MACKINDER'S "HEARTLAND": A HELP OR HINDRANCE IN UNDERSTANDING CENTRAL ASIA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

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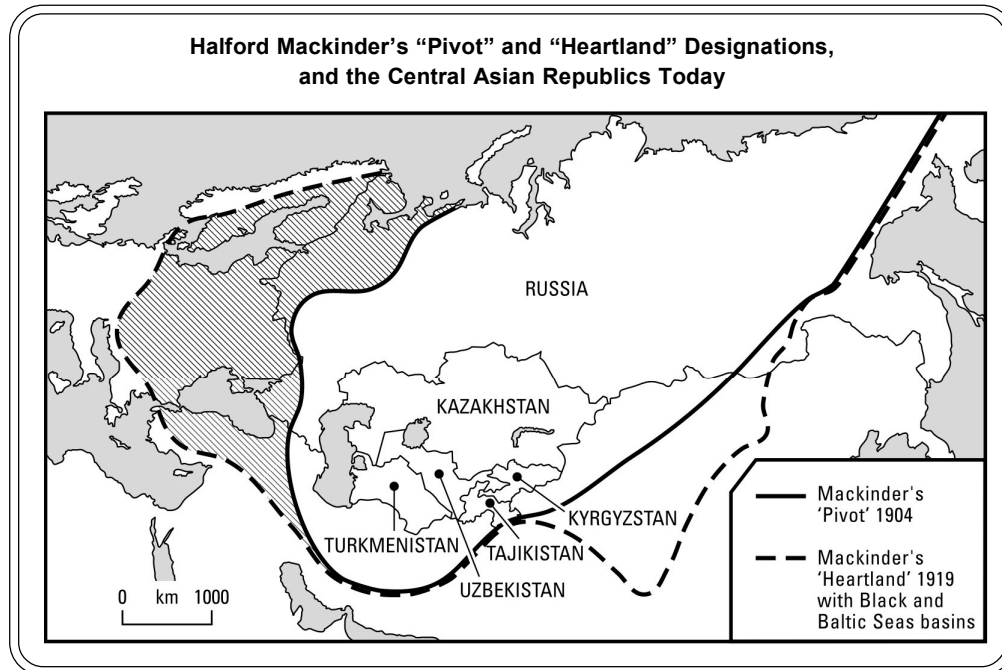(Cambridge CB2 3HU, U.K.)*

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

In 1904 the British geographer Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) delivered a paper to London's Royal Geographical Society entitled *The Geographical Pivot of History*. He argued that the "Pivot," or "Heart-land" of Eurasia—much of Russia and Central Asia (see Fig. 1)—was the key to the balance of power in the world, and the state that controlled it would be well-placed to dominate Eurasia and even the world. His ideas proved controversial, but entered into the vocabulary of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War.

Some commentators predicted that the end of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. conflict would lay Mackinder's thesis to rest. However, his ideas have experienced a renaissance in application to Central Asia. Numerous scholars and journalists have seen fit to revise his ideas, claiming that Central Asia, as the focus of a competition for influence from Russia, the U.S., China, Turkey, Iran and others, has taken its rightful place as the Pivot of Asia. Reducing the "Heartland" to Central Asia, Ehsan Ahrari contends that "the father

F i g u r e   1

**Halford Mackinder's "Pivot" and "Heartland" Designations,
and the Central Asian Republics Today**

RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

KYRGYZSTAN

TURKMENISTAN   TAJIKISTAN

UZBEKISTAN

0   km   1000

Mackinder's
'Pivot' 1904

Mackinder's
'Heartland' 1919
with Black and
Baltic Seas basins

of modern geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder, once said that whoever controlled Central Asia would wield enormous power in the world."[1] Basing their analysis on Mackinder's theories, Sloan argues that "Central Asia is once more a key to the security of all Eurasia,"[2] whilst O'Hara describes competition in Central Asia between external powers since 1991 as "the scramble for the 'Heartland',"[3] and suggests that Mackinder's "insightful observations may yet be proved correct."[4]

Others, however, have criticized this linkage. Edwards argues that it arbitrarily merges ideas about a "new great game" with geopolitics to make policy recommendations, without any attention to theoretical rigor or careful reading of the geopolitical tradition.[5] Fettweis contends that the application of Mackinder's ideas to contemporary Central Asia is profoundly misplaced, as they have been overtaken by the course of events, leading us to waste valuable foreign policy opportunities.[6]

The articles collected in this special issue of *Central Asia and the Caucasus* are the first sustained scholarly investigation of this phenomenon. They are mostly collected from papers pre-

[1] E. Ahrari, "The Strategic Future of Central Asia: A View from Washington," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2003, p. 159.

[2] G. Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now," *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 2/3, 1999, p. 32.

[3] S. O'Hara, "Great Game or Grubby Game? The Struggle for Control of the Caspian," *Geopolitics,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 2004, p. 147.

[4] 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*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, 2005, p. 101.

[5] See: M. Edwards, "The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder," *Central Asian Survey,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 2003, p. 96.

[6] See: C. Fettweis, "Sir Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics, and Policymaking in the 21st Century," *Parameters, U.S. Army War College Quarterly,* Summer 2000, pp. 58-71: available at [http://www.carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/00summer/fettweis.htm].

sented at a symposium held in Tashkent in December 2004 to mark the centenary of the "Pivot" paper, and ask whether Mackinder's theories are a help or a hindrance in analyzing Central Asia's international relations.[7] Following symposia dedicated to the centenary held at the Royal Geographical Society in 2003 and the International Geographical Union in Glasgow 2004, as well as two publications on the same theme[8] and a 2004 seminar at the London think-tank Chatham House, the purpose of this special issue is twofold. Firstly, it is to critically examine what illumination Mackinder's theories may shed on Central Asia's international politics, if any. It is hoped that this will be a corrective to the under-theorization of Central Asian studies. Secondly, it is to participate in the centennial scholarly re-evaluation of Mackinder's legacy by considering what Central Asia and Central Asianists can contribute to it.

In order to set the scene for the papers, this introduction will give a brief biography of Halford Mackinder, outline his geopolitical arguments and their application to Central Asia over time, and provide a short overview of the individual papers. It finishes by drawing some conclusions for both Central Asian and Mackinder studies.

[8] See: *Halford Mackinder and the "Geographical Pivot of History": a centennial retrospective*, ed. by K. Dodds and J. Sidaway. Special edition of *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, 2004; *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, 2005.

Halford Mackinder—His Life and Work

Halford Mackinder was born in the northern English town of Gainsborough in 1861, the son of a doctor. In 1880 he entered Oxford University, from which he graduated with a first class degree in natural sciences, specializing in animal morphology. He was heavily influenced by evolutionary biologists, and studied history in his fourth year in order to explore how their ideas could be applied to the human past. He also studied geology, and was awarded the Burdet Coutts research scholarship.[9]

Mackinder wove these interests together in a holistic vision that he called the "new geography." This was an attempt to move away from geography as the mere rote learning of facts about places or accounts of geomorphological processes, to an integrated vision of physical and human geography (environment and society). In a memorable comparison, Mackinder likened the interaction of human and physical geography to a rock on the seashore. The rock represents the stable physical environment, with human history the tide around it—ebbing and flowing, surging and resting.[10] Technology and human innovation can change the course of human history, but are always struggling against the "invariable" facts of the environment. In particular, climate/environment produces "natural regions" within which human cultures form, which themselves pass inherited racial characteristics down the generations,[11] forming a "momentum" which was difficult to alter in the short term.[12] The societies

[9] For a biography of Mackinder, see: B. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography,* Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1987. For a condensed version, see: B. Blouet, "Mackinder, Sir Halford John (1861-1947)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, Vol. 35, 2004, pp. 648-651.

[10] See: H. Mackinder, "The Physical Basis of Political Geography," *The Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1890, p. 79.

[11] See: H. Mackinder, "The Human Habitat," *The Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. 47, No. 6, 1931.

[12] See: H. Mackinder, Foreword to: N. Mikhaylov, *Soviet Geography: The New Industrial and Economic Distributions of the U.S.S.R.* Second edition, Transl. by Natalie Rothstein, Methuen and Co., London, 1937.

thus nurtured in these natural areas exist in a state of "permanent struggle" with each other.[13] He repeatedly stressed that the interconnectedness of the world, achieved especially since the European states had grown to cover much of it, meant the actions of one would affect all others. The society that best grasped this holistic vision and adapted to take account of it would be best placed to survive. As he boldly claimed in the first presentation of this thesis, in 1887, he believed that his concept of geography "will satisfy at once the practical requirements of the statesman and the merchant, the theoretical requirements of the historian and the scientist, and the intellectual requirements of the teacher."[14]

Although there was little new in the elements of his thesis, he was a gifted speaker and able to weave them together into a compelling picture. Those in the Royal Geographical Society who were anxious to move it from being a body of military and amateur explorers to a professional scholarly organization, successfully pushed for him to become the first Reader of geography in the U.K., at Oxford in 1887. This was the start of an accomplished academic career that saw him establish and oversee Reading College (later Reading University), become Director of the London School of Economics, and publish numerous works that promoted geographical education. In so doing, he helped to establish geography as a modern academic discipline in the United Kingdom.

But Mackinder's vision took him beyond the academy. In 1910 he became a Member of Parliament for Camlachie in Glasgow, and campaigned in particular for the reform of trade tariffs within the British Empire to foster a single economic entity. In 1919-1920 he had the opportunity to attempt to put his geopolitical ideas about the importance of encircling and limiting the "Heartland" into practice, when he was sent by Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon to liaise with General Denikin's anti-Bolshevik forces in South Russia. He returned to the U.K. with proposals that Britain should support a ring of independent states from Poland through Ukraine and South Russia to Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, in order to act to reduce Soviet power and prevent it threatening British India.[15] This was the closest that Mackinder personally came to Central Asia and the Caucasus, part of a series of British interventions in the region from 1918 to 1920 that enraged the Bolsheviks.[16] His proposals were not accepted by the British government. In 1920 he was knighted "Sir" Halford Mackinder for "Public and Parliamentary service," and in 1922 he lost his seat in the parliamentary election, his anti-Bolshevik stance proving unpopular with Glasgow's working class. Thereafter he retired from academia and largely devoted himself to policy planning and the promotion of imperial preference on the Imperial Shipping Committee and the Imperial Economic Committee.

His biographers tend to agree that as a politician and statesman Mackinder failed to achieve the impact he would have desired, but as a promoter and establisher of academic geography he was far more successful.[17] However, although he is reputed not to have liked the term himself, it is as a "geopolitical" thinker that he is most widely known outside the discipline. And it is on the basis of one paper in particular, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, that this reputation was established.

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[13] See: H. Mackinder, "Man-power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," *The National Review,* Vol. 45, No. 265, 1905.

[14] H. Mackinder, "On the Scope and Methods of Geography," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society,* Vol. 9, No. 3, 1887, p. 159.

[15] See: B. Blouet, "Sir Halford Mackinder as British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-1920," *Geographical Journal,* Vol. 142, No. 2, 1976.

[16] See, for example: R.S. Teague-Jones, *The Spy Who Disappeared: Diary of a Secret Mission to Russian Central Asia in 1918. With an Introduction and Epilogue by Peter Hopkirk,* Victor Gollancz, London, 1990.

[17] See: B. Blouet, *Sir Halford Mackinder, 1861-1947: Some New Perspectives,* School of Geography, University of Oxford, 1975; G. Kearns, "Halford John Mackinder: 1861-1947," in: *Geographers Bibliographical Studies,* No. 9, ed. by T.W. Freeman Mansell, London, 1985.

The Geographical Pivot of History

This section will provide an overview of the arguments made in the "Pivot" paper, and the later iterations of his thesis, in order to ground the subsequent essays in this collection.

Mackinder's paper discussed the historical interplay and balance of power between Europe and Asia. It posited that physical geography "in large measure controls" this relationship, by setting a coercive framework within which it must be played out, but that human initiative, displayed particularly in developing technologies of mobility, is able to significantly alter its dynamics, at least in the medium term. It was clearly thus a development of Mackinder's "new geography" outlined above.

Mackinder observed that Europe's relationship with Asia has historically been very different to that of its relationship with the Americas, Africa, and Australasia. Whereas Europe relatively easily subdued the latter continents, the former presented a different example altogether. From the fifth to the sixteenth centuries "a remarkable succession of Turanian nomadic peoples" from the Huns and Avars to the Mongols and Kalmyks formed a "great Asiatic hammer" that repeatedly struck Europe in the form of raids and invasions. This "pressure of external barbarism" directly led to European unity, and thus indirectly to European civilization.

Why should Asia be the great exception? Why should Europe and European history be thus "subordinate," as Mackinder put it, to Asia and Asiatic history? Mackinder dismissed the idea that Asia had enjoyed any civilizational superiority over Europe—no, the invaders were merely "a cloud of ruthless and idealess horsemen." Rather, the answer could be found in the physical geography of the great plains of "Euro-Asia." He posited a vast area composed of the drainage basins of rivers such as the Volga, the Yenisey, and the Amu and Syr Darya, which he called "the Pivot area." These rivers did not connect with the wider world, but rather drained into large inland lakes or the inaccessible Arctic Ocean. This "Pivot" was thus all but impregnable to attack by maritime powers, yet was able to sustain large populations itself. The nations that arose from within it depended on horse and camel to negotiate its vast expanses, which gave them the mobility to mount the raids on Europe that Europe could not emulate in return. Therefore, the physical geography of the "Pivot" made it a "natural seat of power." There were two other "natural seats of power" in Mackinder's scheme, essentially defined in relation to the "Pivot." These were the continental "Inner Crescent" of Europe, the Middle East, South and East Asia (the basis of Spykman's later "Rimland" concept), and the oceanic "Outer Crescent" of the Americas, Britain, South Africa, Australasia, and Japan.

Even though the "chief phases of history" were "organically connected" to the physical features of the world, the interplay between physical and political geography was also influenced by human ingenuity. Thus the development of Europe as an overseas maritime power (which consolidated its strength and wealth) swung the ascendancy in its favor. This was the great "Columbian epoch" that lasted around four hundred years until 1900, during which time the Europeans mapped and divided up most of the world that was, until the beginning of that time period, unknown to them.

However, Mackinder declared that that epoch had come to an end, due to two factors: that there were no more uncontrolled territories for the Europeans to explore and seize, and the development of railways. He believed that Railways were more efficient than seaways in transporting troops, thus swinging the mobility advantage back to land power.

This would have enormous implications for the "Pivot," by now controlled by Russia, which "replaces the Mongol Empire" in its ability to strike on all sides of the "marginal region" around the "Pivot," and be struck "from all sides," save the North. Railways would enhance this ability by ena-

bling vast troop numbers to be rushed to whichever edge of the "Pivot" they were urgently needed. But more than that, a railway system would enable the "incalculably great" resources of the Russian Empire and Mongolia—population, wheat, cotton, fuel, and metals—to be properly exploited, leading to the "inevitable" development of a "vast economic world" outside the control of maritime powers. The resultant shift in the balance of power "would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building," and then "the empire of the world would be in sight." The mighty strides in Russia's agricultural economy resultant from the nineteenth century southward migration of Russian peasants into one part of the "Pivot" was adduced by Mackinder as evidence of this gigantic potential.

This would not inexorably lead to the Pivot state achieving world hegemony—if South America's potential resources were to be exploited by the U.S., it could yet influence the system. However, he concluded that the Pivot state is "always likely to be great," whoever controlled it—he was not attempting to predict a great future for any one state, but to elucidate a "geographical formula," he added in the post-lecture discussion. He concluded his words to the Society by expressing anxiety about the relative rise of the Pivot region, and exhorted his country to check this by maintaining its position in the marginal region.

As Hekimoglu (this edition) states, none of the components of his argument were novel, but his interweaving of them managed to achieve a degree of novelty. Furthermore, the timing was significant, striking a chord with mounting concerns in Britain about the relative decline of empire. He provided two further iterations of his theory, adapted to the strategic situation of their times. The first of these, the book *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, was published in 1919, and he began it by explaining that it was an updated version of two of his key essays, the 1904 "Pivot" paper and his 1905 "Manpower as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength."[18] Subtitled "A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction," it was Mackinder's input into debates about the post World War I settlement in East-Central Europe. He updated the "Pivot" to the "Heartland" in order to include this region, and set it alongside a number of other "natural regions" of the "World-Island," which was his term for Europe, Asia and Africa.[19] He argued that to protect the future of democracy and to secure the British position, it was necessary to "reduce the German people to its proper position in the world" and create a network of independent states around it to check its future power. Indeed, his new reworking of his formula could be summed up by his oft-quoted dictum:

> Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
> Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
> Who rules the World-Island commands the World.[20]

His final version of his ideas was published in 1943 as a *Foreign Affairs* article entitled "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace." He defended the Heartland thesis, speculating on the future of the world following the end of World War II, and the measures that would be necessary to prevent Germany from making another bid for Heartland dominance. He insisted that his Heartland thesis was more useful in 1943 even than it was twenty or forty years earlier.[21] This was, apparently, the view he took with him to his grave four years later.

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[18] See footnote 13.

[19] The other "natural regions" were Sahara, Southern Heartland (Sub-Saharan Africa), Arabia, European Coastland (the remainder of Europe), and Monsoon Coastland (India, China and South-East Asia).

[20] H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Constable and Company, London, 1919, p. 194.

[21] See: H. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 21, No. 4, 1943, p. 603.

The Pivot/Heartland
in Subsequent Scholarship

Since Mackinder's death in 1947, a significant body of secondary scholarship about his works has emerged. It is too extensive to cite exhaustively here, but can broadly be divided into two major topics of concern.

The first is the application and impact of his theories on the practice of international relations. Topics debated included how well Mackinder's thesis anticipated and described the "course of events" during the Cold War, its influence on Fascist and neo-Fascist regimes from Nazi Germany to Latin America, and the extent to which it informed Cold War U.S. policies such as "containment."

The second major topic of scholarly enquiry has been the intellectual background of Mackinder's thought. Based on the premise that it is illuminating to resituate key texts within their original context, this has sought to integrate the three best-known "geopolitical" texts with his full corpus of work on geography and his political and professional activities.

Debates within both of these areas have encompassed what his attitudes to democracy, imperialism, race, gender, socialism, capitalism, social change, and the influence of the environment were, and the extent to which these concerns were reflected in his apparently "scientific" theories. They have also enquired as to the accuracy of his model in predicting events and indeed whether he intended it to be used for this purpose, and his culpability in imperial and state violence. These debates have frequently been highly polarized, with his admirers and detractors talking past each other from dogmatically defended positions.

The Papers
in This Collection

Before moving on to analyze the significance of the papers in this collection for both studies of Central Asian geopolitics and Halford Mackinder, this section will outline the arguments presented by the contributors to this special issue.

■   *Firstly*, some papers regard the Heartland thesis as more or less of a *help* in understanding the international relations of Central Asia.

Ekaterina Borisova makes the case for Mackinder's theories being crucial to an understanding of the behavior of Atlantic states right up until the present. She argues that his scheme was perfectly suited to describing the Cold War system, and was the reasoning behind such developments as the formation of NATO and similar unions. As a land power, Russia has always sought oceanic seaports, but never non-contiguous empires across the seas. The Atlantic powers, on the other hand, have "piratical" mindsets, driven by the desire for unlimited expansion, seeking to rob and plunder whilst at sea, but comply to a different standard social norms at home.

Borisova rejects the notion that the end of the Cold War has meant these principles are no longer operative. On the contrary, the post-1989 Eastward expansion of NATO and the American ideological and commercial push into Central Europe and then Eastern Europe demonstrates the persistence of this mindset. Far from being a "fight against terrorism," recent U.S. moves into Central Asia are indic-

ative of not merely a desire to contain the Heartland, but to dominate all of Eurasia, and thus go beyond even the prescriptions of Mackinder. It is clear, she concludes, that the foreign policies of the Atlantic/sea powers are driven by Mackinder's thesis.

Sayragul Matikeeva argues in her paper that not only is Central Asia the "pivotal area" or "Heartland," but that Kyrgyzstan is the center of this Pivot area. Being located at this pivotal area allows connections with many different places. She argues that the fact that the countries of Central Asia possess such a unique geostrategic position determines the interests of external countries toward them, and that this can especially be demonstrated in the case of Kyrgyzstan. For example, she shows in her paper how China is trying to increase its influence over Kyrgyzstan and even gradually to swallow the republic up. The reason for that behavior, from her point of view, is the desire to be a Heartland. In spite of being in this situation—at "the center of the center"—Matikeeva does not think that it is necessary for Kyrgyzstan to seek to be a strong and influential country. She believes that the presence of both Russia and the U.S. is a factor that will provide security for the country in the absence of alternative political power.

Matikeeva also discusses the relations between these factors and regional integration of the Heartland. She is of the opinion that there are many variables that hinder the integration of Central Asian countries, which include differences in the level of economic development. She believes that another significant reason for current incompatibility is that Kyrgyzstan is a relatively developed democracy compared to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Ulugbeck Khasanov's paper considers what use Mackinder's Heartland thesis is for explaining Eurasian geopolitics, and whether foreign Central Asian policy planners can derive any practical benefits from it. He begins by observing that many commentators had hoped that the end of the Cold War would trigger a new age of cooperation and peace, and it was into this optimism that the independent states of the former Soviet Union were born. He suggests that this was mistaken because it failed to appreciate the realities of the competition at the heart of global power politics. White House documents and papers by U.S. and Russian foreign policy elites and analysts, all reveal that the United States is committed to maintaining itself as a world hegemon, and preventing the emergence of regional hegemons which could challenge U.S. power. This is a dangerous situation, as whilst the U.S. is able to win wars, it is generally unable to resolve post-war conflicts alone, thus creating situations of spiraling insecurity (as in Iraq).

Khasanov argues, however, that the student of international relations should not be surprised at this. Conceptually, realist international relations theory proposes that power politics is at the heart of foreign policy. Geographically, Mackinder's Heartland thesis indicates that Eurasia is the key point of conflict for control of the world's resources and thus its future. Central Asian foreign policy elites would do well to grasp these two truths, by abandoning any fond notions of a "new world order," accepting that they occupy a site of conflict, and acting accordingly. Khasanov's conceptualization of the importance of Eurasia for the global balance of power in a world where competition between states is inevitable, reprises many of Mackinder's core themes.

Although Central Asia has commonly been identified by analysts as Mackinder's Heartland, **Anita Sengupta** reminds us that it has also been discussed in terms of another rubric in currency in the first part of Mackinder's life, the "Great Game." This term was popularized by the British writer and imperialist Rudyard Kipling to describe the skirmishing between Russian and British imperial agents for edge-of-empire influence in the Turkestani Khanates, Chinese Turkestan, and Afghanistan in the mid-to late-nineteenth century. It has been revived to refer to putative external power competition for influence over the Central Asian states since the early 1990s.

Sengupta examines the intersection of these two geographical tropes, and argues that they should be disentangled. Her empirical study is of Russian and U.S. political and military engagement with the Central Asian republics, considering both bilateral relations and the role of the two external powers in supporting rival multilateral regional organizations. She argues that since 11 September, 2001 Russia and the U.S. have had a remarkable overlap of interests in combating Islamist violence. Whilst this does not mean that there will not be competition between them, she argues that the language of "new great game" is inappropriate and unhelpful. Shorn of its zero-sum competition assumptions, Mackinder's "Heartland" designation can thus be salvaged as a useful description of an important area.

Ambrish Dhaka's central contention is that the spatial aspects of the Heartland theory have been overlooked. He seeks to rectify this by first drawing attention to the post-lecture discussion comments, and particularly Leo Amery's objection that Mackinder's thesis failed to consider the future importance of air power. Like other scholars before him, Dhaka seeks to problematize Mackinder's use of the Mercator map projection for his own outlines of the Heartland. Dhaka, however, is more interested in curvature and geometry than in tinkering with projection on a flat surface. He asserts that Mackinder's naïve view of sea-lanes and railways as conduits to enable free movement and exercise control forgets the distance-decay effects of any power projection over a spherical earth. Indeed, he suggests that Mackinder's own conceptualization of space actually resembles the "T-O" maps of the ancients, such as that which he reproduces in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.

Dhaka argues that a radically different conceptualization of space is needed to grasp the dynamics of Mackinder's Heartland in the age of air (and space) power that Amery foresaw. He turns to the works of L. Green and J. Gregory, arguing that the antipodal arrangement of the continents and oceans best suggests a tetrahedral model of assaying the earth. To control the sides and base of a tetrahedron, all that is necessary is to command the position at the apex of the vertices. As this can be done with military planes and satellites, the "space race" and the development of advanced technologies of surveillance and aerial warfare become central to the control of terrestrial space. Access to such technology structures the global hierarchy of states. By virtue of its location in the tetrahedron, the Inner Crescent around the Heartland remains the zone of critical competition. By an original use of geometrics, Dhaka thus rescues Mackinder's thesis from both its own weaknesses and the charge leveled by Amery, concluding that the geographical location of Central Asia in the "Heartland" continues to mean that the region exhibits an "innate proclivity for instability."

Fabrizio Vielmini believes that Mackinder's theories can help explain contemporary U.S. interest in Eurasia in general, and Central Asia in particular, but that they are very dangerous. He observes that the concepts that Mackinder outlined in his "Pivot" and "Heartland" theses have subsequently entered the standard vocabulary of international relations theory. More than that, he suggests that they have acted as guides for the "Atlantic" powers—the U.K. in 1904, and the U.S. in 2004. These powers seek global hegemony through the imposition of free trade systems that favor their own economies, and by military interventions that are legitimized by a belief in the political and cultural superiority of their own systems. This makes Atlantic powers extremely dangerous to world peace. Mackinder's almost mystical language about world domination simply adds to this danger.

For Mackinder, however, argues Vielmini, the "Heartland" potentially presented a major obstacle to these Atlanticist fantasies, because a unified continental Eurasian system would challenge their power. Thus Mackinder not only wrote about the need to ensure division on the Heartland but, in 1919, was commissioned by the British government to go to South Russia and explore ways to weaken the

Heartland by fomenting the Russian civil war. In the same way, argues Vielmini, the U.S. is being guided by a desire to break up Eurasian unity by various direct and proxy interventions in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union. Central Asia is vital to this plan: indeed, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described it as "the heart and soul of Eurasia." The attacks in the U.S. on 11 September, 2001 opened the way for an unprecedented U.S. military intrusion into the region. However, arguing that Mackinder should be "turned on his head," Vielmini concludes that this is dangerous both for the region and the world. He believes that the Paris-Berlin-Moscow alliance that emerged in response to the U.S. invasion of Iraq represents a genuine Heartland alliance that should be supported as a means to counterbalance dangerous U.S. designs.

- *Secondly*, other contributors consider the Heartland theory to be more of a *hindrance* in analyzing the region.

Striking a note of skepticism both about Mackinder's original Pivot/Heartland thesis, and the use of it in relation to Central Asia today, **Levent Hekimoglu** focuses on the economic geography of the putative Pivot region. In a careful re-reading of the 1904 paper and the discussion that followed it, he pays close attention to the reasons why Mackinder considered it to be of such importance. He argues that Mackinder saw its future potential to be largely around the agricultural potential unleashed following expected demographic shifts resultant from consolidation of efficient power in the Heartland. That this never happened should be unsurprising, because Mackinder overestimated the genuine economic potential of the region and underestimated the costs of distance from accessible seaports. Ironically, Mackinder ignored geography.

Hekimoglu contends that lessons from this can be drawn for today, as "The ghost of the Heartland fallacy is still very much around and it is not a benign one." Many commentators assume that the region has vast untapped resources, and neo-liberal economic reforms will allow them to be exploited and benefit the region. Hekimoglu argues that this is exactly the myth that Mackinder propagated: in truth, Central Asia is poorly endowed in terms of natural resources, and its landlockedness makes it harder to develop what it does have. Mackinder's Heartland thesis proved durable because it was parasitic on certain geopolitical notions that chimed with great-power prejudices, but it has always lacked a sound basis in economic geography.

Bahodirjon Ergashev considers the theoretical position behind the "Pivot" paper. He begins by observing Colin Gray's trenchant advocacy of Mackinder as an exemplary statement of realist International Relations theory, and drawing attention to the enormous popularity of Mackinder and geopolitics in contemporary post-Soviet space. He also suggests that the recent "colored" revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan might be adduced by some as examples of Mackinder's contention about the enduring importance of the Pivot/Heartland in international relations.

Ergashev, however, is unconvinced by these arguments. He admits that Mackinder's formula is worthy of historical study. However, he does not believe that it really classes as "theory" in the strict sense of the term, because it is not an explanatory tool based on general principles independent of the object of analysis, but rather a set of policy prescriptions aimed at averting British imperial decline. However, his dispute with Mackinder is not at the level of overall theoretical objection to Mackinder's apparent realism. On the contrary, Ergashev himself argues from a realist perspective that, *contra* Gray, Mackinder is not truly a realist. Whereas arch-realist Thucydides drew on a range of factors to explain international relations, Mackinder's facile concentration on geography at the expense of other variables reduces his account to a determinism that is easily refuted by demonstrating what is in fact the relative unimportance of contemporary Central Asia in contemporary international relations.

Nick Megoran uses the body of theory known as "critical geopolitics" to provide a different perspective on the use of Halford Mackinder's ideas to analyze Central Asia. Insisting that Mackinder's so-called "geopolitical" writings be contextualized, he outlines their place in the geographer's broader intellectual and personal commitments to British imperialism. He contends that to overlook this is to hinder clear thinking about positive engagement with contemporary Central Asia.

In particular, Megoran draws on the work of geographer Gearóid Ó Tuathail, who argues that Mackinder's geopolitical theory is, ironically, both anti-geographical in its conception of space, and de-politicizing of its own deeply political commitments. He tests this critique against the writings of two foreign policy intellectuals, a Russian and an American, who use Mackinder to advocate foreign policy positions of their respective states toward Uzbekistan. He concludes that the crucial question is not so much, "what does Mackinder's theory reveal about Central Asia's place in the world?," but, "how have citations of Mackinder's theory been used to construct contemporary geopolitical narratives about Central Asia?"

Finally, **Sevara Sharapova's** essay is a departure from the others in that it is not about Central Asia, but uses Mackinder's theory to investigate the positions taken by Germany and the U.K. toward the U.S.'s 2003 war on Iraq. It begins with the observation that the Cold War alliance of consensus between Britain and (West) Germany over American leadership in foreign policy broke down over the U.S. war on Iraq that began in 2003. The central question that her paper raises is why this happened. Rejecting economic arguments, she contends that geopolitical factors were the key dividing line between Britain and Germany, and that Mackinder provides the thesis *par excellence* for explicating those. Located on Mackinder's "Outer Crescent," Britain is unambiguously an Atlantic/Midland Ocean power, and by virtue of this is driven into an alliance with the U.S. against Heartland states. Germany, however, is in a unique geopolitical position at the intersection of the Midland Ocean world and the Heartland. During the Cold War its former location proved more important, but the collapse of the Soviet Union has allowed its Heartland location to re-assert itself as a decisive factor in policy-making.

Sharapova augments Mackinder's basic reading of global space with a series of "theories of alliance" derived from the political science literature, in particular the capability-aggregation model and the autonomy-security trade-off model. In the Cold War both West Germany and Britain traded some autonomy in foreign policy for the protection of the U.S. security shield. With this no longer needed in the post-Cold War world, Britain still remains locked into the U.S. alliance as a way for this second order power to assert a global role; Germany, on the other hand, seeks to do that through a re-invigorated EU by weakening the U.S. alliance. She argues that the use of these theories to tweak Mackinder's timeless analysis provides an explanation of the differing postures adopted by Germany and the U.K. over Iraq.

C o n c l u d i n g   R e m a r k s

The purpose of this final section is not to provide a report on discussions at the Tashkent symposium, as this has been done elsewhere.[22] Rather, it is to draw a few observations pertinent to both Central Asian and Mackinder studies.

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[22] For reports on the symposium, see: N. Megoran, S. Sharapova, A. Faizullaev, "Conference report: 'Halford Mackinder's "Heartland": A Help or Hindrance?', Tashkent, 2-3 December, 2004," *Geographical Journal* (forthcoming); S. Sharapova, "Teoriia Makkindera i sovremennye mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia," *Halqaro Munosobatlar*, No. 4, 2004, pp. 87-89.

■ Firstly, pronouncements of the end of Mackinder's Heartland theory with the demise of the Soviet Union and the Cold War were clearly premature. Amongst Central Asianists, Mackinder's concepts are frequently discussed in terms of their contemporary relevance. However, Anglo-American academics have seemed largely unaware of these developments. For a body of scholarship that has often accused Mackinder of being Eurocentric, this lack of awareness is ironic. It is hoped that this collection of papers may encourage geographers to investigate not only the historical background to Mackinder's thought, but also its contemporary redeployment in non-Western contexts.

■ Secondly, these papers raise questions about the geographical dissemination of geopolitical ideas. A fuller intellectual history is yet to be written of how Mackinder's ideas "traveled" from England to parts of the world such as Central Asia, and why so many Central Asians and Central Asianists became interested in his ideas in such a relatively short space of time. This must inevitably be connected to the well-studied phenomenon of the geopolitical revival in Russia,[23] but cannot be confined to it.

■ Thirdly, Mackinder was obviously an elite, white, European, male, and some of his critics have implied that his geopolitical vision indelibly reflects this.[24] Indeed, those in the "Outer Crescent" who have used Mackinder's theories approvingly (or even critiqued them) have generally fitted this description. However, the scholarship represented by this collection problematizes such generalizations. In particular, Sharapova's piece is an exact reversal of that gaze: a Heartland female using Mackinderian geopolitics to categorize, order, and pronounce on the actions of policymakers in the Western metropoles. Furthermore, as far as we are aware, only one Anglophone woman (Sarah O'Hara) has conducted research about Mackinder, whereas almost half the presenters at the Tashkent symposium were female. We believe that this may also point to the relatively greater incorporation of women into the Soviet and post-Soviet academy than the Western one. It is certainly true that a practice does not necessarily cease to be "masculinist" simply because women undertake it. Nonetheless, this collection suggests to us that Anglophone geographers need to both reconsider their conclusions about Mackinder's geopolitical gaze, and also take stock of the gendered nature of the profession of political geography/political science.

■ Fourthly, this collection of papers problematizes the categories that are commonly used to analyze Mackinder. It includes a scholar from a post-colonial context who critiques the "Pivot" paper, and British geography, as a tool of British imperialism, yet is willing to salvage the Heartland concept. It includes a writer drawing on critical theories to dispute the supposed objectivity of those who use Mackinder, yet who accepts that they raise important practical questions; and a realist who rejects the formulaic simplification of Mackinder's geopolitics and even the very designation of him as a realist. It includes an author who holds that Mackinder's beliefs about the importance of Central Asia were correct, and that his conclusions should be embraced to inform policy; yet another who, while holding that they are indeed correct, rejects the use of his conclusions to construct policy recommendations.

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[23] See, for example: G. Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* No. 24, 1999, pp. 481-500; A. Ingram, "Alexander Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-fascism in Post-Soviet Russia," *Political Geography,* No. 20, 2001; J. O'Loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," *Geopolitics,* Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001, pp. 17-48.

[24] See, for example: G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space,* Routledge, London, 1996, Chapter 3.

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