized "cardboard cut-out." He depends heavily upon the three Heartland iterations (especially the 1919 one), with only minor reference to other works. Although he has seen biographies of Mackinder, in insisting that the Heartland thesis is a "timeless formula" that uncovered an enduring geopolitical truth, he disengages it from Mackinder's advocacy of a contested form of imperialism. Furthermore, he does not critically reflect upon the contexts and ways in which geopolitical theories in general are produced and deployed. However, his original application of the currently fashionable terminology of hard and soft power to Mackinder shows he is aware that the globe is more than simply Brzezinski's undifferentiated "grand chessboard."[55] Furthermore, as Seiple himself has yet to finish his doctorate and present a full version of his thesis, it would be unfair at this stage to reach a conclusion on this point.
- Secondly, the charge of being "anti-geographical" must be examined at two scales. At the geostrategic scale, the objection holds up. He does not critically examine the extremely problematic geographical/cartographic bases of the designation of terms such as "Heartland," and he resorts to vague, emotive and suggestive language such as "crescent of crisis." However, on the state level, the accusation can scarcely be maintained. Seiple's detailed understanding of the social and political structures of Uzbekistan, and his insistence that in engaging with the country its complexity must be appreciated, are rare amongst contemporary followers of Mackinder. This understanding has been built up by personal visits, anecdotal and ethnographic observation, and a dogged insistence on testing stereotypes and questioning assumptions about the country. Dodds and Sidaway observe that Mackinder "had no deep knowledge of … Central Asia;"[56] Seiple certainly goes beyond Mackinder in familiarizing himself with one part of it.
- However, thirdly, the charge of de-politicization is one that Seiple does fall foul of. Although Seiple does not draw new cartographic representations for his latest articles, textually he vividly maps Uzbekistan, and Central Asia in general, atop a "crescent of crisis" whence the next Osama bin Laden may arise unless the U.S. intervenes effectively.[57] This implies that terrorist violence and instability is indigenous to the region but its solution is exog-

[54] Ibid., p. 259.

[55] Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives,* Basic Books, New York, 1997. Incidentally, Brzezinski inadvertently revealed his own superficial engagement with the geopolitical tradition in misnaming Halford Mackinder "Harold" Mackinder (p. 38)!

[56] K. Dodds, J. Sidaway, "Halford Mackinder and the 'Geographical Pivot of History': A Centennial Retrospective," *Geographical Journal,* Vol. 170, No. 4, 2004, pp. 294.

[57] See: S. Dalby discusses similar concerns in "Geopolitics, the Bush Doctrine, and War on Iraq," *The Arab World Geographer,* Vol. 6, No. 1, 2003.

enous—in other words, that geography compels a U.S. intervention. This position is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it naturalizes an assertive and militarized foreign policy that is a subjective choice, and one controversial to many inside as well as outside the U.S. Secondly, it implicitly absolves the U.S. of its share of the responsibility for destabilizing the region and creating that violence—by supporting militant factions in Afghanistan (such as al-Qa'eda), and backing and arming rival powers and oppressive dictators across the "crescent of crisis."

Furthermore, Seiple's belief about overarching drama of global politics uncritically reprises the conventional U.S. geopolitical storyline of "the U.S. and democracy versus al-Qa'eda and terrorism." This discourse makes it easier for local strongmen to justify repression in the name of a global war on terror, and the U.S. to tolerate them. This is not to say that Seiple supports a particular line on this issue, but rather that the articulation of this worldview as a dominant horizon for comprehending the world lends itself to such abuse in various contexts.

- Finally, there is a certain ambiguity about democracy in Seiple's writings. There can be no doubt that he is committed to the vision of a democratic future for Uzbekistan, but in the meantime errs on the side of positive engagement with the ruling regime. To justify this position, in an earlier article he insisted that Karimov was a leader genuinely looking to the best interests of the country, presiding over an essentially benevolent authoritarianism whilst preparing the way for democracy.[58] Bearing in mind repeated and ruthless crackdowns on expressions of dissent, this is an extraordinary argument to make. His position is a polar opposite to that of isolating the regime, as recently advocated by former U.K. ambassador to the country, Craig Murray.[59] There are no easy answers to the question of how the U.S. and U.K. should engage with Uzbekistan, but Seiple's final position is nonetheless significant. It can be illuminated by recalling the contradiction at the heart of Mackinder's own thinking. He espoused belief both in the British Empire and the cause of universal democracy. However, the two were not identical, hence internal contradictions in his position. Likewise, Seiple sees the democratic future of Central Asia as tied up with an interventionist U.S. foreign policy. The tension between these two commitments is apparent in Seiple's writing.

  Furthermore, Seiple's work reprises Mackinder's ambiguity about the merits of contemporary democracy at home. These papers, like Seiple's earlier writings, are animated by a profound concern that America's leaders have failed to grasp the geopolitical importance of Uzbekistan, and that this may have damaging long term consequences for the U.S., Uzbekistan, and Eurasia. A parallel concern haunted Mackinder in his own time. Mackinder blamed this on civilian democracy, which "refuses to think strategically unless and until compelled to do so for the purpose of defence." In quoting this citation, Seiple also identifies U.S. democratic culture as part of the problem.

Ó Tuathail's critique of Mackinder and those who use him can usefully highlight major shortcomings of Seiple's work. However, it cannot be completely sustained. Indeed, as the conclusion will argue, Seiple's use of Mackinder in turn reflects critical attention back onto Ó Tuathail's position.

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[58] See: C. Seiple, "Seeing Uzbekistan: From Cliché to Clarity"; "'Clean Leader' from Somewhere Else," 8 January, 2002: available at [http://www.globalengagement.org/issues/2002/01/cseiple-clarity.htm].

[59] See: "Ousted Ambassador Makes Uzbekistan Key Election Issue in Britain," *Eurasianet*, 11 April, 2005: available at [http://www.eurasianet.org].

Conclusion

The complicated international relations of the Central Asian region have triggered a renewed interest in the writings of Mackinder as a tool to explain events and guide policy. It is vital, however, that this return to Mackinder engages with the rich body of secondary scholarship about his writing. This scholarship addresses two separate questions—how his ideas may be applied to actual international relations, and what influenced how he devised them. This essay has considered the second question.

Although the merits of his scholarship have frequently been called into question, what is undeniable about Sir Halford Mackinder is the general coherence of his writings and the conviction arising from them that informed all his public activities. This was a belief about the way that physical geography framed the contours of political geography, and a personal investment in one outcome of that geography—the British Empire.

Ó Tuathail's "critical geopolitics" is the most radical work within the school that emphasizes the importance of contexualizing Mackinder, and that stresses the essentially contested and political nature of all geopolitical discourse. He sees the Pivot/Heartland thesis not as the unearthing of timeless truths, but as the narration of a subjective ideology of British imperialism in the language of an objective scientific theory. He is scathing about security intellectuals who take Mackinder's "Heartland" thesis out of the full context of his geographical writings and use him as a kind of "cardboard cut-out." He asserts that such people yearn to reduce the complexity of the world to simple formulae, and are generally found on the political right.

His critique is generally well taken in the case of the two scholars considered here who use Mackinder. They do not locate Mackinder's Heartland idea in the context of his wider thought and commitment to imperialism. There are two impacts of this failure to engage with the more problematic aspects of Mackinder's legacy. The first is that both advocate contentious foreign policy choices for the active pursuit of the interests of their states abroad (policies that include assertive military deployments and alliances), yet these are de-politicized by their presentation in the apparently scientific language of geopolitics. Secondly, ambiguities remain about the positions of the authors on the prospects for democracy in Uzbekistan. Both of these concerns, it may be argued, arise because the authors have failed to give proper consideration to the full context of Mackinder's work.

However, Seiple's use of Mackinder must in turn question three aspects of Ó Tuathail's critical geopolitics.

- Firstly, although Seiple does not engage with critical geopolitics, he has clearly read a small number of Mackinder's works in detail, plus biographies and other secondary literature. It remains true that the Mackinder he deploys is the Mackinder as strategic prophet, not the Mackinder as advocate of imperialist violence based on a simplistic understanding of geography. However, it is surely unreasonable to suggest that the choice of the former can only be made with ignorance of the latter.
- Secondly, whilst this paper has argued that Seiple's use of Mackinder does de-politicize, the charge of being anti-geographical is more complicated. Certainly, he is drawn by Mackinder's attempt to use a simple geographical formula to make sweeping claims about history on the global scale. However, at the level of Uzbekistan, he has built up a body of knowledge that he uses to critique dominant forms of U.S. and other Western engagement with the country. Indeed, he claims that the U.S. has consistently failed to understand *both* the big picture of Heartland geopolitics, *and* the complexity of individual places within it. It may be that Seiple actually goes beyond Mackinder in developing his concept of the "geopsychological;" nonetheless, Seiple is evidence that the geopolitical gaze in the Mackin-

derian tradition need not necessarily be anti-geographical. This is not to criticize Ó Tuathail's analysis of Mackinder, but rather to sound a note of caution about generalization in the case of those who may cite him.

- Thirdly and finally, Seiple's plotting of an alternative U.S. policy toward Uzbekistan, merits and defects notwithstanding, is at least an attempt to address a very difficult question: how should other countries engage Uzbekistan? Practitioners of critical geopolitics are often elusive about their own alternatives, and Ó Tuathail's own writings do not contain rigorous defenses of his own positive commitments, so much as somewhat-vague statements about "deepening democratic politics." One is entitled to ask what that might mean in the Central Asian example. He may well regard it as a virtue that his own system does not give "advice to the prince:"[60] but it can be difficult to work on, or live in, Central Asia and avoid the question that Seiple tackles head on.

In conclusion, work by geographers over the past two decades has transformed our understanding of Mackinder by locating his Heartland thesis in the context of his wider concerns and beliefs, particularly his commitment to British imperialism. As critical geopolitics insists, to ignore this is to invite a dangerous repetition of the contradictions and flaws of his original work. However, as Seiple demonstrates, these critiques may be over-generalized when applied to writers who use Mackinder, and may struggle to address pressing practical problems. There is a dialog between these different positions that ought to begin. Nonetheless, when confronted with the use of Mackinder to analyze Central Asia, we should heed the key insight of critical geopolitics and always ask not only, "what does this tell us about Central Asia?," but, "how have citations of Mackinder's theory been used to construct contemporary geopolitical narratives about Central Asia?"

[60] G. Ó Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," p. 109.