

+

+

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Journal of Social and Political Studies

On the Centenary of Halford Mackinder's
Geographical Pivot of History

Special Issue

4 (34)
2005

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS
CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES
SWEDEN

INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES OF
THE CAUCASUS
AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC

+

+

FOUNDED AND PUBLISHED BY

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS
CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL STUDIES

Center registration number: 620720-0459
State Administration for
Patents and Registration of Sweden

INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC
STUDIES OF
THE CAUCASUS

Registration number: M-770
Ministry of Justice of
Azerbaijan Republic

Journal registration number: 23 614
State Administration for Patents and Registration of Sweden

Editorial Council

Eldar ISMAILOV	Chairman of the Editorial Council Tel./fax: (994 - 12) 497 12 22 E-mail: elis@tdb.baku.az
Murad ESENOV	Editor-in-Chief Tel./fax: (46) 920 62016 E-mail: murad.esenov@worldmail.se
Irina EGOROVA	Executive Secretary (Moscow) Tel.: (7 - 095) 3163146 E-mail: ira@mosinfo.ru
Klara KHAFIGOVA	represents the journal in Kazakhstan (Almaty) Tel./fax: (7 - 3272) 67 51 72 E-mail: kainar@intelsoft.kz
Ainura ELEBAEVA	represents the journal in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek) Tel.: (996 - 312) 51 26 86 E-mail: ainur@iuk.kg
Jamila MAJIDOVA	represents the journal in Tajikistan (Dushanbe) Tel.: (992 - 372) 21 79 03 E-mail: madzamila@mail.ru
Mukhabat KHAMRAEVA	represents the journal in Uzbekistan (Tashkent) Tel.: (998 - 71) 184 94 91 E-mail: farkhadM@yandex.ru
Jannatkhon EYVAZOV	represents the journal in Azerbaijan (Baku) Tel./fax: (994 - 12) 499 11 74 E-mail: jeyvazov@gmail.com
Aghasi YENOKIAN	represents the journal in Armenia (Erevan) Tel.: (374 - 1) 54 10 22 E-mail: aghasi_y@yahoo.com
Guram GOGIASHVILI	represents the journal in Georgia (Tbilisi) Tel.: (995 - 32) 99 93 03 E-mail: sakresp@gol.ge
Garun KURBANOV	represents the journal in the North Caucasian republics (Makhachkala, RF) Tel.: (7 - 8722) 672-075 E-mail: www.nardag@rambler.ru
Musa BASNUKAEV	represents the journal in the North Caucasian republics (Grozny, RF) Tel./fax: (7 - 871 - 2) 22 23 04 E-mail: basnukaev@hotmail.com
Konrad SCHÄFFLER	represents the journal in Germany (Munich) Tel.: (49 - 89) 3003132 E-mail: GA-infoservice@s.m.isar.de
Sun ZHUANGZHI	represents the journal in China (Beijing) Tel.: (86) 10-64039088 E-mail: sunzhzh@isc.cass.net.cn
Vladimir MESAMED	represents the journal in the Middle East (Jerusalem) Tel.: (972 - 2) 5882332 E-mail: mssamed@olive.mscc.huji.ac.il
Rustem ZHANGUZHIN	represents the journal in Ukraine (Kiev) Tel.: (380-44) 524-79-13 E-mail: zhangozha@yahoo.co.uk

EDITORIAL BOARD

Giuli ALASANIA	Doctor of History, professor, Vice Rector of the International Black Sea University (Georgia)
Bülent ARAS	Doctor, Chair, Department of International Relations, Fatih University (Turkey)
Mariam ARUNOVA	Doctor of Political Sciences, leading research associate, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS (Russian Federation)
Garnik ASATRIAN	Doctor of Philology, professor, head of the Department of Iranian Studies, Erevan State University (Armenia)
Murat AUEZOV	Executive Director, Soros-Kazakhstan Foundation (Kazakhstan)
Bakyt BESHIMOV	Doctor of History, professor, Ambassador Executive and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to India (Kyrgyzstan)
Ariel COHEN	Doctor, leading analyst, The Heritage Foundation, U.S.A. (U.S.A.)
William FIERMAN	Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor of Indiana University (U.S.A.)
Paul GOBLE	Senior Advisor, Voice of America (U.S.A.)
Sergei GRETSKY	Doctor, Chair of Central Asian Studies, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State (U.S.A.)
Xing GUANGCHENG	Doctor of Political Sciences, professor, Deputy Director of the Institute for East European, Russian and Central Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (China)
Alexander IGNATENKO	Doctor of Philosophy, specialist in Islamic studies, leading expert of the Institute of Social Systems, Moscow State University, member of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the Russian Federation President (Russian Federation)
Ashurboi IMOMOV	Ph.D. (Law), assistant professor, head of the Department of Constitutional Law, Tajik National University (Tajikistan)
Lena JONSON	Doctor, senior researcher, Swedish Institute of International Affairs (Sweden)
Hasan KULIEV	Doctor of Philosophy, professor, department head, Institute of Philosophy, AS of Azerbaijan, Editor-in-Chief of <i>The Caucasus & Globalization</i> journal (Azerbaijan)
Jacob M. LANDAU	Professor of Political Sciences, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel)
S. Neil MACFARLANE	Professor, Director, Center for International Studies, The University of Oxford (Great Britain)
Alexei MALASHENKO	Doctor of History, professor, Scholar-in-Residence, Ethnicity and Nation-Building Program Co-Chair, The Carnegie Moscow Center (Russian Federation)
Abbas MALEKI	Dr., Director General, International Institute for Caspian Studies (Iran)
Akira MATSUNAGA	Ph.D., History of Central Asia and the Caucasus, Program Officer, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation (Japan)
Roger N. McDERMOTT	Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent at Canterbury (UK)
Vitaly NAUMKIN	Doctor of History, professor, Director, Center for Strategic and International Studies of RF (Russian Federation)
Yerengaip OMAROV	Professor, Rector of Kainar University, President of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Republic of Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan)
Vladimer PAPAUA	Doctor of Economics, professor, Corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Senior Fellow of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Georgia)
S. Frederick STARR	Professor, Chairman, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University (U.S.A.)
Farkhod TOLIPOV	Ph.D. (Political Sciences), assistant professor, International Relations Department, World Economics and Diplomacy University (Uzbekistan)

The materials that appear in the journal do not necessarily reflect
the Editorial Board and the Editors' opinion

Editorial Office:

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS
Hubertusstigen 9. 97455 Luleå
SWEDEN

WEB ADDRESS:
<http://www.ca-c.org>

© *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2005

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS
Journal of Social and Political Studies
No. 4(34), 2005

SPECIAL ISSUE

**On the Centenary of Halford Mackinder's
*Geographical Pivot of History***

Eldar Ismailov

PREFACE 7

Nick Megoran, Sevara Sharapova

MACKINDER'S "HEARTLAND": A HELP OR HINDRANCE
IN UNDERSTANDING CENTRAL ASIA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS? 8

Ekaterina Borisova

HALFORD MACKINDER'S IDEAS TODAY 21

Sayragul Matikeeva

MACKINDER'S LEGACY: WAS IT A PROPHECY? 24

Ulugbeck Khasanov

ON MODERN GEOPOLITICAL PLURALISM
OR ONE-NATION HEGEMONISM 29

Anita Sengupta

9/11 AND THE HEARTLAND DEBATE IN CENTRAL ASIA 37

Ambrish Dhaka

MACKINDER'S HEARTLAND AND THE LOCATION OF
THE GEOPOLITICAL TETRAHEDRON 46

Fabrizio Vielmini

THE INFLUENCE OF MACKINDER'S THEORY
ON CURRENT U.S. DEPLOYMENT IN EURASIA:
PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES 58

Levent Hekimoglu

WHITHER "HEARTLAND"?
CENTRAL ASIA, GEOGRAPHY AND GLOBALIZATION 66

Bahodirjon Ergashev

DETERMINISM VERSUS FRICTION:
A CRITIQUE OF MACKINDER 81

Nick Megoran

THE POLITICS OF USING MACKINDER'S GEOPOLITICS:
THE EXAMPLE OF UZBEKISTAN 89

Sevara Sharapova

MACKINDER'S "HEARTLAND" THEORY AND
THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY 103

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The Special Feature section in the next issue will discuss:

Central Asia and the Caucasus

- The Democratic Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine and their Impact on Central Asian and Caucasian Politics
- Border Delimitation and Separatism
- What Makes the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Central Asia and the Caucasus Specific

P R E F A C E

Dear Readers,

This is a special issue of our journal dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the famous work *The Geographical Pivot of History* by Sir Halford Mackinder, one of the brightest minds of geopolitics. The papers collected here were originally contributed to the symposium organized by Cambridge University to sum up, earlier in the 21st century, the first ever subtle and profound analysis of his geopolitical ideas.

On the one hand, we drew on Halford Mackinder's theoretical constructs to clarify the meaning of the current political processes and their impact on the geopolitical future of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Indeed, it has become obvious that the regional developments call for an objective approach that alone can provide the right responses to the numerous and alarming globalization challenges. On the other hand, this is our feasible contribution to the development of contemporary geopolitical paradigm stemming from a critical assessment of the great British scholar's theoretical heritage which still affects our geopolitical ideas about the history of mankind. We do hope that this effort will help the political and expert communities to find the best possible development models for central Eurasia.

The Editorial Council of the *Central Asia and the Caucasus* journal intends to continue the practice of publishing special issues on subjects relating to the maximally effective approaches to burning issues of regional politics and to new ideas about the place and role of Central Asia and the Caucasus in geohistory.

We do hope that our readers will welcome this initiative and offer their own ideas for future publications.

Chairman of the Editorial Council

Eldar Ismailov

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

Dr Nick MEGORAN

*Research Fellow at Sidney Sussex College
(Cambridge CB2 3HU, U.K.)*

Dr Sevara SHARAPOVA

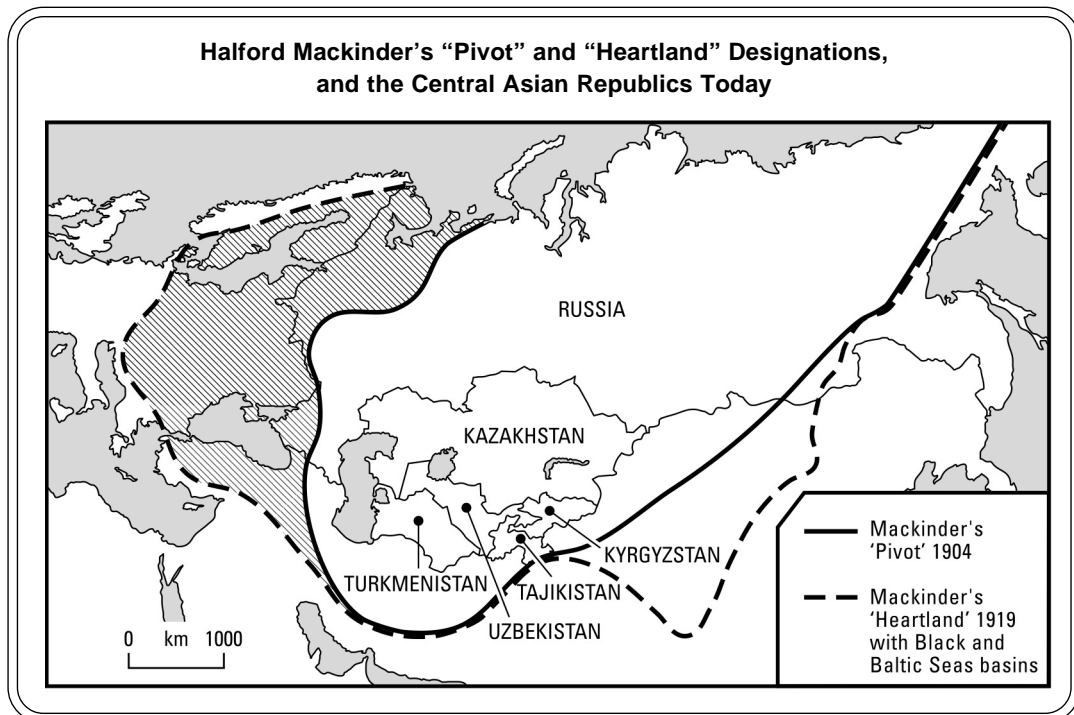
*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
International Relations and Law,
Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

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

Figure 1



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

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.

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-

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 theme⁸ and a 2004

⁷ The authors would like to thank Professor Alisher Faizullaev of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy and the Center of Political Studies, Tashkent, for hosting the symposium and assisting in its organization, and the U.K. Committee on Central and Inner Asia for financial assistance. We would also like to thank Dr Murad Esenov for his support of this special issue, and Dr Brian Blouet for commenting on this paper.

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*

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.

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.

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.

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 Turkestan 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.

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 and 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 metropolises. 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.

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.

- Finally, to return to the terms of the question, some of the authors here think that Mackinder's ideas are helpful for understanding both Central Asia and global international relations, others a hindrance. What is indisputable is that they continue to compel or infuriate a century after their inception. Most scholars would happily settle for much less than that.
-

HALFORD MACKINDER'S IDEAS TODAY

Ekaterina BORISOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Institute of Oriental Studies,
Russian Academy of Sciences
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

There have always been politicians who considered the cornerstone of their foreign policy efforts to be Halford Mackinder's imperative about the need to control the Pivot area (or the Heartland) in order to rule the world. Today, some countries are still guided by the key tenets of this theory in their foreign policy pursuits, even though the idea has been revised by a number of thinkers, its author included.

At one time, Mackinder postulated that the maritime nations and the people of the marginal regions [which Nicholas J. Spykman later called Eurasia's "Rimland"] should do their best to contain those living in the Heartland. This perfectly suited the realities of the bipolar world and largely promoted the ideology of NATO and other postwar blocs (SENTO, ASEAN).

Today, however, it seems that these geopolitical postulations can no longer serve as a sound theoretical basis for explaining the current trends obvious in world politics. It might have seemed that after splitting the continental monolith and turning the fragments into friendly states, the maritime nations had defused the British geopolitician's key theoretical propositions about the Heartland's invulnerability and eternal opposition between the sea and land powers.

However, the very fact that the sea powers have moved into the heart of the Eurasian continent shows that they find it extremely important. The Atlantic powers are out to spread their control to the most distant (from them) corners of the world, such as Afghanistan and Central Asia. In other words, West European politicians are fully aware that, according to Mackinder, in order to rule the world they should gain control over the Pivot area. In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote: "For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia."¹ According to him, the importance of Eurasia is created by the fact that it is home to 75 percent of the world's population and that upon and beneath it lies the larger part of the world's physical wealth. This vast territory

¹ Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 30.

accounts for about 60 percent of the world's GNP and controls about 75 percent of the world's proven energy resources.

In the 20th century, an interest in Mackinder's geopolitical conceptions was rekindled regularly. Judging by the persistence with which NATO is pushing into Eastern Europe and Central Asia, one of these bouts of interest occurred in the post-Soviet era. The NATO leaders, at least, are acting in full conformity with what the British geopolitician said at one time: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; ... who rules the Heartland commands the world."

Nicholas J. Spykman tried to disprove the theory by saying that even if the Heartland were a geographical reality, first, it has lost its unassailability to strategic aviation and other state-of-the-art weapons, and, second, contrary to what Mackinder asserted, this vast territory failed to become one of the world's economically most developed regions. He insisted that the outcome of both world wars was decided not in the Heartland zone or in the struggle for it, but along the coasts and in the Rimland. Spykman, therefore, concluded that world hegemony does not depend on control over Eastern Europe, but, contrary to Mackinder, maintained that he "who rules the Rimland commands the World."

In fact, his theory confirms what Mackinder postulated: both world wars were waged for the Rimland in order to gain control over the Heartland. He who rules the Rimland can gain control over the Heartland. We should never forget that Russia, a country in the very heart of Eurasia, had colonies along its periphery and worked hard to reach the seacoasts. This would have allowed it to fully join the world economic system. It never aspired, however, to control the territories of the sea powers—in fact, it never needed them. Outlets to the sea made Russia self-sufficient. To a certain extent, the Soviet geopolitical bloc collapsed when the Soviet Union succumbed to the temptation to spread its ideology throughout the world. Overstrained, it lost control over the adjacent territories.

When analyzed, the foreign policies of the Atlantic states, the United States in particular, reveal that these countries are urged to constantly extend their sphere of influence in Eurasia, as well as elsewhere. For instance, after establishing its ideological domination and economic influence in Central and then in Eastern Europe, the U.S. is trying to strike root in Central Asia. Permanent expansion is the foreign policy cornerstone of the today's only hegemonic state and is explained, among other things, by the sea powers' mindset.

Today we are witnessing continued pressure by the Sea (sea powers) on the Land (Eurasian countries). According to the classics of geopolitics, the Sea mindset presupposes there is a space that produces nothing and lives on piracy and exploitation of the Land, which derives its riches from the subsurface and the earth's natural resources. Aware of its barrenness, the Sea has no choice but to reproduce itself by plundering the Land. To make it more vulnerable, the Sea tries to split the monolith of the Land, which gives rise to the tactics of the Atlantic civilization obvious in postwar European dynamics. During the course of two wars, World War II and the Cold War, the Atlantic world engulfed first Central and then Eastern Europe by turning them into a friendly oceanic subsystem. It Westernized the countries within these two regions.

The same is going on in the APR where, according to Russian researcher Alexander Panarin, oceanic strategists have found another monolith target—China—which they are seeking to fragment in a similar way.

The "piratical" mindset is targeted at other countries. At home, the "robbers of the sea" have to stick to the principles of normal social existence; they have to develop an economy that produces rather than appropriates. What is more, after returning home, the "robbers of the sea" don puritanic garb for the simple reason that life according to the rules of the Sea is self-destructive.

In the context of social existence, the Sea is a secondary phenomenon and can live by serving and/or exploiting the Land. Alexander Panarin put this in the following way: "The process of Westernization is not merely an onslaught of the Atlantic Sea on the fortresses of the Eurasian continent;

this is also an attempt to replace the spiritual vertical rooted in the culture of man as a supra-natural creature with the utilitarian-pragmatic horizontal.”² No wonder the process developing along the latitudes connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific stopped at Russia’s borders. All attempts to Westernize Russia and Central Asia (the continental heartland) failed for the simple reason that these attempts succeed where the Sea mindset prevails.

Condoleezza Rice, who was recently appointed as U.S. Secretary of State, is absolutely convinced: “America’s pursuit of the national interest will create conditions that promote freedom, markets, and peace.”³ In the heart of the continent, however, the values imposed by the West are hardly welcome; they have created a multitude of problems, such as corruption, and stirred up extremist trends.

Zbigniew Brzezinski recognized that American influence is too weak in the heart of Eurasia, and he explains this as follows: “The very scale and diversity of Eurasia, as well as the power of some of its states, limits the depth of American influence and the scope of control over the course of events. That megacontinent is just too large, too populous, culturally too varied, and composed of too many historically ambitious and politically energetic states to be compliant toward even the most economically successful and politically preeminent global power.”⁴ He has obviously agreed that Washington’s aim—world order American-style—is a very difficult task, yet the White House believes that it could be resolved on condition that the U.S. “places a premium on geostrategic skill, on the careful, selective, and very deliberate deployment of America’s resources on the huge Eurasian chessboard.”⁵ This is what is going on: American military bases are placed in the strategically most important points of Eurasia, which allows the world hegemon to control developments in the continent’s larger part and to prevent the appearance of a potential rival. America’s fear of another rival is fed, among other things, by its awareness that it does not have sufficient energy sources of its own to deal with global issues. This has made Eurasia, a source of energy, a sphere of Washington’s national interests.

Today, the geopolitical accents of Mackinder’s theory have shifted: it is no longer enough to rule parts of the Eurasian continent to command the World—control over the entire continent serves as the basis of global domination.

We can doubt Mackinder’s theory, but no one can deny that, its debatable nature notwithstanding, it is not merely used—it serves as the foreign policy foundation for the world’s leading powers. Otherwise, we would not have been watching the sea powers push into the heart of the Eurasian continent with a zeal that can hardly be explained by counterterrorist strategies alone.

² A.S. Panarin, *Politologia*, Moscow, 2000, p. 409.

³ C. Rice, “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1, January/February 2000: available at [<http://www.foreignaffairs.org>].

⁴ Z. Brzezinski, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

MACKINDER'S LEGACY: WAS IT A PROPHECY?

Sayragul MATIKEEVA

*Ph.D. (Political Science), senior lecturer,
International Relations Department, International University of Kyrgyzstan
(Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)*

Today the planet seems to be brimming with surprises—it is too changeable and too unpredictable. The man in the street, as well as people well-versed in the world order theory cannot help wondering whether there is a system in the world able to regulate the relations among all entities.

This is not a novel feature of our times: in the past, too, thinkers pondered over questions of world order and relations between the key members of the world community and the members of secondary importance. Halford Mackinder, who is well known to the world as one of the founders of geopolitics, was among these thinkers. I am not going to discuss his numerous merits in the field of political geography—I am going to discuss his heritage and use his major “geographical pivot of history” theory as applied to the present foreign policy realities of Kyrgyzstan, which cannot, and should not, be divorced from its Central Asian neighbors, the CIS countries, China, and the United States.

It should be said that one of the key ideas of a man born nearly 150 years ago has found a new lease on life in the 21st century in light of the new relations between the “key and secondary” actors. This happened not because he dotted all the “i’s” in the world politics of his time. On the contrary, after describing the process that led to the present intertwining of international relations and presenting practical recommendations on how to untwine them, he offered his own forecast of the future of interstate relations and bequeathed a number of questions to future generations. Who is destined to become “ruler of the world?” By way of an answer, he hinted that the future leader of world politics would use geographic location, one of the key factors in any state’s destiny, as its trump card. Having described the central location (which he called the Heartland) as geographically the most advantageous, he posed another, no less important question: which country can be described as the Heartland, a position that gives it considerable advantages over

others?¹ And he provided the answer: the central location is a relative concept. A state that manages to dominate the central country will acquire all the advantages of the Heartland. This obviously brings up another consideration: he was probably referring to a country's political weight, rather than to its geographic location, that is, to its ability either to capitalize on its advantages independently, or to remain a dependent country even when holding the trump card, yet lacking adequate resources for its own protection. In other words, it is less important to be located in the Heartland—it is enough to command political (and foreign policy) resources to dominate the center.

Mackinder, however, failed to specify the address at which the Pivot area could be found. There is still no agreement on it today, while numerous academics are busy sticking this label on their countries.² This is a natural and completely understandable desire. For example, a prominent Russian academic Alexander Dugin believes that in geopolitical terms Russia can be described as the Pivot area.³ I cannot agree with him. This might have been true when the Soviet Union was still alive and included the Central Asian republics, which, I am convinced, are the Pivot area. A look at the map of Central Asia shows that Kyrgyzstan is the Heartland of this vast region. I can agree that its closest neighbors—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—can also be described as the Heartland, yet the interest displayed by the regional (Russia) and world (the U.S.) leaders in our republic explained why I was going to concentrate on Kyrgyzstan. Someone may say that the country is not centrally located and that American and Russian military bases were deployed there because of its weakness, which impaired regional and, hence, world security.

Before taking sides let us go back to Mackinder who pointed out that the Pivot states might (or might not) grow stronger. If we look at Central Asia as the Pivot area and, consequently, describe it as the Heartland, we can discuss possible close integration between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and others. I am convinced that today there are certain factors that interfere with the Heartland's internal strengthening.

There are external factors: the Soviet Union's disintegration created political freedom and also caused the former Soviet republics' economic ruin. This fully applies to the Central Asian countries. Today, a sustainable economy is the key to the domestic and foreign policies of independent states.⁴ Economic instability, uneven development, and different approaches to economic regulation practices in the Central Asian countries inflate the already strong impact of the states of the "Inner" and "Outer" crescents. By the "Inner Crescent" I mean Russia and China, while the U.S., Japan, Turkey, and others belong to the "Outer Crescent." This impact is gradually growing stronger and takes the form of competing investments, credits, and grants. I am convinced that the investment flow is a sure sign that both crescents are obviously interested in the area, which supports Mackinder's forecast that any country which commands the Heartland will rule the World.⁵ This alone can explain the consistent interest in Kyrgyzstan.

If Kyrgyzstan is a strategically important point of the Heartland, we should pay particular attention to the growing American, Japanese, Turkish, German, and Chinese investments in various spheres of its economy. Let us discuss China as a strategically important neighbor; the relations between the Chinese and the Kyrgyz are rooted in hoary antiquity. Until the 20th century, the Celestial Kingdom persisted in its attempts to join the lands of the Kyrgyz to its territory. The territorial wars between the two nations reached their peak in the 17th-19th centuries⁶ and stopped when the Russian Empire came to the territory. No wonder China was one of the first countries

¹ See: "Halford Mackinder. Geograficheskaia os istorii," in: A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 110-111.

² See: *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³ See: A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moscow, 2000, pp. 45-46.

⁴ See: P.A. Tsygankov, *Teoria mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy*, Moscow, 2003, p. 22.

⁵ See: "Halford Mackinder. Geograficheskaia os istorii," pp. 114-117.

⁶ See: N.M. Omarov, *Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia v epokhu global'nogo razvitiia*, Bishkek, 2003, p. 79.

to recognize Kyrgyzstan as an independent state on 27 December, 1991 and established diplomatic relations with it on 5 January, 1992. Immediately after that Bishkek and Beijing became bogged down in border issues which demanded settlement, delimitation, and demarcation.⁷ (The state border of Kyrgyzstan is 4,767 km long, 1,072 km of which constitutes the Chinese stretch.) Despite prolonged negotiations and several agreements, the border issues have not yet been settled.⁸ We can say that the public has not yet reconciled itself to Bishkek's decision to transfer 30 percent of the disputable territories in the Bedel Pass (Uzongu-Kuush) area to China.⁹ Certain political forces in Kyrgyzstan are convinced that this is the beginning of final territorial delimitation in favor of China.

In 2001, these countries signed an agreement on building a stretch of the transcontinental railway to Europe, which would cross Central Asia in general and the larger part of Kyrgyzstan in particular.¹⁰ The project is considered economically highly promising. It seems, however, that so far our economy is a consumer rather than a producer: according to the latest information, 85 percent of consumer goods arrive in Kyrgyzstan from China, because of which local producers are forced to compete with Chinese imports. This negatively affects our economy. To my mind, the railway will not help Kyrgyzstan develop; it will offer China a chance to consolidate its economic domination over our country. Our concern is aggravated by the fact that the political leaders of our country are much weaker than their colleagues in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan when it comes to control over external migration and internal stability. In other words, similar projects realized jointly by a developed and a developing country may assume political dimensions and may endanger the weaker state's independence.

Even though Mackinder never wrote that the Heartland might shift to any particular country, China's economic advance and its persistent, even if "soft," efforts to impose its conditions on the developing Central Asian republics, including Kyrgyzstan, suggest that the Heartland might shift and is shifting toward one of the key "Inner Crescent" states, China. In any case, there is the impression that China is striving to become the Heartland by swallowing, on the sly, the current Heartland by capitalizing on its political and economic instability. We should bear in mind that China is not alone: there are other countries that have already occupied the central niche. The American military base near Bishkek, which is there indefinitely, and Russia's identical military base in Kant ensure external stability even though "there is no such thing as a free lunch." So far, the public and the establishment are showing no signs of irritation over the simultaneous presence of two strong states on our territory. Their protection is indispensable when there is no political and economic stability. Time alone will tell how the situation will unfold.

The external factor consists of two components.

First, there is the economic influence. It has not so far been fully developed in Central Asia: the local countries are only just developing their normative and legal base and taking their first steps in the right direction. In fact, the ability to shape the domestic policies of the recipient countries is the final aim of economic influence, which is achieved through investments. External influence can be realized by means of certain political groups inside the state, in which case an obvious bias inside the country toward one of the foreign investors may split the political front at home. If there are several simultaneous attempts by several investor countries to promote their interests in the recipient country, political dissent may develop into a civil war.

Political influence is another component. In the case of Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan as its part, it is officially based on the international counterterrorist efforts. In the wake of 9/11, Kyrgyzstan of-

⁷ See: *Istoria kyrgyzov i Kyrgyzstana*, Bishkek, 2000, p. 67.

⁸ See: A. Akaev, *Pamiatnoe desiatiletie*, Bishkek, 2001, p. 104.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ See: N.M. Omarov, *op. cit.*

ficially joined the counterterrorist coalition.¹¹ Russia and China had an ambiguous response to the deployment of the U.S.-led Joint Rapid Deployment Force in Kyrgyzstan. The Treaty on Eternal Friendship, Allied Relationships and Partnership Moscow and Bishkek signed in July 2000 can be interpreted as Russia's clear statement of its interests in the region. It is trying hard to restore its key role in Central Asia, not only because the number of Russian speakers in Kyrgyzstan is relatively large, but also because it wants to strengthen its position in "historical" areas and ensure its security in the south-eastern sector.

America's position is more ambiguous. Washington is obviously exploiting its "support of democracy and protection of human rights" and other slogans to conceal its true foreign policy aims. Like any other country, the United States needs stability at home. Today, because of globalization, stability at home depends on the superpower's external position, which makes developing countries (such as Kyrgyzstan) an important strongpoint of self-defense and a means of extending its influence to the "vacated" territories. America is not scared by the need to deal with a traditional society, political and economic instability, and irresponsible bureaucrats, because of whom investments designed for economic development disappear without trace.

At the same time, foreign factors have a different effect on the politics and economy of the Central Asian countries, therefore my version of future developments cannot be equally applied to all of them.

Here are several internal factors that will not allow the Heartland to strengthen from the inside. They are also rooted in the past.

1. The current border disagreements are caused by the need to delineate and demarcate the borders among the Central Asian countries. Back in 1924, the Central Asian Liquidation Committee set up an ethnic and territorial delimitation commission. After 15 sittings, the committee presented Moscow with its plan of border delimitation.¹² Even though most of the representatives of the Central Asian republics disagreed with this alternative, the Soviet leaders approved it. This is what gave rise to the present territorial claims.¹³ No decision in favor of one side is possible. There is the risk of ethnic conflicts in the region; the unsettled border issues are causing numerous problems, while local conflicts over drinking water, pastures, and roads are simmering in border areas. So far, only the local NGOs are doing their best to prevent or defuse such conflicts, yet this is not enough.
2. The economic development levels and nature of the political regimes differ from country to country.¹⁴ On the one hand, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan display relatively high rates of economic development; on the other, the local political regimes differ greatly from each other. For example, Kyrgyzstan with its (relatively!) high level of democracy, open ideology, and pluralism stands aside from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

It seems that Mackinder, who pointed out that the geopolitical descriptions could be easily translated into ideological characteristics, was right after all. Indeed, the "Outer Crescent" is liberal and democratic and the "Inner Crescent" is a transitory model which combines both ideological systems; is the Pivot area undemocratic and authoritarian?¹⁵ In his time, Halford Mackinder was obviously unable to predict who would become the actors in the Central Asian region in the 21st century to describe its future political regimes in any detail. Still, on the whole, the developments are following his forecasts.

Globalization has imparted equal importance to all corners of the globe. Mackinder wrote: "Every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and

¹¹ See: A.A. Akaev, *Istoria, proshedshaia cherez moe serdtse*, Bishkek, 2003, p. 112.

¹² See: T. Ozhukeeva, *XX vek: Vozrozhdenie natsional'noy gosudarstvennosti*, Bishkek, 1993, pp. 12-40.

¹³ See: T. Ozhukeeva, *Politicheskie protsessy v stranakh Tsentral'noy Azii*, Part 1, Bishkek, 1996, p. 45.

¹⁴ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 27-90.

¹⁵ See: "Halford Mackinder. Geograficheskaya os istorii," pp. 114-117.

barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence.”¹⁶ If we ask what he had in mind, we can answer: the security of each actor, irrespective of its location and potential, depends on integration. Mackinder warned mankind about the conventional nature of state borders: even if events happen far from our own country, we should not remain indifferent—the planet is too small for this.

I believe that the above testifies that any part of the globe may become the heart of the Pivot area at any moment and that when writing the above Mackinder had in mind the threat of terror with which no superpower can cope single-handedly. This says that to become the Pivot area, a state does not need to be strong or absolutely independent. Even Kyrgyzstan could become the heart of the Pivot area if the geostrategic interests of its close and distant neighbors, especially of those that claim the role of a world leader, depend on our republic’s territorial integrity.

¹⁶ H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, p. 422.

ON MODERN GEOPOLITICAL PLURALISM OR ONE-NATION HEGEMONISM

Dr Ulugbeck KHASANOV

*Lecturer in Geopolitics,
University of World Economy & Diplomacy
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations, so many people believed, opened up unprecedented opportunities for restructuring the world on the basis of general human values and interests. The world community has, it would seem, received a unique historical chance for the formation of a new international order on just legal principles, and to enter the new century and millennium free from the past legacy of confrontation.

The threats of a new order of international relations have replaced the threats and contradictions of the bipolar world, dominated by Soviets and Americans. In fact, threats to security may even be accentuated in the condition of greater interdependence of states. The stability of many countries and whole regions is shaken by conflicts connected with interethnic and interconfessional tensions, religious extremism, and aggressive separatism. The danger of proliferation of nuclear and other types of weapons of

mass destruction and their means of delivery is particularly menacing. The gap between the poor and the rich countries does not shrink. Whilst the ecological and climatic equilibrium of the planet is being violated, the U.S. withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol can make this international initiative less effective. The narcotics trade has grown, as has organized crime, which has increasingly crossed national frontiers and assumed truly global proportions.

The course of international developments was indeed greatly impacted by the end of the "bipolar system." States not only found themselves less well protected against the old "diseases," but faced the new ones too. Crucially, adequate mechanisms to ensure international stability in the face of these new changes were not created.

This essay will explain geopolitical dynamics in Eurasia, assess whether Mackinder's Heartland thesis can be used to shed light on them, and ask what lessons foreign policy planners in the Central Asian region can derive from this.

In saecula saeculorum (Forever and ever)

Today Eurasia is the key arena of international politics, by virtue both of its significance in the modern world and the role that it will play in determining the contours of future scenarios. This assertion can be validated with reference to the goals, tasks and priorities of the foreign policy of the United States, set out annually in a White House publication. Since 1997 this report has been published under the title, "A National Strategy for a New Century."¹

The chief premise, from which the United States proceeds in the formulation of its national strategy, is the recognition of the instability of the present-day world, the existence of threats to the security of both itself and its allies, and the challenge they present to America's world domination. The report notes that the balance of power in the world is subject to constant changes, is unstable, and is fraught with various threats. One such threat is seen in the instability of a number of regions of the world, in which certain countries have the possibility of inflicting damage to the national interests of the United States. "These countries," says the document, "threaten the sovereignty of their neighbors, economic stability and international access to natural resources."²

Such an estimate logically leads White House analysts to conclude on the necessity of tough counteraction to the enumerated threats, and also of active participation in the solution of international problems and maintaining its leading edge in economic, political, military, communicational, and other spheres: "The United States must lead the world, if we intend to ensure security inside the country... We cannot implement our leading role, if we do not allocate the necessary resources for supporting our military, diplomatic, intelligence and other efforts. We must be ready to make use of all necessary means of national might for exerting influence on other states and nongovernmental subjects of international relations in view of ensuring our global leadership and preservation of our status of a reliable ally in the field of security for countries sharing our interests."³

At the same time, the United States does not deny itself the right to act alone, "when this answers to the maximum the interests of the course pursued by it or when there is no other alternative." Because this right, it should be understood, is appropriated exclusively by the United States, the allied obligations and consultations are in fact reduced to zero in the case of especially serious conflicts in the world.

In addition, it is possible to note one more important provision, appearing in almost all documents and materials in which the present-day interests of the United States are considered and formulated. Here we have in mind that the number of vital interests of the U.S. invariably comprises an item on the prevention of the emergence of a regional hegemon (leader) in the regions considered most important to the U.S. That this invariably occurs in such documents is striking.⁴ In particular, it is informed by a fear of the upsetting of the balance of power away from its favor on the vast expanses of Eurasia. It should be noted that some analysts regard this disease of "hegemonism," from which the United States is suffering, as one of the causes of international terrorism aimed against it. The United States has been largely successful in creating the appearance of a pyramid for the process of globalization. At its peak is the United States proper, and below this a group of states making up seven of the

¹ See: *A National Strategy for a New Century*, The White House, Washington, D.C., May 1997, October 1998, December 1999.

² *A National Strategy for a New Century*, December 1999, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ See, for example: *America's National Interests*, A Report from the Commission on America's National Interests, Center for Science and International Affairs, Cambridge; John Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, July 1996, pp. 2-4, 21, 22; July 2000, p. 6.

most industrially developed countries of the world. Below these is a group of average countries like Spain, and at the foot of the pyramid are the remaining states, comprising about nine tenths of humanity's total population. They are permitted only to make some improvements in their standards of living, but otherwise have been assigned the role of raw material suppliers for the upper layers of the pyramid, a dumping ground for waste, and a market for stale goods. It is clear that such a model of globalization cannot but cause a counter reaction, and terrorism is but one of the forms of its manifestation.

We have dwelt in detail on the national interests of the United States for the reason that it is today the only superpower in the world, and stability in the system of international relations hangs in many ways on its policies. On the whole, everything said above provides sufficiently convincing evidence, in our opinion, that today, just like in previous times, statesmen, in the words of H. Morgenthau, "*think and act in the notions of interest determined as power.*"⁵ Such a way of thinking cannot be altered by any transformations and changes in the world.

The correctness of these words can be seen not only on the example of the United States, for which the problem of national interest has become a kind of an *idée fixe*, but also in the case of other states and, first of all, those which have recently become independent. Here Russia is no exception, showing a keen interest in the elaboration of her own national interest, especially since Vladimir Putin's 1999 victory at the presidential elections. However, in one vital sense there exists a marked difference between these two states. Whereas the United States is at the zenith of its might, Russia is a state weakened by years of thoughtless, hasty and destructive "restructuring" and reforms, which have actually resulted in the degeneration of the state and the reduction in its ability to direct the political, economic and social life of the country. It is not merely that this has resulted in the weakening of national self-consciousness. It has also caused the destruction of the moral foundations of society, in an uncontrolled growth of crime, corruption, arbitrariness, and the reckless promotion of self-interest, which has seized not only the lower and middle strata of society, but also the ruling elite. The authorities are faced with a national and political vacuum—the vacuum of national self-consciousness, a crisis facing not just Russians in Russia proper, but those in other regions.

What was formerly a single nation was suddenly divided into a plethora of loosely-linked ethnic and national regional formations. This involved the emergence of conflicts on the basis of aggressive nationalism and the prioritization of local interests—of which Chechnia is the most vivid example. Amongst the intelligentsia, one could observe the development of rootless cosmopolitanism, the loss of a concern for the motherland, frustration, pessimism, lack of faith in the possibility of constructive changes, and a wholesale criticism of all and everything. The instability of the internal and external political, economic, and military-strategic situation rendered attempts to devise grand plans to revive the national interest at worst futile, and at best abstract intellectual exercises. This whole process was accompanied on the part of the majority of the population by political apathy, indifference to state affairs, and the development of egotistical interest.⁶

The main features of these changes are connected with the departure from the world arena of the Soviet Union as a superpower, the disintegration of its colossal sphere of influence, the emergence in its place of new independent states, and regional political crises. These include the crises in the Persian Gulf and the Balkans, and the conflict in Kosovo, and the armed intervention in these places by Western powers led by the United States. As the United States has promoted its hegemony, ever more serious challenges to it arise from the world periphery. One manifestation of these is international

⁵ H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th edition, New York, 1967, p. 5.

⁶ In this sense let us make reference to the collection of topical articles prepared by a group of well-known political scientists and economists under the common and pretentious title *Natsional'naiia doktrina Rossii (problemy i priority)* (Russia's National Doctrine (Problems and Priorities)), The Obozrevatel agency, Moscow, 1994. Judging by everything, it remained undesirable, just like other such works.

terrorism. In this light the events in Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002 are of principal importance. The epoch-making changes concern many regions and subregions. But, perhaps, central in this respect today is the Eurasian continental massif ("heart-shaped land," or "Heartland," according to the definition of Sir Halford Mackinder). It is namely here today that the most significant geopolitical changes take place, which will influence the destiny of the whole world in the 21st century. It is the now-independent former republics of the Soviet Union that have turned out to be at the center of these changes, including Uzbekistan. It is namely in that region today that an antiterrorist campaign has been launched, in which in one way or another many states of the world are involved.

The geopolitical changes that have taken place compel responsible politicians and statesmen to rethink their understandings of what is going on in the present-day world. Today Eurasia is the key arena of international politics, by virtue both of its significance in the modern world and the role that it will play in determining the contours of the future world. The veteran politician Zbigniew Brzezinski was one of the first to draw the attention of American leaders to the geopolitical changes that have taken place, and their significance for the national interest of the United States. He has well learnt the lessons of Mackinder, particularly that Eurasia is not simply the largest continent on the globe, but occupies an axial position on it: "A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent."⁷

Nearly 75% of the world's population lives in Eurasia, and a greater part of its physical riches is also located there. Eurasia boasts almost 60% of the world GNP and nearly three quarters of its proven energy reserves. Therefore: "Eurasia is also the location of most of the world's politically assertive and dynamic states. After the United States, the next six largest economies and the next six biggest spenders on military weaponry are located in Eurasia. All but one of the world's overt nuclear powers and all but one of the covert ones are located in Eurasia. The world's two most populous aspirants to regional hegemony and global influence are Eurasian. All of the potential political and/or economic challengers to American primacy are Eurasian. Cumulatively, Eurasia's power vastly overshadows America's."⁸

Thus enumerated, it is possible to understand the concerns of the United States about developments taking place on the vast expanses of Eurasia, and why the American political leadership attaches priority to this region in its policy. Today, in connection with the 9/11 events, a real possibility has opened up for the United States to ensure its presence in the region and exert influence for its interests.

Hoc opus, hic labor est! (This is the toil!)

Events in the region, and particularly the Central Asian part of it, have been developing both rapidly and unpredictably. The new political realities in it are absolutely unlike those that characterized the early 1990s, when the disintegration of the Soviet Union took place and new forms of interstate association began to emerge, principally the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The geopolitical realities of post-Soviet territory have begun implacably to introduce their correctives to

⁷ Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 31.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

the former “fraternal” relations between the republics, and indicate the new contours of the political, economic, ideological, transport-communicational, social and ecological problems that face the region. The antiterrorist campaign focused on Afghanistan, has added new nuances to these relations which, far from improving the situation, have had the opposite effect.

Regarding the CIS, it is most likely that it will remain for some time in a state where there is, so to speak, “neither real marriage, nor formal divorce.” This leads many analysts to assert that it is almost at its last gasp and will soon cease to exist—if it is not already dead. However, paraphrasing Mark Twain’s well-known witticism, it is possible to say that rumors of the death of the Commonwealth are really exaggerated. Despite the obvious symptoms of lasting disease in the CIS, whose condition has already become chronic, it is nonetheless premature to think that it is already on its death bed. It has been in such a state for a decade already, but far from bothering anyone, this has even actually suited many. Without riveting anyone to it by iron ties, the Commonwealth has allowed its members to make immediate use of the advantages available to it at a time of crisis. And the fact that it continues to have these advantages must be admitted by even its most implacable critics.

So far everyone, it seems, is comfortable with the amorphous and not too binding structure of the CIS, within the framework of which urgent interstate issues are mainly resolved on a bilateral basis. It is important to grasp that from the outset the CIS was not planned as a supra-state formation designed to resolve certain common tasks, but that it was some kind of a transitional structure, in which each participant was free to develop their involvement or otherwise. This was especially fixed in the Alma-Ata Declaration in December 1991.

The struggle for influence in the Central Asian region—which involves, to a greater or lesser extent, all the leading states of the world—has the potential to turn the region into a troubled buffer zone between the West and the East. The domination or prevailing influence in Central Asia, besides everything else, promises great advantages in the field of possession of rich energy resources. This is especially important, if one takes into account the gradual exhaustion of their reserves in the Persian Gulf region, and that that region is in a permanently unstable situation.

Ultima ratio regum (The final argument of kings, i.e. war)

Geopolitical changes in the world are obvious, but so too is the role that they play in determining the policies of states and defining their national interests. This was quite definitely identified by Brzezinski, who notes that nation-states continue to remain the main units of the world system. In the struggle and competition between them the “geographic location is still the point of departure for the definition of a nation-state’s external priorities, and the size of national territory also remains one of the major criteria of status and power.”⁹

Against this background, it seems strange that certain analysts should question the importance of geopolitics in determining the positions of states in the international arena, and even believe that its role in the interstate relations is actually diminishing. It is asserted, for example, that relations cannot be already understood and described “with the help of such traditional and most influential models of foreign policy as ‘political realism’ or ‘geopolitics.’” Under “political realism,” it is of course important that national interests should be carefully analyzed and understood. The words spoken above belong to Nikolai Kosolapov, a well-known analyst and author of many articles on the topic of present-day international relations and Russia’s foreign policy. It is interesting to note that after the categorical

⁹ Zb. Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 38.

assertion regarding the inadequacy of the previous models of study he himself several pages below outlines the “complex of primary long-term systems tasks” of Russia. He identifies the main ones as: “preservation of the country’s integrity, maintenance of effective control over its territory, resources, economy; overcoming resistance of those external forces, which are not interested in the development of strong influential Russia and actively counteract its revival in that capacity.”¹⁰

Moving to the concrete geopolitical interests of the United States in the Eurasian region, Brzezinski outlines what he considers to be the priorities: “In the short run, it is in America’s interest to consolidate and perpetuate the prevailing geopolitical pluralism on the map of Eurasia. That puts a premium on maneuver and manipulation in order to prevent the emergence of a hostile coalition that could eventually seek to challenge America’s primacy, not to mention the remote possibility of any one particular state seeking to do so. By the middle term, the foregoing should gradually yield to a greater emphasis on the emergence of increasingly important but strategically compatible partners who, prompted by American leadership, might help to shape a more cooperative trans-Eurasian security system. Eventually, in the much longer run still, the foregoing could phase into a global core of genuinely shared political responsibility.”¹¹

The most immediate goal that the U.S. is pursuing, he concludes, is to “make certain that no state or combination of states gains the capacity to expel the United States from Eurasia or even to diminish significantly its decisive arbitrating role.”¹² This essentially expresses the same *idée fixe*, which American strategists and analysts have pursued over the period of post-war history and whose presence in various foreign political documents was noted above. What is crystal clear is that there is absolutely no doubt that the concepts of national interests, geopolitics, and the balance of power, remain important in relations between states, and will continue to serve as major instruments of the United States’ policy in the world arena.

Russia and China will most likely be the powers that in the future may offer the greatest real counteraction to the plans of the United States in Eurasia. Therefore the “middle” states, including first of all the states of Trans-Caucasia, Turkey, Iran, and Central and Middle Asia, will be obliged to take their bearings geopolitically and decide, on the basis of their national interests, what position they should adhere to. There is no such obvious need thus far, but there are no guarantees that it will not arise in the foreseeable future, taking into account the dynamics of development of the present-day world. The events in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 and the participation of many states of the Central Asian region in the antiterrorist campaign, in particular the granting by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan of access to air space and basing rights to the U.S. military, have created a certain foundation for this. Many analysts believe that in spite of all of these statements about the temporary character of the presence in the region of the American armed forces, *the United States will not leave, at least not in the foreseeable future.*

In other words, not only is the U.S. rethinking the geopolitical importance of the Central Asian region, but it is also expressing the desire to create a legal base for carrying out the resultant policies. In plans to restore the “Silk Road,” primary attention is devoted to the maintenance of the balance of power favorable to the United States both in the Caspian region and in Central Asia. This is aimed in the final analysis at the neutralization of hegemonic aspirations on the part of Iran from the south and Russia from the north.

There is considerable hope that the tapping of hydrocarbon reserves in the Caspian Sea will make it possible to substantially lower the energy dependence of the United States on the unstable Arab world. This is a vital consideration because, according to certain estimates, during the next two to three dec-

¹⁰ N. Kosolapov, “Rossia v mezhdunarodnoi sisteme nachala XXI veka: vyzov globalizatsii,” in: Rossiiskaia vneshniaia politika na rubezhe vekov: preemstvennost, izmeneniia, perspektivy, IMEMO RAN, Moscow, 2000, pp. 180-181.

¹¹ Zb. Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 198.

¹² Ibidem.

ades world energy consumption must considerably grow. Given such a great demand on energy producers, and the deficits in most countries of the world, it is quite clear what should be expected in the mutual relations of states, striving as best as they can to satisfy their national interests, among which the task of providing national economics with energy resources occupies a central place.

The United States supports geopolitical pluralism on the post-Soviet territory of Central Asia and seeks to counter the desire of any power in the region to dominate, most particularly Russia. Such tactics are the best way to consolidate its influence in the region and provide itself with a role in the development of the region's resource potential. America's primary interest, Brzezinski believes, "is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community [read: the United States] has underhindered financial and economic access to it." And one of its chief geopolitical conclusions is as follows: "Geopolitical pluralism will become an enduring reality only when a network of pipeline and transportation routes links the region directly to the major centers of global economic activity via the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas, as well as overland. Hence, Russian efforts to monopolize access need to be opposed as inimical to regional stability."¹³

On the whole we believe that the system of present-day relations after the disintegration of bipolarity is neither "unipolar" nor "multipolar." As of today, it has not yet developed sufficiently enough to make a comprehensive evaluation of its nature and form, and all judgments at this point must be provisional. Today in the world only one superpower really exists but, in our view, one should not draw a conclusion that it exerts a decisive impact on the development of international relations on the whole. The events in Iraq and Yugoslavia, the hostilities against them under the aegis of the United States have shown one thing: it is capable of organizing such actions and even inflict a military defeat to these or other regimes, but alone it cannot realize its goals and channel the development of international relations in a direction desired by it or protect itself from new threats. It is possible to put it thus: today the only superpower is opposed not by a certain equal force, but by a certain international disorder, a chaos, a kind of anarchy, which cannot be controlled, regulated and managed. In this sense the bipolar system was more orderly, more controllable, and therefore, more predictable than the present-day system of international relations. It is therefore no accident that in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, certain influential and far-sighted American analysts and experts said that the United States will now be faced not with a problem of conflict with the monolithic Soviet threat, but how to confront and manage the disintegration of the Soviet Union.¹⁴

How to manage this decline, and indeed whether it is even possible to manage it in general, is a problem that is not only faced by the United States. The new system of a disorderly balance of power has presented the U.S. with more new headaches than advantages, and considerably new material and moral costs, because it is impossible in principle to manage chaos.

It is possible to say that the former global bipolar balance of power has disintegrated, giving place to many regional balances of power, which unlike the first one are unstable, changing and fraught with unpredictable conflicts. If it is possible to call the present-day system of international relations multipolar, then it can be done only in the sense of a certain totality of the loosely linked regional balances of power, which does not merge into a single global dynamic. In this sense the United States can be compared with a "shepherd" whose herd is running in different directions. Sir Winston Churchill rightly noted that the balance of power is the "law of politics ... and not simple expediency prompted by random circumstances, antipathies or other similar feeling."¹⁵

The unbalanced power in the system of international relations exerts in principle the same destructive effect as in mechanics, only its aftermath is much more serious. Mackinder's monolith of the

¹³ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁴ See, for example: C. Gershman, "Freedom Remains the Touchstone," *The National Interest*, No. 19, Spring 1990, p. 83.

¹⁵ W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. 1, Boston, 1948, pp. 207-208.

Eurasian Heartland is being remodeled in a fatal way. According to Kenneth Waltz, the famous U.S. scholar and analyst, the absence of balance poses a danger for all states, not excluding the most powerful. Unbalanced power, he writes, “feeding the ambitions of certain states in expanding their influence, may prompt them to a dangerous and adventurous policy. From this it is possible to conclude that security of all states depends on maintaining the balance of power among them.”¹⁶

P o s t s c r i p t

Categories of morality or personal taste would hardly be appropriate to evaluate the world system. It is possible to find plenty of arguments that it is in a good state, and equally many that contend the opposite. Here, in our view, it is rightful only to observe that the system of the bipolar balance of power was created due to quite definite objective circumstances, which emerged after the end of World War II, and themselves came to an end with the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

All the contemporary phenomena and problems outlined in this paper are inseparable from the process of globalization: some, including international terrorism, can be reckoned as its direct consequence and inevitable product. The process of globalization and the growth of the interdependence of states, especially in the economic sphere, has become one of the chief features of the present-day world. Many states are being newly forced to adapt themselves to this situation, especially those which only in the last decade have embarked on the path of independent political and economic development.

The new sovereign states created on post-Soviet territory, including Central Asia, should rid themselves of any illusions about a new world order, and accept the controversial rules of survival in the modern world. They are located on Halford Mackinder’s Heartland, an ongoing site of international struggle, and must act accordingly. In particular, they have to defend and strengthen their sovereignty, political and economic independence, simultaneously taking into account both the process of globalization and interdependence, and their own national interests—factors which do not always coincide.

¹⁶ K. Waltz, “International Structure and the Balance of Power,” in: *International Politics and Foreign Policy. A Reader in Research and Theory*, ed. by J. Rosenau, New York, 1969, p. 312.

9/11 AND THE HEARTLAND DEBATE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Anita SENGUPTA

*D.Sc. (Political Science),
Fellow at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies
(Kolkata, India)*

The “Romance” of the Heartland

When five independent states emerged in the Central Asian region, in the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, what also emerged, more or less simultaneously, was a focus on certain geopolitical concepts and constructs that had become defunct in the immediate past. One such concept that became popular was that of the “new great game,” to define the competition for influence, power, hegemony and profits that would now be played out over the “Heartland.”¹ It was emphasized that while the original “Great Game” had been about territorial control, the new game was primarily about control over the resources of the Heartland and only secondarily about the strategic geopolitical position of the region.² This became an integral part of a vast literature and coincided with a revival of interest in and use of geopolitics as a tool for politico-security analysis.

This focus intensified in the post 9/11 scenario when it was argued that control over this region, the crucial “Heartland” of the “World-Island,” would be critical in determining the emerging

¹ There is, however, debate on the viability of the use of the term “new great game.” For more detail, 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, pp. 83-102.

² Energy politics and the competition over oil and gas became the focus of both Russian and American administrations in the Central Asian region. A Russian Security Council Report emphasized that by 2005 Russia’s dependence on CIS energy resources would have increased and that it would be of vital interest to have access to these areas. Similarly, reports under the Clinton administration stressed the need to be active in the region.

balance of influence in the context of a vastly changed world order. The assumption, particularly in the post 9/11 scenario, was that Sir Halford Mackinder's "World-Island" would once again be central to both U.S. and Russian foreign policy. Strategic analysts returned to the theory of the "Heartland" that had envisioned Russian control over the Eurasian landmass as the "pivot of world politics" and the implications of this for other states.³ However, it would be incorrect to interpret this focus on the Heartland as geographical determinism. Geographical determinism ignores one of Mackinder's major tenets where he had pointed out that "the actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organization of the competing peoples."⁴

In the post 9/11 scenario this became particularly significant and Mackinder's ideas received a fresh consideration in both the U.S. and Russia as policymakers searched for ways to conceptualize and deal with the heart of the Heartland, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region. The region assumed a significant part in the interaction between Russia and the United States with the recognition of its role in any "war against terror." As American presence increased and the U.S. military was offered basing rights by some Central Asian states, an entirely new set of geopolitical relations was seen to be emerging where traditional areas of interest had been transformed.

Against this background, this article examines how significant the "Heartland" actually is in Russian and U.S. foreign policy particularly in the post 9/11 scenario. The article attempts to do so through a review of developments in Russian-U.S. relations in the Central Asian region in the aftermath of 9/11.

Russia and the United States in Central Asia: The "New" Rivalry over the Heartland

"The war on terrorism has brought Washington and Moscow closer and has seen the development of a personal relationship between President Bush and President Putin. Before the 2001 terror attacks on the United States few would have thought that Russia would sit by while America established a military presence in four of the Soviet Union's successor states, given Moscow's earlier reactions to United States criticism of Russian conduct in Chechnia. Yet, Russia seemed to acquiesce to America's movement into Central Asia and even remained quiet when American troops landed on Russia's border in the Caucasus."⁵

The "new" rivalry between Russia and the U.S. is particularly interesting since it was assumed that the cordial atmosphere that had developed in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September events

³ The concept of a critical Eurasian Heartland and containment of the power occupying the Heartland had become evident in the writings of a number of commentators even prior to the events of 9/11. Among them Zbigniew Brzezinski referred to Central Asia, the "Eurasian Balkans," as geopolitically significant for reasons of energy, sociopolitical instability and potential power domination. Brzezinski argued that America's primary interest would be to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space since preponderance over the entire Eurasian continent serves as the central basis for global primacy. Brzezinski thus made Eurasia the focus of U.S. foreign policy in his writings consistently warning of the advantages that the Heartland power had over the West (Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperative*, Basic Books, New York, 1997; idem, *Game Plan: A Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.-Soviet Contest*, The Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston, 1986).

⁴ H.J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, pp. 437.

⁵ S.E. Cornell, "America in Eurasia: One Year After," *Current History*, October 2002, pp. 330-336.

would herald a new era in Russian-U.S. relations particularly as far as policy toward Central Asia was concerned. 9/11 was seen to “spark a Russian pivot” to which the West was seen to have responded very positively. President Vladimir Putin was noted as the first foreign head of state to have called President Bush and then followed it up with a whole string of actions that amounted to a wholesale reorientation of Russian foreign policy.

This was significant since from about the second half of President Yeltsin’s term, particularly after the U.S. attacks against Yugoslavia, relations between Russia and the United States had been in a state of sustained crisis. Serious differences between the two countries on a number of major issues far exceeded the common ground between them. Although the Bush administration had made some adjustments to its Russian policy from the middle of 2001, owing mainly to growing criticism at home and abroad of its tough stance toward Russia and of the EP-3 aircraft incident between the United States and China in April 2001, there had been no substantial improvement in Russian-U.S. relations. In order to improve relations with the United States, Russia also made concessions on other important issues. For instance, it tacitly consented to the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty signed in 1972 and abandoned the limit which it had set on the NATO’s eastward expansion. Russia also closed, of its own accord, its military bases in Cuba and Vietnam.

However, there remains contradictory evidence to such linear development of Russian-U.S. relations. It has been observed that when President Bush had called President Putin on the weekend of 22 September, 2001, and asked if the Russian President would use his influence with the Central Asian states to help the U.S. obtain basing rights, President Putin had replied: “I am prepared to tell the heads of government of the Central Asian states that we have good relations with and that we have no objections to a U.S. role in Central Asia as long as it has the objective of fighting the war on terror and is *temporary and not permanent* (italics mine.—A.S.). If it is that then we have no objection and that is what I will tell people.”⁶

It is not surprising therefore that a year later there was a reversal of trends with reports of a growing disillusionment in Russia about the strategic partnership agreements concluded with the U.S. and other western allies over the past year. In fact, there were adverse reactions to the presence of the NATO forces in Central Asia, which was seen as “the penetration of a strategic region that undermines the security not only of Russia but also of China.”⁷ While those close to the Russian army were most vocal about expressing their displeasure it was also reflected in the Russian press with the *Nezavisimaia gazeta* referring to the presence of American troops in Afghanistan as a backward step for Russian influence in the region.⁸ In response to this the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov insisted on a clear operational deadline for the American troops in the region arguing that they would have to leave once their objective of defeating terror had been achieved.

In addition, the two countries have significant differences regarding the definition of terrorism and a number of other issues. The issue of Iraq is a prime example where U.S. claims of Iraqi violation of a ban on the development of weapons of mass destruction has been negated by Russia with President Putin pointing out that Russia does not have any intelligence proving that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Russia is also at odds with the United States over its relations with Iran and is dissatisfied with the attitude of the U.S. government toward Georgia. Furthermore, Russia still has

⁶ Quoted from: B. Woodward, *Bush At War*, Pocket Books, London, Sydney, New York, Tokyo, Singapore, Toronto, 2002, p. 118.

⁷ Quoted from: “Russia: Communist Leader Says ‘NATO Forces’ in Central Asia a Threat,” *RFE/RL Report*, 9 February, 2002: available at [www.rferl.org].

⁸ See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 9 October, 2001. Quoted in Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Keeping Central Asia Stable,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2004, pp. 689-705.

differences with the United States regarding implementation of the treaty on the reduction of strategic offensive weapons, the U.S. missile defense program and other issues.

Such differences focused Russian attention on security arrangements within the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Iskander Khisamov, a regional analyst clearly states this in the journal *Ekspert* when he writes: "There is no country or even a group of countries or an international institution that can or would want to give Russia some guarantees that its security, territorial integrity or at least its economic interests will be respected. Thus, no matter how weak or disintegrated the Commonwealth of Independent States might be, it remains Russia's main strategic priority."⁹

In keeping with this there have been moves by Russia to reassert her influence over the post-Soviet space on the basis of the Collective Security Treaty. It has been noted that using antiterrorism as a catch phrase Russia is pushing to create a full-fledged regional military bloc.¹⁰

Russia and five other CIS countries, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, during a summit held on 28 April, 2003 formalized a security alliance that could help boost Moscow's presence in Central Asia by creating the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which will attempt to provide a more efficient response to strategic problems confronting member states, specifically terrorism and narcotics trafficking.¹¹ The CSTO is an outgrowth of the 1992 Collective Security Treaty, which sought to promote greater strategic cooperation among the signatories. The Organization is now committed to creating permanent institutions responsible for budget management and strategic military planning. The bulk of the organization's attention and resources will be initially concentrated in Central Asia with rapid deployment force to be stationed at the Russian military facility at Kant, in northern Kyrgyzstan.

Russian policymakers believe that the CSTO has the potential to help Moscow reestablish its high strategic profile in what traditionally has been its sphere of influence. According to a report in the Russian daily *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, some CSTO summit participants pressed Kyrgyz officials to curtail basing rights given to the U.S. forces in their Manas airbase, also in northern Kyrgyzstan. President Putin downplayed the notion that Russia seeks to utilize the CSTO to reduce U.S. influence in the region, saying that the organization would strive to contain the flow of drugs coming out of Afghanistan and counter the threat posed by radical Islamic organizations in Central Asia.¹² Some political analysts believe that the impetus for the formal creation of the CSTO is concern over the U.S. tendency under the Bush administration to take a unilateralist approach to strategic issues as recently underscored by the American campaign against Iraq.

President Putin has also sought to resurrect Russia's diminished influence in post-Cold War global politics. In addition to signing a nuclear arms treaty with Washington and setting up a new joint council with NATO, he has courted American adversaries, including China, North Korea and Iraq, and extended economic ties to what the U.S. refers as the "axis-of-evil," Iraq, Iran and North Korea. As already noted, Russia has also stationed troops and warplanes in Kyrgyzstan.¹³

It has been observed that these recent Russian foreign policy moves may undermine the alliance between Moscow and Washington.¹⁴ The \$40 billion economic agreement with Iraq, sale

⁹ Quoted from: I. Torbakov, "Russia Moves to Reassert Influence in Central Asia, Caucasus," *Eurasia Insight*, 18 December, 2002: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ See: I. Alibekov, S. Blagov, "New Security Organization Could Help Expand Russia's Reach in Central Asia," *Eurasia Insight*, 6 May, 2003: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ See: G. Feifer, "2002 in Review: Putin's Foreign Policy Not Seen as Harming Relations with the West," *RFE/RL Report*, 16 December, 2002: available at [www.rferl.org].

¹⁴ See: A. Cohen, "Uncertainty Still Defines Russia's Role in Central Eurasia," *Eurasia Insight*, 19 September, 2002: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

of five nuclear reactors to Iran and public demonstration of warm feelings toward Kim Jung Il have all been noted with apprehension in the U.S. Balancing these relationships with Russia's desire for a reliable partner in the Caucasus and Central Asia may prove to be difficult. Southern Caucasus also remains an area of friction between state interests and different ethnic groups and military factions. Russia insists that its war in Chechnia is an extension of the "war on terrorism." The Chechen issue, however, remains a potential area of disagreement between Russia and the U.S. Also Russia's inability to bring the conflict to a close has an effect on attitudes toward Russia in Central Asia.

While Russia's role in central Eurasia remains ambiguous, political analyst Ahmed Rashid notes that a number of factors are now actually leading Russia to regain her influence over the region, not the least of which is the U.S. administration's inability to come up with a coherent aid program for the region. Rashid notes that another significant reason is the fact that in the post 11 September period the Central Asian elite is very seriously divided. In Turkmenistan the former Foreign Minister Boris Shikmuradov has moved to Moscow and set up an opposition group along with a number of other leading Turkmen political figures. In Kazakhstan the current leader of the opposition is the former Prime Minister, Akezhan Kazhegeldin. In Kyrgyzstan, similarly, many members of the former elite are in jail and now form the opposition. Because a large part of this dissident elite is now in Moscow, Rashid notes that this will allow Russia huge leverage in Central Asia.¹⁵

It is in this connection that Alexei Malashenko, Professor at the Moscow Institute of International Relations, points out that Russian efforts to set up a permanent Russian base in Kyrgyzstan may be significant. Kyrgyzstan is now faced with a political crisis where President Askar Akaev has accused opposition protesters of trying to destabilize the country and has indicated that he has no intentions of responding to calls for his resignation. Malashenko has noted that the Russian military presence in the country will serve, first and foremost, to maintain the rule of President Akaev, who is considered to be pro Moscow. Malashenko notes: "The kind of developments that took place in Kyrgyzstan in October and November (2002), in my point of view, exactly point out that the current Kyrgyz political elite is very much interested in cooperation with Moscow. At least cooperation with Moscow, including military cooperation, gives some confidence to Akaev's regime, while the American presence, in my opinion, in no way influences its stability or its future."¹⁶

In the aftermath of 9/11 Kyrgyzstan had indicated complete support for the "war against terrorism." The 11 September terrorist attacks were, in Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev's words, a turning point for the international perceptions of political and security developments in the region. President Akaev immediately expressed his condolences to the American people and his full support for the U.S. action against international terrorism and extremism. He also offered Kyrgyz airspace for the American action in Afghanistan. The United States government in turn indicated that it valued Kyrgyzstan's support and that it would extend economic and military assistance to the Republic. In December 2001, the U.S. established a permanent military base near Bishkek airport.

The establishment of a U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan was in many ways an unprecedented step since it demonstrated, among other things, a radical reorientation of security arrangements from Russia to the U.S. Some political groups and the Russian military were highly critical of the U.S. base and this meant that Kyrgyzstan had to search for a delicate balance between the interests of the two major powers. This prompted one analyst to note: "After 11 September, 2001, Bishkek's foreign policymakers had to find a balance between the long-standing security arrangements with

¹⁵ Quoted from: N. Krastev, "Central Asia: 'Taliban' Author Says Russia to Regain Influence in Unstable Region," *RFE/RL Report*, 22 March, 2002: available at [www.rferl.org].

¹⁶ Quoted from: Z. Eshanova, "Central Asia: Diplomatic Visits Highlight U.S.-Russian Competition," *RFE/RL Report*, 3 December, 2002: available at [www.rferl.org].

Russia and the newly established regime of antiterrorist cooperation with the United States which brought a U.S. military presence to the outskirts of Kyrgyzstan's capital. In November 2001, U.S. personnel began hastily building the Republic's first ever American military base, just a few miles away from a Russian sponsored CIS antiterrorist center. Moreover, the visitors were talking about extended cooperation with the independent Kyrgyz defense forces, outraging Russia's generals and political hawks."¹⁷

However, Kyrgyzstan is not the only Central Asian state that will be host to both Russian and American forces. In December 2002 Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov met the U.S. President George Bush. One of the main issues under discussion is supposed to have been the creation of a permanent U.S. military base in Tajikistan. However, the U.S. position in Tajikistan has faced challenges with talks about the establishment of a permanent Russian military base in Tajikistan and the opening of the Khorog-Kashgar road link between Tajikistan and China.¹⁸ Tajik political experts have noted that U.S. policy in Tajikistan and particularly U.S. policy to engage in discussions with the Tajik opposition has had a significant part in this.¹⁹ Along with the establishment of a permanent base, Russia has also worked out details for the transfer of border security to Tajik troops. Similarly, the opening of the Khorog-Kashgar road link will significantly expand trade between Tajikistan and China and also create jobs in the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, thus significantly increasing the Chinese presence.

While Malashenko notes that President Putin's visit to Kyrgyzstan and President Rakhmonov's visit to the White House are indicative of a new military reapportionment of Central Asia with the U.S. and Russia as the main players and will eventually result in the stability of the region, others like Alisher Abdimomunov, a deputy in the Kyrgyz Legislative Assembly and head of the Parliamentary Committee of International Relations expressed his reservations about the presence of competing powers in the state who may well be chasing different geopolitical interests.²⁰

Another recent development is the reemergence of the GUUAM with active American support.²¹ The GUUAM, which is a group consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova, saw a revival in a meeting held on 3-4 July, 2003 in Yalta. It has been pointed out that much of the support needed to promote GUUAM is coming from the United States.²² In addition to lending diplomatic encouragement, the U.S. government is also reportedly providing economic assistance to foster GUUAM development. Officials in Moscow have remained silent about recent GUUAM developments. However, the Russian media have left little doubt that Moscow views GUUAM's prospects as limited. A commentary in the *Nezavisimaia gazeta* pointed out that only two heads of state, those from Georgia and the host Ukraine, attended the summit. A primary source of tension between GUUAM and Russia is competing trade interests. GUUAM states have supported a trans-Caucasian transportation corridor known as TRACECA, which would link the countries in the Caspian Basin and the Black Sea regions, effectively bypassing Russia. At the same time, Moscow is seeking to promote the so-

¹⁷ R. Abazov, "Kyrgyzstan's Dilemmas," *Analysis of Current Events*, Vol. 14, No. 2, May 2002.

¹⁸ On 26 February, 2004, *Nezavisimaia gazeta* suggested that Moscow is hoping to secure a permanent Russian military base in Tajikistan (see: Z. Abdullayev, "Tajikistan, Russia Probe Military Partnership," *Eurasia Insight*, 15 March, 2004: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>]).

¹⁹ See: K. Arman, "U.S. Geopolitical Position Takes Hit in Tajikistan," *Eurasia Insight*, 13 July, 2004: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

²⁰ Quoted from: Z. Eshanova, op. cit.

²¹ Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova formed a group called the GUAM in 1996 and when Uzbekistan joined in 1999 it came to be known as GUUAM. It was formed as a political, economic and strategic alliance among the member states with the objective of enhancing regional economic cooperation through the development of a Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor. It has also become a forum for discussing various levels of existing security problems and promoting conflict resolution. For more detail, see the GUUAM official website available at [www.guam.org].

²² See: T. Kuzio, S. Blagov, "GUUAM Makes a Comeback Bid with U.S. Support," *Eurasia Insight*, 7 July, 2003: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

called North-South transportation corridor. Moscow has been promoting the Eurasian Economic Community as an alternative to GUUAM.²³ What will deduct from the significance of the GUUAM is the fact that Uzbekistan has decided to opt out of it though it clarified that this was a temporary measure and that Uzbekistan could rejoin the grouping at a later date.²⁴

Observers believe that with Central Asian security conditions becoming more complex, the countries in the region are eager to engage in cooperation with all regional powers, including China and Russia, and the United States. Kazakhstan, in particular, is eager to pursue a “multivector policy” as Maulen Ashimbaev, Director of the Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies pointed out in an interview with the *Express K* newspaper.²⁵ Similarly, in the aftermath of the late March 2004 militant attacks in Tashkent and Bukhara, Uzbek President Karimov once again stressed the need to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Russia. Commenting on this the Uzbek Foreign Minister Sadiq Safayev pointed out that “...after deep analysis and considering prospects for bilateral relations both sides agreed that it was important that Uzbekistan and Russia sign a strategic partnership agreement in the near future.”²⁶

However, even within this framework of a “new rivalry” other issues require attention. The U.S. and Russia have now embarked on an energy partnership with announcements about imports from Russia for the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserves. At a commercial summit meeting in Houston, Texas, in October 2002, industry leaders and officials came together to further the energy dialog declared by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir Putin at their Moscow Summit in May 2002.²⁷ While this will help to build the U.S. emergency stockpile it is also expected to help keep Russian output of crude oil high at times of sagging world demands. These are issues that could well become crucial in determining the contours of the relationship and its subsequent impact on Central Asia. Russia’s resumption of its role as a leading oil producer in the late 1990s coincided with the political and strategic changes that followed 9/11. Developments since then have deepened the United State’s sense of vulnerability to imported oil supplies particularly from Saudi Arabia. Within this context an energy partnership slowly developed between the U.S. and Russia. This emerging cooperation was based on American oil companies providing badly needed financial resources to Russia’s energy industry and in return Moscow presented itself as a stable oil supplier to the United States.²⁸

Energy security remains a significant part of the U.S. policy toward Russia and the Central Asian region. Here, it has been observed that a truce has also been declared in the “battle of the pipelines.” John Erickson notes that there is a form of “geostrategic-geo-economic trade off” between Russia and the United States in the making. In return for the agreed admission of the American military into Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, albeit viewed in some military circles as a security threat to Russia, Moscow anticipates acceptance of Russia as a secure conduit for oil and gas pipeline from the Caspian.²⁹

However, it is unrealistic to expect that Moscow can replace Riyadh as the principal supplier of oil in the near future. The Russian oil industry is still restrained by economic, political and geograph-

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Uzbekistan withdrew from the Organization in 2005.—*Editor’s Note*.

²⁵ Quoted from: I. Alibekov, S. Blagov, op. cit.

²⁶ Quoted from: I. Torbakov, “Uzbekistan Set to Diversify its Security Options in the Wake of Recent Militant Attacks,” *Eurasia Insight*, 19 April, 2004: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

²⁷ See: M. Lelyveld, “U.S./Russia: Officials Hail Energy Partnership,” *RFE/RL Report*, 4 October, 2002: available at [www.rferl.org].

²⁸ For more details of how this was attempted and the role of the oil companies, see: G. Bahgat, “The New Geopolitics of Oil: The United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia,” *Orbis*, Vol. 47, No 3, Summer 2003, pp. 447-461.

²⁹ See: J. Erickson, “Eurasian Manoeuvres,” in: *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, ed. by S.N. Cummings, Routledge-Curzon, London and New York, 2003, pp. 255-262.

ical obstacles. These include hesitant reform, lack of foreign investment, inadequate transportation infrastructure and a relative shortage of proven reserves compared to the Middle East. Russia's future level of oil production will be defined by the ability of oil companies to discover and develop oil deposits in the Arctic region, eastern Siberia and Sakhalin Islands. At the moment oil production from deposits is exceeding its rate of discovery of new reserves by a significant margin. The depletion of existing oilfields raises fears that Russia's current oil boom might be followed by a sharp decline in the foreseeable future. Also shipping to the U.S. is costly because of the great distance between the two countries and the lack of Russian deep water ports. The war on Iraq further intensified the U.S. efforts to reduce dependence on Middle East oil and secure supplies from other regions. However, the sheer quantity of Persian Gulf reserves ensures that Riyadh will continue to have a significant impact on the world's petroleum supplies and prices. This in turn will reflect on future developments in the region and future Russian-U.S. interaction in the Central Asian region.

Post Beslan, there was reemergence of the debates on the limits of Russian and U.S. power in the Caucasus and Central Asian region. It was argued that since chances of the establishment of either Russia or the U.S. as the dominant power were slim, it would best serve the purpose of both to increase cooperation in the two regions. The threat of renewed conflict in South Ossetia and the recent cases of radical violence in Uzbekistan have helped sharpen this viewpoint.³⁰ The debate in Russia, however, is still sharply divided between those who are opposed to confrontation with the U.S., given the fact that Russia does not have the ability to prevent the redeployment of U.S. troops to these regions and in any case now share a common concern about the containment of radicalism, and others who continue to believe that Russia can roll back U.S. influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia.³¹

Conclusion: *Is Central Asia Truly the Heartland?*

"The formation of the international coalition to wage war on terrorism transformed what has been long standing 'Eurasian maneuvers,' competition for political and economic influence, jostling for privileged positions to exploit huge regional energy resources... The sanctity of the 'Heartland' was not only invaded—some of the invaders were actually invited in... The post-11 September rapprochement between Russia and the U.S. provided a virtual guarantee of non-interference in Russian affairs and an acknowledgement of Russian primacy in Central Asia. Washington publicly affirmed that it had no intention of 'squeezing Russia out of Central Asia.'"³²

Rather than the development of a new round of geopolitical rivalry over the heartland in the immediate aftermath of the entry of U.S. forces in the region, the dynamics of major powers' strategic interaction in the Central Asian region has moved toward collaboration. An assessment of their behavior demonstrates a remarkable degree of shared strategic interests that has sustained their collaboration in the region. This does not imply that Russian and American decision makers do not wish to increase their influence over the region. Russian officials are eager to stop further decline of their influence. Russia wishes to limit the U.S. role in the region and advocates a multipolar strategy. For

³⁰ In the end of March 2004 there were suicidal attacks against the militia in Tashkent. This was followed by a series of bomb blasts in Bukhara. Following these incidents Uzbekistan and Russia negotiated an Uzbek-Russian strategic cooperation pact.

³¹ For more details of the debate, see: I. Torbakov, "Policy Makers in Moscow Debate the Limits of Russian Power in the Caucasus, Central Asia," *Eurasia Insight*, 2 September, 2004: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>].

³² J. Erickson, op. cit., p. 261.

their part, American policymakers have expressed a preference for “stability” and “development” that can only be served by their continued and enhanced presence.

Moreover the most pressing security problems for both the U.S. and Russia are not in Central Asia and are not ones that can only be achieved at the expense of the other. On the contrary, they require collaboration from other powers. For Russia, the war in Chechnia remains the most significant and there have been claims that the movement has transnational links with the Taliban and al-Qa’eda. The United States has classified both the Taliban and the al-Qa’eda as terrorist organizations and recognizes them as chief security threats, but at the same time has shifted its priorities to the Persian Gulf.

Contrary to the opinion that there is today a revival of the “Great Game” in the Caucasus and Central Asia, cooperation and multilateralism seem to be the watchwords of diplomacy for Eurasian powers. This brings into question the continuing interpretation of the history of the region in terms of an intense rivalry for control over Mackinder’s so-called “heartland of the world.” In fact, no major geopolitical conflicts now divide the powers and there is a new rapprochement over the region. While, on the one hand, this calls for a reinterpretation of the viability of the great game theories, and the significance of the “heartland,” on the other, it also demands a new look at the emerging multilateralism in the region.



MACKINDER'S HEARTLAND AND THE LOCATION OF THE GEOPOLITICAL TETRAHEDRON

Dr Amrish DHAKA

Assistant Professor,
School of International Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University
(New Delhi, India)

Sir Halford Mackinder's paper, *The Geographical Pivot of History*,¹ has retained a power to engage those concerned with the analysis of epochal events in world geopolitics. The end of the Cold War witnessed the geopolitical phoenix rising in the "new world order," to the extent that the legacy of Mackinder has been consistently revisited in geopolitical discourse on Central Asia and, *inter alia*, Eurasia.

If the "age of discovery" had been the *prima facie* introduction to Europe of new lands and new societies across the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania, then the age of capitalism had given way to virtually the complete political appropriation of these continents. Otherwise, how could there have been a sudden realization in the form of Mackinder's cognitive metaphor that the

"Heartland," hitherto the vast moribund steppes of Eurasia, had suddenly become of prime importance?²

The paper presented here addresses a dual question. First, it looks into the historical-geographical conditions in which the Pivot was construed, and the systemic variables of global capitalism which are the source of its programming across time-space. Second, it addresses an aspect of Mackinder's model that has seldom been considered—the spatial. One of the prime reasons that the latter has so often been overlooked could be the prevalent abhorrence of mapping simple geometrical and physical tools into the complex and changing nature of the geopolitical world. Had it not been for the 11 September, 2001 episode, the

¹ H.J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-437.

² Even apart from these external factors, the internal dynamics of British society were subject to significant stress from the impact of the business cycle that began in Britain in the 1870s, a phase that coincided with the second scramble for Africa and Asia.

restive state of world affairs would have found few takers for the platonic Heartland-Rimland debates that often used to wash the shores of Cold War geopolitics. Here, an attempt has been made to look into the dual nature of Mackinder's theory both as map and concept. The paper's original contribution is to show how new light is shed on the Pivot by tilting it on its axis.

The paper that Mackinder presented to the Royal Geographical Society was illustrative of events of the time. These were the inevitable transformation of British imperialism, and it is then overarching captivity of world trade, from a near monopoly to competitive play with the increasing involvement of Germany in the East and later with the advent of Socialist Russia. The paper also reflected the new Asia rising from a long slumber of economic exploitation, revitalized by economic nationalism. China and Japan revealed the enormous potential of the East. Geographers and Statesmen were the two glass-lenses of the binocular vision of British Imperialism. This can be surmised in the words of G.T. Goldie on the death of the Queen Victoria, Empress of India, as follows: "Throughout the Victorian age, Great Britain has dealt with the white races on the principle of constitutional liberty, when assured of the loyalty to the Crown and flag; and the chief aim in dealing with the colored races has undoubtedly been beneficence, though this aim, like other human ideals, has too often been marred by *imperfect knowledge* or faulty judgement."³

The Royal Geographical Society was founded in February 1827, with the objective of filling the gaps in the "imperfect knowledge" of the globe for King William IV (1830). The society became the flagship of British Imperialism, when Queen Victoria provided a Royal Charter defining its objectives as "The Advancement of Geographical Science" and "The Improvement and Diffusion of Geographical Knowledge." A major contribution of the Society toward these goals has been the *Geographical Journal*. This is one of the longest running journals, forming a comprehensive repos-

³ G.T. Goldie, "Progress of Exploration and the Spread and Consolidation of the Empire in America, Australia, and Africa," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, March 1901, pp. 240.

itory of information about explorations of vast areas in Africa and Asia. Most of the proceedings of this society took the form of meetings, often held by senior statesmen and army personnel involved in the promotion of British imperial interests. Their work commonly took the form of intelligence about the local people, suitable routes for trade and movement, principal ethnic-social dimensions, and the military capabilities of the "natives." Sir Thomas Holdich aptly states this imperial service of the empire, in explaining the task of the Royal Geographical Society as follows: "We have restored to the world what the world well knew once before... All this has been brought about by the slow and certain process of Imperial advance, carrying with it all the *accessories of civilization*, which sweep clean the rottenness that underlies the undergrowth of small and semi-barbarous nationalities choking their roots and stunting the growth of wide and wholesome development; and it is this which has distinguished Asia no less than Africa..."⁴

Thus, the latter-day challenge that the promoters of Great Britain's overseas interest visualized, was not from Gothic France or German Magyars, who themselves emerged "under common necessity of resistance to external factors," but the advent of nascent Asian statehood emergent in the Third World, symbolic of the "Asiatic Imperialism" of the nomads hammering the eastern gates of Europe.⁵ According to Mackinder, Latin America and Africa had an altogether different significance for the western world than did Asia: their history was inconsequential, and their geography made them militarily vulnerable.⁶

⁴ T.H. Holdich, "Advances in Asia and Imperial Consolidation in India," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, March 1901, pp. 241-242.

⁵ Mackinder contends that "the idea of England was beaten into the Heptarchy by Danish and Norman conquerors; the idea of France was forced upon competing Franks, Goths," but the idea of European civilization had been the consequence of one of the more "elemental movements whose pressure ... perform[ed] a valuable social function ... and it was under the pressure of external barbarism that Europe achieved her civilization" (H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 423).

⁶ The end of the nineteenth century had been already witnessing the second scramble for Africa, with Germany

Britain and its empire at the turn of the century had to face the multiple levels of challenges that emerged from its over-sized and unwieldy expanse. Napoleon had commented, "All empires die of indigestion," and statesmen and thinkers of the like of Chamberlain, Rhodes, Lord Haldane, Bertrand Russell, H.G. Wells, and Leo Amery, a galaxy to which Sir Mackinder also belonged, were attempting to save this one.

Mackinder's illustrious paper was soon put to test by another major event that invited the application of his precepts: the transformation of "trans-Prussian" space from a backyard to a powerful state in the form of U.S.S.R., a polity that later came to offer the Third World an alter-European identity. The emergence of the Soviet Union was a unique event in world geopolitics that rallied significant energies across Eurasia and quite effectively paved the way for the global transmission of British Imperialism, which now had geopolitically shifted its base to North America.⁷ Mackinder's paper was an epilogue to Imperialism's geographic progression, as he remarks, "in Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Australasia there is scarcely a re-

and France now equipotent industrial economies ventured out both for market and raw material in competence to Britain, so long held monopoly. For further details, see an *Outline of History* by P. Townsend.

⁷ Britain's monopoly was dwindling swiftly as "between 1880-1884 and 1900-1904 British exports of manufactures increased 8 percent, German 40 percent, and American 230 percent." And, "in 1880 British steel output stood at 1.3 million tons, American at 1.2 million and German at 700,000. By 1900, American steel output had reached 10.2 million tons, German 6.4 million and British 4.9 million" (C.R. Dutt, *Britain's Crises of Empire*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1949, pp. 18-19).

gion left for the pegging out of a claim of ownership."⁸ Asia is differentiated by its enigmatic space that seems physically conquered but feebly overwhelmed. He was arguably the pioneering statesman-cum-scholar who sought to look into the cyclic nature of the interaction between the Orient and the Occident through the dialectics of continental and maritime reciprocation. According to Mackinder, broader geographical and historical generalizations are sometimes needed to describe the genesis of landscapes, conspicuous of the "most coercive of human action" that "exhibit human history as part of life of the world organism." His oriental man was "a repellent personality" who "performs a valuable social function in uniting his enemies, and it was under the pressure of external barbarism that Europe achieved her civilization."⁹ He further elucidates that "European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion."¹⁰ This opprobrium against the conquered world was a historic justification to the "pegging" of control out of the spaces of the world.

This interpretative briefing is needed to look into the contemporaneity of Mackinder's work, where U.S. imperialism and its crusade against ultra-religious barbarism play a role often unnoticed by geographers of the present day.

⁸ H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 421. It is interesting to note that Mackinder did not enlist Asia in the similar vein, perhaps keeping safe the perceptive difference for his pivotal work that revealed Asia in a new geopolitical light.

⁹ H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 423.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

The "Pivot" Paper and the Ensuing Discussion

Scholars of geopolitics have subsequently devoted considerable space to elucidating Mackinder's ingenious paper. However, they have often overlooked the discussion that followed later in the evening with Spencer Wilkinson, Thomas Holdich, Mr. Amery and Mr. Hogarth present. Wilkinson observed that one of the important facts brought out by Mackinder's paper was that "any movement which is made in one part of the world affects the whole of the international relations of the world."¹¹ At that

¹¹ S. Wilkinson *et al.*, "The Geographical Pivot of History: Discussion," pp. 437-444.

time, Russia was by no means the Soviet Union, and it was only the reminiscences of Czarist Russia that offered the scant prospect of a successor to the Asiatic “hammer” of yesteryear. He questioned the proposition of this putative hammer striking all over the periphery of the Eurasian landmass (later defined as the Heartland). He offered an alternate explanation. He suggested that, historically, Europe was struck even at times by the Byzantine Empire, which was superseded by the Ottomans; hence the argument seemed far fetching. Another proposition was that just as the British Empire exerted control over marginal regions due to its geostrategic location, so should Japan be able to do the same, thus counterbalancing the whole effect.¹²

Sir Thomas Holdich was of the view that one of the prime reasons for the westward movement of Asiatic armies must have been climatic change that could have resulted in the subsequent outflow of nomadic tribes. He also suggests that South America might function “as a possible factor in that outer belt of power which was to bring coercion to bear on the inner power pivoting about the south of Russia.”¹³

Mr. Leo Amery made some of the most insightful comments on Mackinder’s paper. He contended that the East and the West are two relating terms in a constant gong and hammer relationship since the time of Herodotus. He explained their unique geographical location identified with three different economic and military systems. There is an agrarian system, a system of steppe people and sea-faring coastal people. But, for a power to sustain its sway, it had to acquire all the superimposing qualities of the three systems, i.e., the mobility of steppes as well as sea-faring capabilities along with a huge standing army can only render it an unsurpassing superiority. For all practical reasons there has to be an industrial and demographic base in order to support such a huge mobile contingent, both in continental (army) and oceanic (naval) terms. On the specifics of railway and sea mobility, he said that both would eventually be superseded by air mobility. Citing the role of the scientific and technological revolution, he said, “those people who have industrial power and the power of invention and of science will be able to defeat all others.”¹⁴ Mackinder later responded to all the queries but his principal reassertion was that the Eurasian steppes were occupied by the nomads, “and that there were rich countries to be plundered.” He also reminded his listeners that railways had the major advantage over sea transport in that they could transfer huge armies relatively swiftly.

The Tetrahedral Scheme

Mackinder’s paper can be considered as a stage in the long and meandering progression of his thinking throughout his professional career. That this was not merely an exercise in academic objectives can be seen by his imperial understanding of geography, as demonstrated by his ascent of Mount Kenya in 1899.¹⁵ A significant consummation of these ideas occurred in 1902 with his book *Britain and the British Seas*. He wisely used the thematic structure of ancient maps and their relational aspect to arrive at a significant conclusion of how Britain could best locate her strategic interests in that

¹² See: H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 436. This refers to one of the aims of British-Japan Treaty to preserve their possessions in Korean peninsula, after all, it had been “the idea underlying Mr. Amery’s conception that the British military front stretch(ed) from the Cape through India to Japan.”

¹³ H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 439.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 441.

¹⁵ “The motives for climbing Mount Kenya were not purely scientific,” argues Brian Blouet (see: B.W. Blouet, “The Imperial Vision of Halford Mackinder,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, December 2004, pp. 322-329). He further argues that the “desire to conquer Mount Kenya was a deliberate career move by a man seeking authority within the new discipline of geography in late Victorian Britain” (see: G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 76).

continuum. Here, one finds that the Principle of *uniformitarianism* (that “the present is the key to the past”) seems operational in physical space. Accordingly, physical space is differentiated by the superimposition of a sociopolitical outlay that defines nation-states as uniquely located communities identifiable by their geopolitical attributes. Given that, it is unsurprising that the law of antipodality (expression of arrangement of earth’s land/sea distribution given by Lowthian Green) can be drawn onto the geopolitical orientation of the earth’s surface (see Table 1), where the Cold War and its priori and posteriori dynamics offer a sense of continuity amidst change. This construction of social “geo”-physics can be better understood when the tetrahedral theory and its utilitarian structure are extracted to model out the current scheme.

Table 1

**The Antipodal Arrangement of
the Continents and Oceans**

ANTIPODAL ARRANGEMENT	
CONTINENTS	OCEANS
NORTH AMERICA	INDIAN
EUROPE & AFRICA	PACIFIC
AUSTRALASIA	NORTH ATLANTIC
EAST ASIA	SOUTH ATLANTIC
ANTARCTIC	ARCTIC

According to Gregory, the plan of the earth has certain important geographic observations (Fig. 1)¹⁶:

- A) Concentration of land in the northern hemisphere, and of sea in the southern hemisphere.
- B) General “triangularity” of the continents with bases in the north and apices in the south, and vice-versa for the oceans.
- C) The marked antipodal arrangement of oceans and continents.

The antipodal distribution is essentially based upon geometric relation between shapes. Lowthian Green (1875) gave the two geometrical facts as follows¹⁷:

- A) A sphere is a body, which contains the largest volume with respect to a surface area.
- B) A tetrahedron is a body, which refers to the least volume for the aforesaid surface area.

Thus, a sphere and a tetrahedron are antipodal shapes in relation to a given surface area in terms of volume. The rationale for the tetrahedronic argument is as follows.

The three vertices of the tetrahedron radiating from one of its apices (primary) are poised with such distance that the major watershed of the earth (first order, continental) can be seen as a representation of their great meridional extents. This is seen in the two Americas, Europe-Africa and East Asia-

¹⁶ See: J.W. Gregory, “The Plan of the Earth and its Causes,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, March 1899, pp. 225-250.

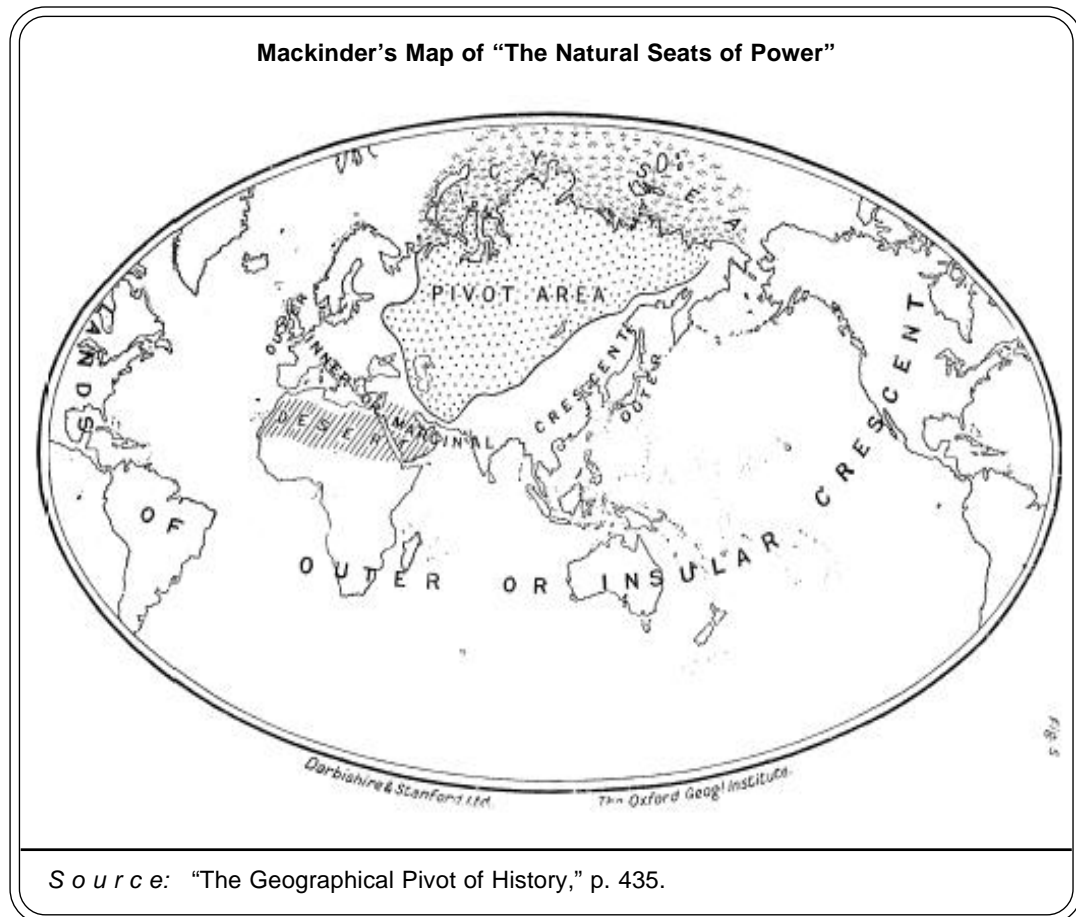
¹⁷ See: J.A. Steers, *The Unstable Earth*, Kalyani Publishers, ND, 1988, reprint, p. 3.

Australasia. It is also worth noting that the three major continental shields, namely, the Laurentian, Baltic and the Siberian, are approximately 120 degrees apart, longitudinally.¹⁸

Mackinder's Projection and the Tetrahedral Theory

Although this might appear to be an extraordinary claim, Mackinder's concept of the world had the same thematics as that of classical "T-O" maps. These depicted the earth as split by the Mediterranean and Red Sea continuum meeting the Nile at right angles, giving a shape of letter "T," ringed by the outer circumference of the ocean ring represented as an "O"—hence popularly known as "T-O" maps. These represented the world as a saucer shaped continental splay surrounded by an oceanic lake that offered a quest for geopolitical relations between Europe, Asia and Libya (Africa)—as Fig. 1 shows.

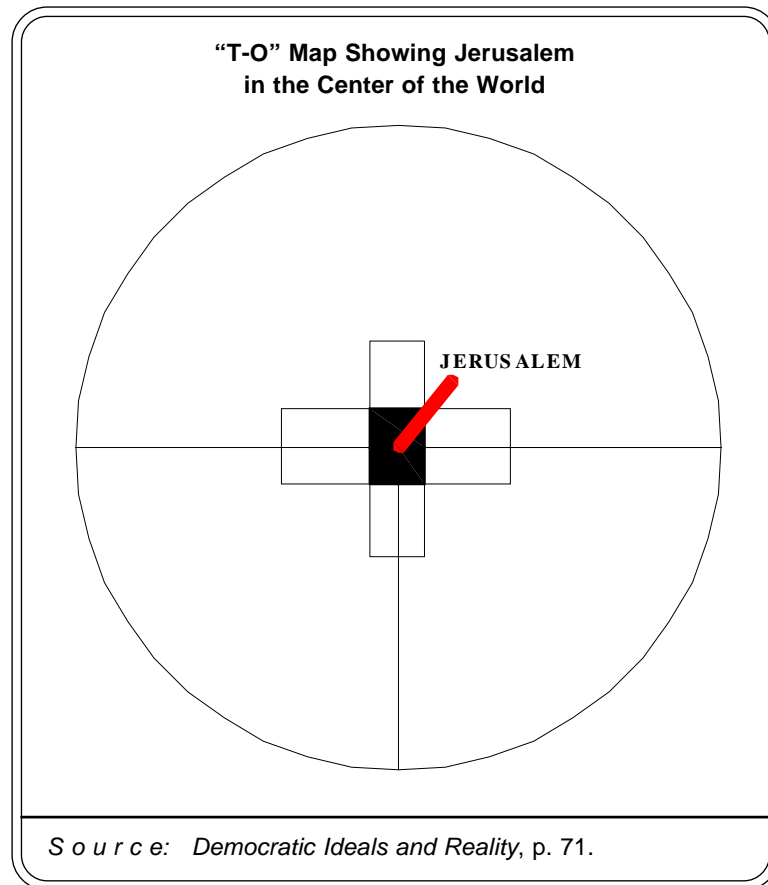
Figure 1



¹⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 4.

This claim is not as surprising as perhaps it sounds. Indeed, Mackinder acknowledges this in his own theory by writing that “if our study of geographical realities, as we now know them in their completeness, is leading us to right conclusions, the medieval ecclesiastics were not far wrong” (see Fig. 2). The only modification was that instead of those “T-O” maps, the more suitable Mercator projection was available to offer adjustments to the scheme of global fortress.

Figure 2



In fact, in his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919), he even proposes that “if the World-Island be inevitably the principal seat of humanity on this globe, and if Arabia, as the passage land from Europe to the Indies and from the Northern to the Southern Heartland, be central in the World-Island, then the hill citadel of Jerusalem has a strategic position with reference to world realities not differing essentially from its ideal position in the perspective of the Middle Ages, or its strategic position between ancient Babylon and Egypt.”¹⁹

Thus, the premeditations of his famous airy cherub had been as conspicuous in his quest for an eternal seat for strategic power, as, “Who owns Damascus, moreover, will have flank access to

¹⁹ H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Constable and Company, London, 1919, p. 71.

alternative route between the oceans ... it cannot be wholly a coincidence that in the self-same region should be the starting point of History and the crossing point of the most vital of the modern highways.”²⁰

This imperial location betraying strategic fetishism was fraught with “standard” geographical error, where the railways and sea-lanes were conceived as if they were no more than the question of transportation choice, rather than considering the exercise of power over distance.

The tetrahedral structure is a vital cog to understand and fully appreciate Mackinder’s views. An important spatial priori to his theory has been the linear primacy of state and its authority, being visualized as overarching and undiminishing without any distance decay effect. Nevertheless, scale is a problem for this vision of global statehood, but Mackinder overlooks this to argue the case for British Imperialism and its quest to seek to identify a spatial configuration that would enable a power to command and rule the world.

One can safely presume here that it would be unmindful for any islander to overlook the curvature of the earth’s surface at the edges beyond which its authority could tangentially pass off into uncertainty. However the vision of vast potential resources, spread all over the globe as colonies and slaves, creates a distortion that could easily mislead any superpower into delusions of invincible supremacy. This is achieved by the use of Mercator’s navigation chart which, in constructing a grand vision of a global empire, shows imperial gains at higher latitudes increasingly larger than they are.

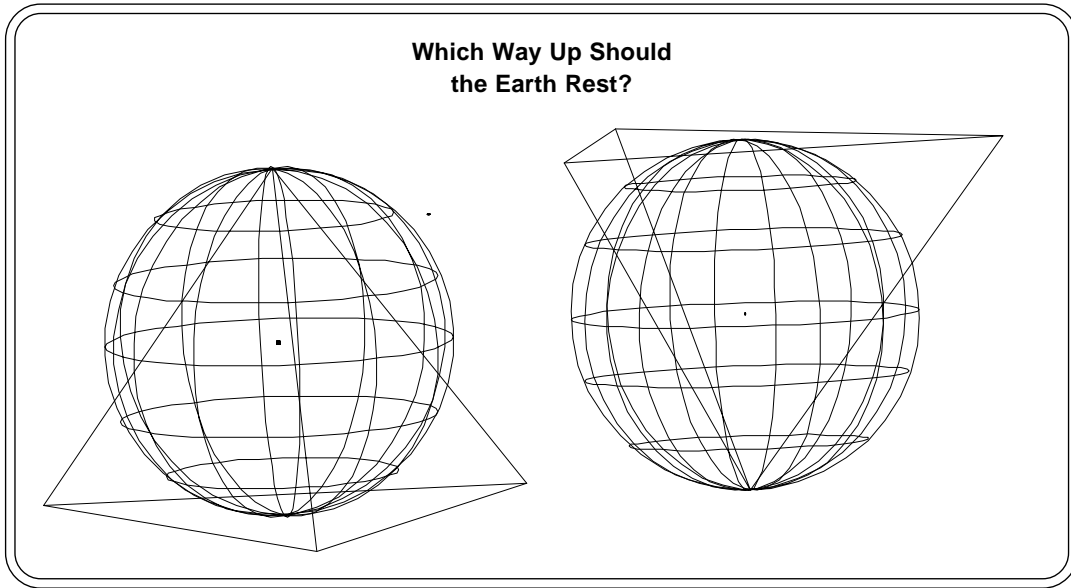
The tetrahedral theory helps modify the case by substantially reducing the margin of error for the space between the three vertices of “earth as tetrahedron” that can be easily commanded, dividing the whole spherical earth into four juxtaposing surfaces against each apice. This interpretative break up of the earth’s surface is worth visualizing in a world, which is far more spheroid in the spatiometry of world order, and where a perceptively monocline surface provides the basis for hierarchical relations.

The tetrahedron approach can also be used as a model for mapping extra-terrestrial space. In the age of space power and rocketry, were all stellar locations connected they would reveal the earth’s surface as encapsulated by a tetrahedronic shape. Thus, it is neither the railways nor the counter position to sea-lanes that convert the vast territorial expanses of erstwhile Asiatic hordes into the Heartland. Rather, the real air/space power supremacy can be commanded through an overhead perspective and the utilization of a unique stellar location, enabling its occupier to strike at any force trying to break into its circumference. This contention is supported by the fact that one of the primary aspects of the Cold War was the race for space supremacy, and its highest stage as displayed in the “Star Wars” program.

Mackinder’s Pivot/Heartland is one of the four tetrahedral bases having Europe and East Asia at its two apices. Quite interestingly, its location is very much antipodal to America’s, which also has another ideological location envisioning the conflict between communism and capitalism in the Cold War situation. This antipodal nature could be seen as a constant struggle to balance the tetrahedron either on its base or on its apex (see Fig. 3). Alternatively, it can be viewed as a struggle over the ability to sit atop the tetrahedron. On the basis of that logic, it seems that the Antarctic is the apex over which the whole tetrahedron is set up with the Arctic Ocean as its base in the north. However, the question of whether the northern or the southern hemisphere is “on top” becomes even more difficult when the earth is perceived at an increasing distance. This is the case with the age of space technology, where the perceptive orientation gets increasingly stereographic. Thus, it seems that a dialectics of Cold War geopolitics remains in place. That is quite a stable element in the long term, when compared to the short-term instability (or victory of capitalism, for that matter) of the earth.

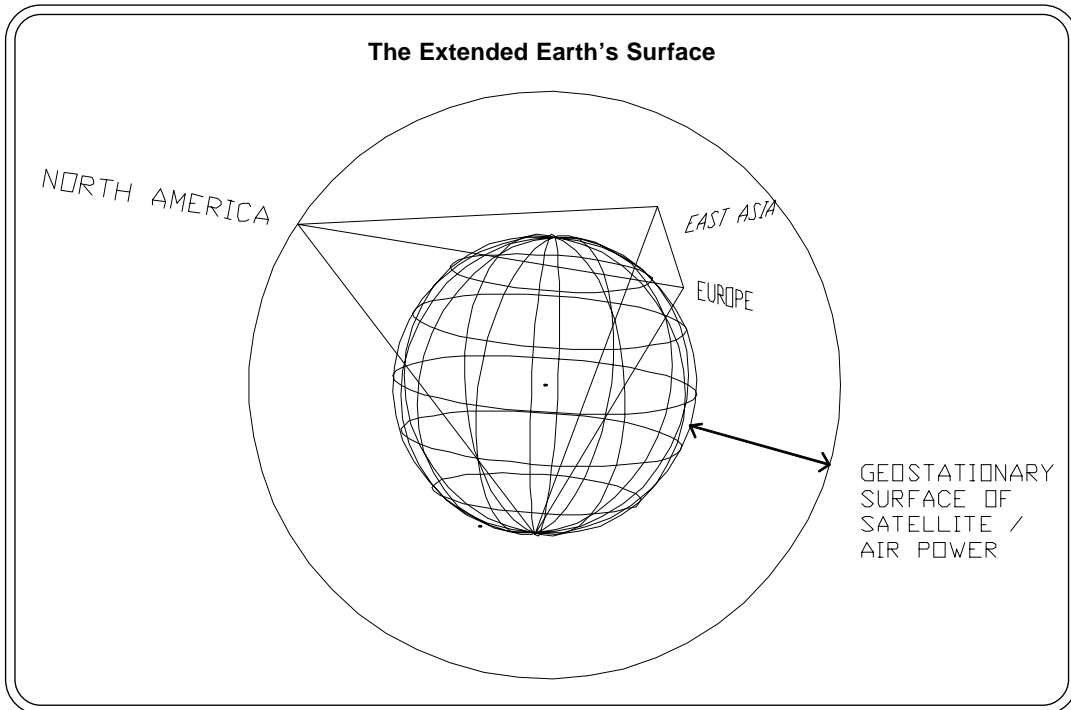
²⁰ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

Figure 3



Any continental apex (power), which commands the extended radii of the earth's surface by attaining air supremacy, is able to determine all the orientation of the tetrahedronic scheme (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4



Airpower transforms the fixed continental apices into mobile ones. They can project state authority and overcome the distance-decay effects of curvature. The same effect can be extended to military satellites and intelligence units that orbit the earth at even greater heights. However, one does not simply need to confine this discussion to mobile units. The scheme can be viewed with the operation of geostationary satellites. An apex power has the advantage of maximum surface area coverage with the positioning of geostationary satellites on apical positions of an imaginary tetrahedron. Thus, an American satellite would cover the area between Europe and China that counts for all the major zones of strategic interest. Conversely, a base power (here, for example, Russia) can also convert itself into an apical node for strategic parity. This can be achieved if the satellites are positioned on the basal positions of the tetrahedron (i.e., simulating a counter-tetrahedron). However, most of the direct area under these satellites would consist of oceans (the Atlantic and the Pacific). This will necessitate more reliance on maritime intelligence to supplement the overall picture. One might envisage a case where Russian satellites positioned over the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and the Heartland could effectively provide early warning to its military installations of a force invading them in the Heartland.

Epilogue: Heartland as Strategy and System

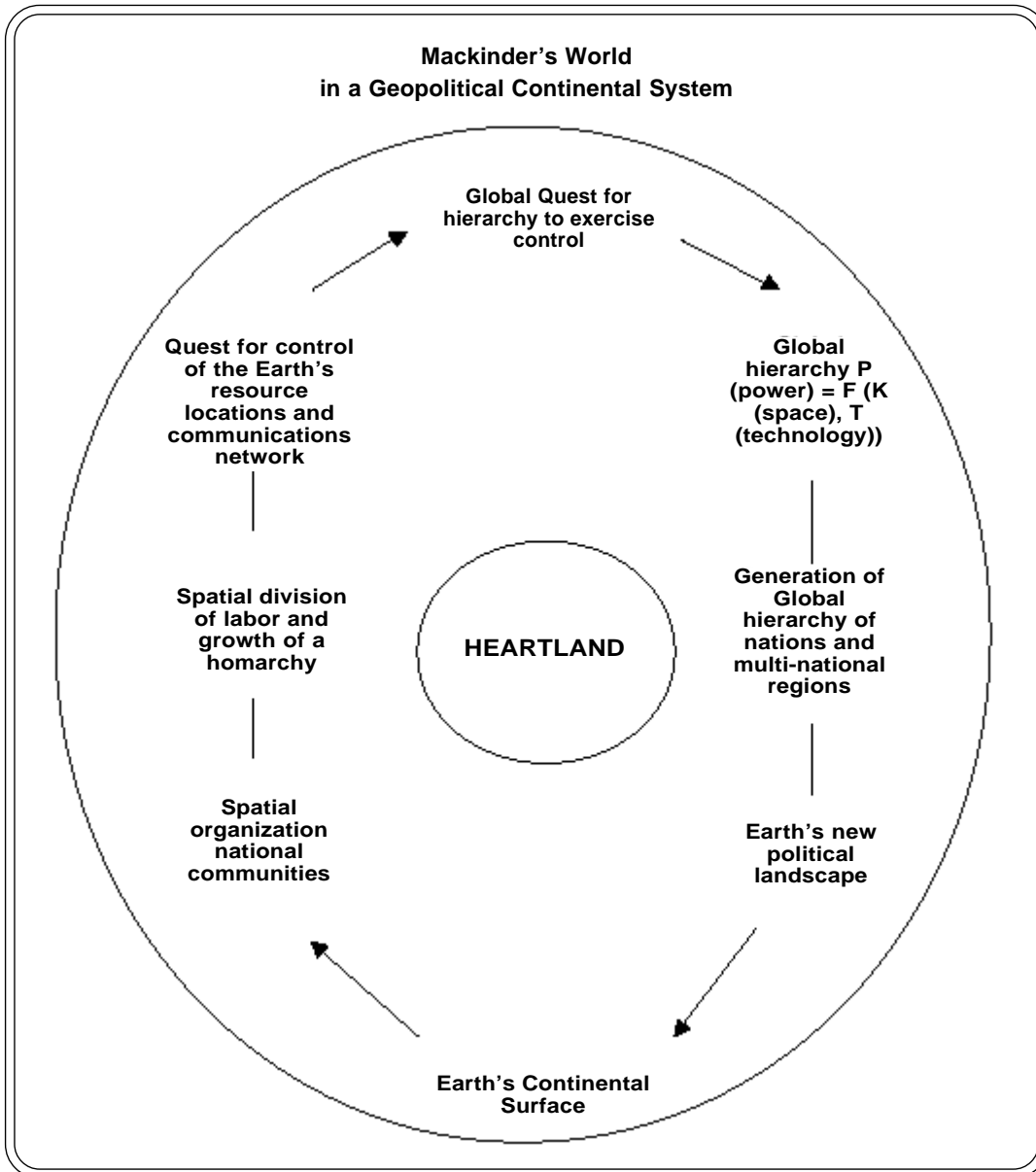
It has often been stated that Mackinder's Heartland thesis offers no further food for thought since the rise and fall of Soviet power, without properly clarifying the opinion that Mackinder actually held about it.²¹ Although, the logic of containment of Soviet power did provide some evidence in support of the theory, it did not reflect Mackinder's argument about railways versus searoutes. In fact, the issue of relative resource parity was important in Mackinder's scheme. This was how South America became a stooge to U.S. global domination, as it was the only other rich storehouse of natural resources and, interestingly enough, was antipodal to the location of Heartland. Mackinder had recognized this possibility in his paper, where he found that "the development of the vast potentialities of South America might ... strengthen the United States."²² In time, with the toppling of Allende's government in Chile, and political turmoil in Uruguay, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, Latin America became one of the hot trial beds for the CIA's operations, where the local elite and the military establishment played quite an important role in quelling any democratic movement. The vast continental resources, including Amazonian forests, Venezuelan oil fields, Argentine grasslands, Chile's copper mines, and Brazilian plantations, became the hinterland for the "Midland basin" to counter the Eurasian fortress.

Mackinder's thought can be interpreted with the help of systems analysis theory as it connotes the spherical conceptualization of the earth surface (see Fig. 5). The model sums up the essence of his paper, which he maintained and updated in his subsequent writings. As geographers are given to cyclic understanding of spatial process, here a model is presented where one can integrate the earth's surface with the distribution of oceans and continents as a given set of conditions into the geopolitical complexities that gave rise to all tactical power arrangements across the globe.

²¹ Soviet power and its ideological orientation were in stark opposition to Mackinder's desired ownership of Heartland. In fact, his distaste for the Bolshevik revolution was quite conspicuous. Furthermore, World War II made him retreat from his Heartland interest. At the very moment when "policymakers in the US and the UK feared that the USSR might control the World-Island, Mackinder's imperial vision was undermined by the perceived need to leave the empire behind and join the European Economic Community" (B.W. Blouet, op. cit., p. 328).

²² H.J. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 436.

Figure 5



Different communities occupy the land area as their national space. These communities, both through inter- and intra-territorial means, influence state organization and vitally identify their resource location vis-à-vis the resources of other communities. They might reciprocate or compete for material (energy, territory, coastal outlet) or non-material (production of social goods, creating human resource potential) common resources. By a “national resource,” especially in the sphere of non-material culture, is essentially meant the geopolitics of a nation. Its strengths and weaknesses within local, regional and global tiers of integration are governed by the nature of the state (a part of non-material culture) and the manpower support behind it.

This affects the regional organization of national communities into a broader regional hierarchy (homarchy), and this stratum in turn then broadly fits into a global hierarchy (heterarchy). This is responsible for their spatial division of labor, essentially the “specialization of labor” that prompts comparative exchange between nationbound communities, and it is quite often provocative of competition among them for more access to each other’s resources and need to monopolize the communication lines that materialize them. The global consequence of this is a collective quest for both a control of global resources and a desired heterarchy. This has been the essence of a “new world order” or a quest for such a “Heartland,” resting at the pinnacle of the spatial hierarchy of the “World-Island.”

The system then feeds back into the quest for the selection of the appropriate technology that can render power and isotropy of space (the earth’s surface), and thus command absolute control over the hierarchy. It may often be that innovations and extensions in transportation networks and technologies will provide the tools of exercising effective control. Most noticeably, these developments have been visible on the principle of cybernetics, when the cyber communication and airspace power combined into a powerful system of global surveillance has been developed. The role of global surveillance and its transformation into a tool to intervene into the national lives of communities has been a major instrument in conflict among nations, states, and non-state actors. This expands the intervention capability in spatial terms and thus power is exercised through threat or actual damage. The same approach is also used to counter possible interventions. Hence, there is an increased role of sectarian technologies. Needless to say, any such advent is bound to create a technological hierarchy in terms of superiority. These again feed back into the reshuffling of hierarchy in the World-Island, with middle region readjustments. An important aspect of this structuring is that the Heartland (by virtue of its geographical location), and the lowest order nations (on account of their exclusion from the system) remain comparatively untouched. The maximum disturbance is witnessed among the “Inner Crescent” nations, who are particularly vulnerable by virtue of their location in the tetrahedron. Interestingly, “Soviet” Central Asia remains embedded to the southern most end of the Heartland and bound by the “Inner Crescent” further south, which affirms its innate proclivity for instability. But being bound from its inner side by the “Russian Fortress” in the north that could offer much territorial space, there is very little demographic base for any marked diastrophism in the general Eurasian political landscape. Mackinder’s theory thus remains helpful in understanding the geopolitics of contemporary Central Asia.

THE INFLUENCE OF MACKINDER'S THEORY ON CURRENT U.S. DEPLOYMENT IN EURASIA: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

Fabrizio VIELMINI

*Ph.D. candidate at the Ecole des Hautes Études
en Sciences Sociales (EHESS),
Centre d'Études du Monde Russe,
Soviétique et Post-Soviétique
(Paris, France)*

Mackinder's basic ideas about the Eurasian Heartland remain the most pertinent vision to understand the strategic changes which have occurred over post-Soviet space, as well as the current U.S. military deployment inside it. In fact, the 1904 "Pivot" theory¹ (and its successive revisions as the "Heartland" theory²) suggested a range of concepts that were destined to enter the standard lexicon of international relations during and, to an even greater extent, after the end of the Cold War.

¹ See: H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-437.

² See: H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1969 (originally published 1919); idem, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1943, pp. 595-605.

The starting point of this analysis is that the end of bipolar world has created an international situation which, from the point of view of a U.S. power resolute in maintaining world hegemony, closely resembles the British situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. In order to understand this we have first to assess the similar structure of these two powers, which we can call "Atlantic" for the sake of simplification. These are chiefly maritime commercial powers, based on the imposition of a precise economic constitution characterized by the application of free trade principles to the world economy. These principles correspond to certain advantages, such as financial and technical skills, that they possess over all others actors. Nevertheless these powers are fundamentally fragile, and the description remains

more theoretical than practical. The U.S. share of world economy is today shrinking as was the British vis-à-vis Germany. To compensate for this, military force thus remains crucial to maintaining the hegemonic position of the maritime world power. Another central feature of this kind of power is its effort to impose a universal liberal economic constitution that goes parallel with a pretension to the moral superiority of its cultural and social structure.³ A consequence of this combination of escalating force and sense of moral superiority is the legitimization of interventions in the political affairs or territory of other powers that resist the extension of the hegemon's strategic enterprise, even when the Atlantic power undertakes behavior violating the basic norms of humanitarian law and ethics, as did the British in South Africa at the time of Mackinder's first elaboration of his thought, or U.S. waging its "war on terror" today.

For the Atlantic power, today as a century ago, the main potential challenge to its hegemony could arise from the development of diplomatic contacts between continental powers. The evolution of these contacts into a stable alliance could result in the building of a continental network of

³ On British roots of current U.S. tendency to "humanitarian imperialism," see: N. Ferguson, *Empire. The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, Basic Books, New York, 2003.

powers as an alternative to the maritime one. Such an evolution is made more likely by the creation of a single international system and actually configures a general change of the paradigm governing international life, a fact that Mackinder correctly identified in 1904 as the end of "Columbian era."⁴ The main international development pushing the British imperialist to write the first version of his theory was in fact the building of railway transportation infrastructures by the continental Empires. Mackinder clearly understood that these infrastructures could compete with the sea-lanes and, by enabling the efficient utilization of previously inaccessible natural resources, enable the development of a continental power with the potential to break the hegemony of the maritime powers.

The paper overviews the main redeployments of Mackinder's theories up until the present time, underlining that they have been mostly used to play Eurasian actors one against the other. It argues that the deep understanding of Eurasian dynamics and importance for the world that was opened by the British geographer could be applied to advocate a very different position to that articulated by Mackinder: namely, as a stimulus for inner continental cooperation instead of containment.

⁴ H. Mackinder, "On the Scope and Methods of Geography," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1887, pp. 141-174.

Applied Geopolitics: Mackinder after World War I

To understand this parallel between the U.K. in 1904 and the U.S. in 2004, and the role of Mackinder's thought in the current international situation, we should still highlight the core areas that the theoretician singled out as crucial for a definition of the natural base of world power that could challenge the British one.

Closely associated since 1904 with the conception of Heartland, Central Asia, is only one of the strategic crossroads where different continental powers meet. Along with Central Asia, the British geographer insisted on two other regions which are today again at the heart of U.S. world strategy.

As described in detail in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, there is first of all Eastern Europe, the area between the Baltic and Black seas historically forming a *limes* between Europe (in civilizational terms) and Eurasia. Through this area, according to the British geographer, at the end of World War I the Heartland overlapped the European peninsula. His main element of concern then was that Moscow and Berlin could decide to form an alliance associating the two main poles of power of the Eurasian landmass. His answer to this rapprochement was to suggest to the delegates at the peace conference the creation of a buffer zone between Russia and Germany. Composed of independent neo-States, its purpose would be to dismember Eastern Europe into a large number of states, fixing an unequal situation on the ground, in order to keep it in a permanent condition of rivalry.⁵

Mackinder went further trying to implement his plans in first person when he was appointed British High Commissioner to South Russia at the end of 1919. The report he sent from the field delineated a geopolitical scheme for the “neutralization” of Russia that proved valid even seventy years later.⁶ For Mackinder, “Caucasus and Caspian should be considered as elements of a broader policy.” Along with other Central European countries, he wanted the West to promote the independence of Ukraine along with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Moreover, Mackinder anticipated Zbigniew Brzezinski’s strategy for post-Soviet Russia envisaging to cut the country into pieces through the British support of Gen. Denikin government.⁷ Indeed Mackinder endowed his plan with detailed measures intended to make it work on economical terms through industrial and commercial joint Russian-British syndicates, especially insisting that it was important “to secure a position on the Caspian sea.”⁸ In line with the moralistic component noted above, this plan for rewriting the map of Eastern Europe, coming from a power which had just further enlarged its colonial enterprise thanks to the war, was sustained by a moral discourse which refers to the Heartland’s power as the “world basis of militarism,” to be contained in “the general interest of humanity.”⁹

Of no less consequence for understanding today’s U.S. policy is the third crucial area highlighted by the British geographer as decisive for fixing WWI results: Palestine. Mackinder analyzed in detail how, by virtue of basic geography, Britain’s triumph in the Middle East would be challenged by continental power in the near future. Mackinder singled out a second African Heartland (the “Southern Heartland”), with the Arab lands in between as their natural element of junction opened to the projection of force from the side of the sea.¹⁰ With a similar conception circulating among the British imperial élite, one could only suppose that they had a role in influencing British attitudes in support of Zionist expansion in Arab lands.

In order to close this rapid overview of the impact of Mackinder’s geopolitical conception after World War I, with its potential impact on contemporary U.S. policy, one should bear in mind another fundamental passage. As a recent Italian study analyzed in details, a number of elements of Hitler’s imperial geopolitical *Weltanschauung* for the space east of Germany were directly related to Mackinder’s ideas.¹¹ Since the first version of his theory, Mackinder insisted on a representation of Russia

⁵ See: P.A. Dossena, *Hitler & Churchill. Mackinder e la sua scuola*, Terziaria, Milan, 2002.

⁶ See: H. Mackinder, “General Report, with Appendices, on Situation in South Russia; Recommendations for Future Policy,” *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, First Series, Vol. III, London, 1949, pp. 777-784.

⁷ See: V.I. Maksimenko, “Rossia i Azia, ili anti-Brzezinski (čherk geopolitiki 2000 goda),” *Vostok*, No. 5, 2000.

⁸ H. Mackinder, *General Report...*, p. 786.

⁹ H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.

¹⁰ “If the World-Island be inevitably the principal seat of humanity on this globe and if Arabia, as the passage-land from Europe to Indies and from the Northern to the Southern Heartland, be central for the World-Island, then the hill citadel of Jerusalem has a strategical position with reference to the world realities not differing essentially from the ideal position in the perspective of the Middle Ages or its strategical position between ancient Babylon and Egypt” (H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 89).

¹¹ See: P.A. Dossena, *op. cit.*

as a substitute for the Mongol Empire, an entity conducive of “Slavic backwardness” and “Asiatic destruction.” In this sense the British geographer was one of those who set up the theoretical terrain for the project of German domination of the Russians,¹² instead of cooperation between the two European giants (advocated for instance by leading German geopolitician Karl Haushofer).¹³ One should remember the ideological characteristics of the Nazi milieu, deeply influenced by esoteric and eschatological visions. For such people the captivating appeal of the Mackinder’s formula, prospecting the perspective of World command as something automatically following the control of a precise geographical area, could only be an additional element pushing toward the realization of their insane design.

The Endurance of Mackinder’s Thought through the Cold War

After World War II, although geopolitics was no longer the widely debated theme that it had been in the inter-war period, it became in the United States a conceptual instrument in the study of power projection on the global scale.¹⁴ Since the start of the war, in the U.S. it was widely thought that the German re-elaboration of the Heartland conception lied at the base of the initial Nazi military success.¹⁵ This belief engendered a wide curiosity for the idea. A series of publications appeared where, along with a condemnation of the ideological tool of the European opponent, there was also an effort directed at the creation of an analytical instrument “more true” and “more right” to be used in the guiding U.S. engagement in world affairs. On the basis of this concern, a *geopolitics* opposed to the “evil” *Geopolitik* became “a geographically based strategic doctrine in the interest of American power.”¹⁶

It should be noted that the U.S. is a fertile breeding ground for such geographically based strategic doctrines. This was indeed the first great power to elaborate a foreign policy based on geographical data, as testified by the Monroe doctrine and even the myth of the “Frontier.” Geographical knowledge in the U.S. was always associated with the state apparatus in charge of Foreign policy, as in the career of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Hooson reported that Mackinder’s ideas were widely known in the high echelons of U.S. strategic planning in the 1950s.¹⁷

Bearing in mind these evolutions, one can assume that Mackinder’s conception has consistently been a reference for the American policy making establishment. In fact, it was the concept underpinning the construction of strategic alliances in the “Rimland” (such as NATO and CENTO) which underwrote the U.S.’s Cold War-era Containment policy after World War II. By means of these alliances, the U.S. shifted its military border across the world’s oceans through different chains of security-dependent clients, justifying their mobilization with the same sense of menace vis-à-vis the continental power that was firstly clearly formulated by the British imperialist. In this perspective, it is

¹² This linkage is also admitted by W.H. Parker in his *Mackinder Geography as an Aid to Statecraft*, Oxford, 1982, p. 245.

¹³ See : K. Haushofer, *De la geopolitique*, Fayard, Paris, 1986.

¹⁴ See: C. Jean, *Geopolitica*, Laterza, Bari, 1996.

¹⁵ Cf.: M. Antonsich, “Dalla Geopolitik alla Geopolitics. Conversione ideologica di una dottrina di potenza,” *Quaderni del dottorato di ricerca in Geografia politica*, Università di Napoli, No. 4, 1994, p. 51.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ See: D. Hooson, “The Heartland—Then and Now,” in: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, 2005.

worth recalling the work of Nicholas Spykman.¹⁸ Although he shifted the focus of world power from the pivot area to the insular and peninsular “Rimland” around it, it still has the appeal of a doctrine of global imperialism focused on the inner Eurasian core as the main basis for a power antagonistic to a maritime global enterprise.

Mackinder’s Revival after the End of Communism

The fact that Mackinder’s theory constitutes an essential and integral part of the U.S. presence east of the Atlantic Ocean became clear after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Perhaps nothing better than Mackinder’s vision allows U.S. to understand the deployment and the actions of the U.S. in the Greater Heartland, including the Middle East. After an initial hesitancy at the beginning of the 1990s, precipitated by the shock produced by the disappearance of the many decade-long enemy, American policy has clearly followed the indications traced by the British a century earlier in all the three crucial theaters delineated above, and a certain resemblance to the former strategy of the British Empire can be observed.¹⁹

For instance, the imperative of the maintenance of “geopolitical pluralism” in the post-Soviet space asserted by Zbigniew Brzezinski is only the most evident outcome of this tradition.²⁰ Along with this well-known strategy in the post-Soviet space, one could observe this Anglo-American continuity in the unconditional support for radical Zionist forces in Israel, forces that today share with U.S. extreme right politicians the mystical importance given to the site of Jerusalem, which Mackinder systematized in his writings.

And again, Mackinder’s guidance is clearly present in the strategy aimed at detaching “New” Eastern Europe not only from Russia, as pledged by the British, but also from the EU civilizational core, a strategy aimed at preventing the emergence of an autonomous geopolitical actor in the decisive “platform of democracy” that Western European edge of Eurasian landmass was for Mackinder.²¹

In all these three theaters, the main element of U.S. strategy is the support of regimes entirely depending on their external sponsor for the implementation of its foreign policy course. The main concern of the overall concept seems to be to maintain these regimes in order to have them as geopolitical stumbling blocks among the main strategic actors that could challenge U.S. pretensions to world hegemony. In this way they act as a sort of a guarantee that the continental powers will not build strong links between themselves that would allow them to become assertive and strong enough to constitute an alternative international order, in particular, as it was in 1904, through the building of continental trading railways that could interfere in the world trade monopoly by sea routes assured by the U.S. and its allies.

¹⁸ Cf.: O. Sevaistre, “Un géant de la géopolitique: Nicholas John Spykman,” *Stratégique*, No. 3, 1988, pp. 115-132.

¹⁹ In this sense: K.E. Mayer, *The Dust of Empire*, 2003 (tr. it., *La polvere dell’Impero. Il “grande gioco” in Asia centrale*, Corbaccio, 2004); N. Ferguson, op. cit.

²⁰ See: I. Torbakov, *Reexamining Old Concepts about the Caucasus and Central Asia*: available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020404a.shtml>], 4 February, 2004.

²¹ Definition used in “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace” (tr. it., “Il mondo intero e come vincere la pace,” *Limes*, No. 1, 1994, pp. 171-182).

U.S. Deployment in Former Soviet Heartland

Given the location of the Mackinder conference, it is worth analyzing in detail Mackinder's influence on U.S. policy in Central Asia. This has been the product of contradictory impulses. In the aftermath of the fall of the U.S.S.R., there were few American experts who would dare to argue that the U.S. had any relevant interest in a region that, firstly, was marginal to the areas of traditional U.S. engagement, and secondly, was not even perceived as an identifiable object in its own right—indeed, it was *terra incognita* for most of the Americans.

Accordingly, in the early 1990s, the U.S. approach toward the region was negative. That is to say, given the power vacuum opened by the Soviet collapse, the U.S. was primarily engaged in watching and trying to ensure that no other major power, especially Iran, made too much of an advance in the region.²²

Nevertheless, since 1995, without declaring it openly, the U.S. began to try to implement a real strategic revolution all along the former Soviet Southern belt distributed around the three inner seas—Black, Caspian and Aral. Although this is presented as a fact related to the growing interest for Caspian oil, it is clear that the motivation is first of all strategic rather than economic.²³ This action was accompanied by the rise of a strategic concept which looks at the importance of Central Asia from the point of view of **a perception of its centrality** among East and West, South and North, that is to say, as a pivotal area in world politics.²⁴ It is difficult not to detect at the basis of this perception the strategic thinking stemming from Mackinder's theory of the Heartland.

In its concrete implementation, the new U.S. application of the thought of the British strategist resulted in a further push toward the North of the former line of containment. This endeavor is implicit in the U.S. support for the GUUAM regional grouping (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova).²⁵ The framing of this bloc went parallel with the implementation of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) NATO program, and the stubborn U.S. insistence on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. The main concern of the Eurasian corridor thus established, is aimed at taking control of the pivot area by building a buffer zone from Eastern Europe to the western border of China. It implies a further projection to the East of the NATO area of operation, as has been evident since the approval of the Alliance's new strategic concept in 1999. Also noteworthy is the particular attention to the Black Sea basin, a basin that, as Mackinder noted, if the access is controlled by the continental power, will be absorbed in its entirety into the Heartland. Against this perspective, as was the case in 1904, the Anglo-American sponsored buffer of geopolitical alliances intends to separate Russia and Iran from the pivot area itself, because this connection could interfere in the system of alliances assuring world trade monopoly by sea routes managed by the U.S. This is leading to the building of a sort of "Rimland" extension to the North, a fact that is clearly visible on a Eurasian map that singles out the countries that adhered to the GUUAM scheme.

Moscow also understood developments in this scheme way. This is demonstrated through its anti-western policy of the re-activation of all the "east" and "southern" axis of its traditional diplomacy, in order to cut across the East-West orientation of the U.S. sponsored Eurasian corridor supporting, among other actions, North-South continental trading railways.

²² See: G.E. Fuller, *Central Asia. The New Geopolitics*, RAND, Santa Monica, 1992, p. 77.

²³ See: S. Blank, "Every Shark East of Suez: Great Power Interests, Policies and Tactics in the Transcaspian Energy Wars," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, 1999, pp. 373-383.

²⁴ See: R. Legvold, *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan and Central Asian Nexus*, MA, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003.

²⁵ See: A. Lieven, "G.U.U.A.M: What Is It, and What Is It For?" *Eurasia Insight*, 18 December, 2000: available at [www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight].

By 2001, the terms of this game were evident to all its participants. In one of the few assessments of the U.S. policy toward the region before 11 September it was stated that “this region should matter to the United States because it matters considerably to every other major Eurasian power whose global and regional interests affect U.S. interests,” and that “U.S. interests in Central Eurasia almost definitely will grow.”²⁶ By this time, the window of opportunity opened by the Soviet suicide in 1991 was irrevocably on the point of closing to American influence. Only an event of the scale of 11 September was able to reopen the game for the Atlantic power to the point that it could create a new military ring to be added at the old Cold War border, from Southern Europe to the Caucasus and Central Asia.²⁷ The U.S. is even re-deploying its old “Rimland” policy deep into the Heartland—according to the words of Donald Rumsfeld, “in the heart and soul of Eurasia.”²⁸

The influence of Mackinder, in particular the feeling of omnipotence that his simple formulas could impart to political circles that are inclined to think according to mystical conceptions, was shown in the case of Nazi Germany, and is partially being demonstrated again by the U.S. engagement with Central Asia. The consequences of this could be very serious, not only for the states which emerged from the Soviet bloc and which have become today pawns in U.S. designs, but also for the whole world.

C o n c l u s i o n

The current situation of international relations owes a lot to the legacy of Mackinder’s thought. The theories of the British geographer are living policies and their influence is felt on all the main hot spots of current instability, from the Holy Land to the Western frontier of China.

This offspring of geopolitical imperialism’s maneuvers, which are going on before our eyes, is especially dangerous today, as it happens in the context of a structural crisis of the U.S. capacity to act as a regulator of international life.²⁹ This is particularly evident in the case of Central Asia. Here, pursuing an effort clearly motivated by the rationale of opposing its potential challenger, the U.S. is augmenting existing regional tensions and causing additional conflicts. Far from guaranteeing security for the region, it is initiating a race for military bases. It is also protecting the political stability of Central Asian regimes (or, in certain cases, supporting opposition against the center), which tends to alienate the local populations, thus ultimately strengthening local terrorist networks.³⁰

It is time to understand Mackinder by turning his conclusions upside-down. The positive legacy of Mackinder’s theory is the way that it successfully alerts the attention of the European elite toward lands that had been largely forgotten. However, this positive heuristic moment was up to now overruled by a sense of menace that the geographer tried to communicate. Today it is of a paramount importance to apprehend Mackinder’s heritage in the objective conditions of the new century. Given

²⁶ C. Fairbanks, C.R. Nelson, S.F. Starr, K. Weisbrode, *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*, Central Asian-Caucasus Institute, Atlantic Council, Washington D.C., January 2001, pp. 7, 95: available at [www.acus.org/Publications/Default.htm].

²⁷ See: M. Amineh, M. Parvizi, H. Houweling, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden & Boston, 2004.

²⁸ Rumsfeld’s Speech, Germany, 11 July, 2003: available at [http://http://defense-link.mil/releases/2003/nr20030612-0095.html].

²⁹ As analyzed by E. Todd in *After the Empire. The Breakdown of the American Order*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, and I. Wallerstein in “The Eagle has Crash Landed,” *Foreign Policy*, July-August 2002.

³⁰ See: F. Vielmini, “Implications of U.S. Military Presence in Central Asia Security System: Evolution, Current Situation, and Future Perspectives,” in: *Dynamics of Transformation in Central Asia—Perspectives from the Field*, International Conference, Rome, 5-6 November, 2004 (forthcoming publication).

an imploded Russia, a democratic Germany and a fast-developing China, the unity of the Heartland is no more a threat for international peace. On the contrary, the threat emanates from attempts by one external power to divide the Eurasian continent. As Mackinder's Pivot/Heartland theory underwent many conversions during the first century of its life, it is time to redevelop it once more to highlight the positive element of the potential of land power and the role of railroads for developing Inner Asian lands. It could be then used to build that Eurasian cooperation that was already advocated by the German *Geopolitik* school before the coming of the Nazism, and that is today offered by the Paris-Berlin-Moscow alliance that arose in response to aggression against Iraq. Such a development, a new Heartland, is urgently needed in order to stop the logic of war without end on which the United States is operating.

WHITHER “HEARTLAND”? CENTRAL ASIA, GEOGRAPHY AND GLOBALIZATION

Levent HEKIMOGLU

*Researcher,
York Center for International and Security Studies
(Toronto, Canada)*

I. Introduction

This article attempts a double task. First, it looks at the main premises of Halford J. Mackinder’s analysis in his renowned 1904 address to the Royal Geographical Society, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, and discusses some of the problems. It observes that these problems have actually rendered the whole Heartland thesis a fallacy from its very inception, and argues that this resilient fallacy continues to distort perceptions and policies in/on Central Asia. Second, it draws attention to the severe geographical predicament of Central Asia in an era of rapid globalization, and points out how a host of myths led by the ghost of Mackinder’s Heartland, in conjunction with the biases and flaws of neoliberal dogma, serve to impede the development of strategies for dealing with that predicament.

The landlocked interior of the Eurasian continent was called the “Heart-land” and “the Pivot area” in Mackinder’s 1904 address, not because he attributed some metaphysical intrinsic strategic quality to the region, but because he believed that the region possessed vast natural resources, including a huge agricultural potential. He was convinced that thanks to the revolution in land transportation recently brought about by railroad technology, Inner/Central Asia was destined to provide its contemporary political master with an unequalled economic capability, becoming the engine of an inevitable Russian bid for world dominance.

Mackinder’s confidence in the commercial competitiveness of railroads with maritime transport and in the vastness of resources in Inner/Central Asia both have turned out to be misplaced. The region couldn’t have and has not lived up to the “pivot” billing given to it by Mackinder. The Heartland

thesis has survived not on account of the validity of the underlying premises and the merits of the argument, but because its conclusions recommending the containment of Russia fit snugly into the Cold War ideational scheme that dominated much of the 20th century.

The ghost of the Heartland fallacy is still very much around and it is not a benign one.

II. Mackinder's Heartland

The relative immunity of Russia to projections of military power from its rivals, especially—but not exclusively—from maritime states like Britain, was well understood at least since the ill-fated campaign of Napoleon earlier in the 19th century. Many well-known thinkers and commentators from Marx to Mahan had promptly noted this relative immunity.

The factors that created a logistical nightmare for would-be invaders, however, cut both ways. The vastness of the territory and the limitations of available transportation technologies imposed significant restraints on the Russian state as well, in both military and economic terms. In implicit recognition of these restraints, little attention seems to have been paid in the West to the economic potentialities of the Russian interior until well into the 19th century.

Several developments in the course of the 19th century, however, altered the view on Russia. Among the most pertinent for our discussion were:

- The successful expansion of the Russian Empire in Asia southwards from its previous northern domain, coming on the heels of its southwards expansion in Europe in the 18th century, testified to the significant growth of Russian power and sharply increased the perception of a Russian threat in Britain—especially regarding British South Asia.
- The rise of railroad technology revolutionized land transportation and reconfigured old military and economic equations.
- The phenomenal economic transformation of the province of “New Russia” (consisting in part of the territories freshly acquired from the Ottomans and corresponding roughly to the hinterland of northern Black Sea coast, including most of modern day Ukraine) obliged Western observers to reconsider their hitherto dismissive attitude toward the commercial development potentialities of the vast and dormant territorial possessions of the Russian Empire.

In a relatively short period of time, both the prospects of economic development in Inner Eurasia and a Russian expansionist threat to the coastal regions of the continent, acquired plausibility.

Mackinder was only one of the scores of people who studied and commented on these issues at the time.¹ Many others had long noted that Russia was for the most part beyond the reach of the maritime countries both militarily and economically; many attributed great economic potential to the relatively little known vast Asian territories of the Russian Empire; many thought that railroads were providing land powers with an invaluable new means to increase their economic and military might; and many—certainly in Britain—saw Russia as a major threat. But it was Mackinder who

¹ As even W.H. Parker, who otherwise tends to treat Mackinder as a genius, concedes, “many of his ideas had been anticipated by others, and doubtless many of them originated from a familiarity with earlier work” (W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 250). I have discussed some of these antecedents both in Britain and the United States in Hekimoglu (see: L. Hekimoglu, “The Absent Pivot: Reflections on Mackinder's Heartland Fallacy on its Centennial,” in: *Governance and Global (Dis)Orders: Trends, Transformations, and Impasses*, ed. by Alison Howell, The York Centre for International and Security Studies, Toronto, 2004).

put together a coherent argument based on and incorporating all of the above premises and assertions. In other words, none of the individual components of Mackinder's 1904 Heartland/Pivot of History argument were altogether original, but his thesis as a whole managed to achieve a degree of novelty.

Reminiscing about the 1870s, Mackinder wrote: "Britain's supremacy on the ocean had not yet been challenged, and the only danger she saw at that time to her overseas empire was in the Asiatic position of Russia. During this period the London newspapers were quick to detect evidence of Russian intrigue in every rumor from Constantinople and in every tribal disturbance along the northwest frontier of India. British sea power and Russian land power held the center of the international stage."² At the turn of the century, the British perception of a Russian threat continued to be acute, and this perception constituted a dominant theme/element in Mackinder's thinking at the time. Even before the 1904 address Mackinder's work shows signs of anxiety about the seriousness of external threats to British supremacy. In a book published two years earlier, for instance, Russia is obviously very much on the forefront of his thought when he expresses concern with how to maintain British imperial security "in the presence of vast Powers, broad based on the resources of half continents."³

In his 1904 address Mackinder primarily focuses on three factors regarding the Eurasian interior: the economic potential of the region, the promise of railroads, and the incapability of sea powers like the U.K. and the U.S. to penetrate into it. His concern is that now that Russia has used its advantages as a major land power and entrenched itself securely inside the heart of the Eurasian landmass beyond the effective military—and commercial/economic—reach of sea powers, it is only a matter of time before it starts to take advantage of the recently developed railroad technology to successfully exploit the presumably immense economic potential of this vast region and become the global hegemon.

The conviction "that commercially the railway gave land powers an advantage over maritime states using shipping," had already been expressed by Mackinder in a 1900 article.⁴ Now he repeated the same claim even more forcefully regarding the economic prospects of Inner/Central Asia: "A generation ago steam and the Suez Canal appeared to have increased the mobility of sea-power relatively to land-power. Railways acted chiefly as feeders to ocean-going commerce. But trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power, and nowhere can they have such effect as in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia, ... the century will not be old before all Asia is covered with railways. The spaces within the Russian Empire and Mongolia are so vast, and their potentialities in population, wheat, cotton, fuel, and metals so incalculably great, that it is inevitable that a vast economic world, more or less apart, will there develop inaccessible to oceanic commerce."⁵

Mackinder's is an alarm call: Russia, he is saying, already politically in control of this vast region, will soon put in place a network of railways to exploit the "incalculably great" riches of the region and will turn into an economic and military behemoth set on its way to world hegemony. "The over-setting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight."⁶

Mackinder's 1904 analysis puts a great premium on the inaccessibility of the region for sea powers, but ultimately the crux of the argument rests on his assessment of the "incalculably great potential-

² H.J. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1943, p. 595.

³ H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, Heinemann, London, 1902, p. 358.

⁴ See: W.H. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁵ H.J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, p. 434.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 436.

ties” of Inner/Central Eurasia. Put in a different way, inaccessibility for the sea powers matters because of the presumed great riches of the region. The “Heartland” is granted that designation not on account of its distant past but its potential future.

Why, however, was Mackinder so convinced of an enormous economic potential in the Eurasian interior? So convinced as to stake the whole Heartland/Pivot of History thesis on the validity of that assumption?

The answer, I believe, lies in understanding that Mackinder was writing with hindsight of the developments of the 19th century in European Russia, which witnessed the extraordinary opening up of the Black Sea steppe to commercial agriculture and world trade.⁷ Victorious against the Ottomans in a series of military engagements, Russia annexed the Black Sea steppe and the northern Black Sea littoral by the last quarter of the 18th century. The province of “New Russia,” which was blessed with the extremely fertile *chernozem* (black soil) almost in its entirety but hitherto remained a sparsely populated frontier land where Cossacks and Tatars maintained their semi-settled existence routinely raiding the other side, was now rapidly opened to settlement.

The population increased no less than fifteen-fold in just over half a century.⁸ The region had already possessed a favorable river transportation system which was now further developed; but the real change in transportation came with the building of a railway network from the late 1860s onwards.⁹ With convenient access to Black Sea ports, and of course with the opening of the Turkish Straits to international commerce by the early 19th century, “New Russia” was very well placed to emerge as a granary of industrializing Europe.

Britain had lost its self-sufficiency in foodstuffs, specifically grains, by the early 19th century, and although the Corn Laws were not abolished until mid-century, it was fast becoming a grain importer along with several other countries on the continent. From mid-19th century onwards, “New Russia” became a major exporter of grains. During the half a century between the Crimean War and Mackinder’s article, Russia’s total wheat exports increased six-fold.¹⁰ During the same period, on average about a quarter of British and more than a third of French wheat imports came from Russia, that is, from the Black Sea steppe.¹¹ During the early years of the 20th century, the total amount of grains Russia was able to export thanks to the incredible transformation of the Black Sea steppe, was more than double the total for the U.S. and Canada combined.¹²

The rapid development of commercial agriculture in the region was accompanied by the rise of new towns and transportation infrastructure, as well as advancement in shipping, manufacturing, and mining. The rise of “New Russia” as the agricultural and commercial powerhouse of the Russian Empire was nothing short of phenomenal. The significance of this development for the Russian state cannot be overstated, and it should come as no surprise that to a well-informed commentator of the turn of the century on Russia like Mackinder, the transformation of the Black Sea steppe was a perspective-defining event.

⁷ Probably the best study in the English language on the 19th century transformation of “New Russia” is Mose Lofley Harvey’s 1938 PhD dissertation, which unfortunately remains unpublished. Vassilis Kardasis’s 2001 book is also useful despite its more specific focus on the Greek communities of Southern Russia.

⁸ See: V. Kardasis, *Diaspora Merchants in the Black Sea: The Greeks in Southern Russia 1775-1861*, Lexington Books, New York, 2001, p. 29.

⁹ See: M.L. Harvey, *The Development of Russian Commerce on the Black Sea and its Significance*, PhD dissertation, University of California, 1938, Ch. 3.

¹⁰ See: *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹¹ See: *Ibid.*, Ch. 4.

¹² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 238-242. A 1906 U.S. Department of Agriculture report written by I.M. Rubinow, drew attention to the fact that despite the use of rather backward agricultural methods by its farmers and despite the comparatively small size of its wheat growing area largely confined to the black-soil region, Russia still produced more wheat than the United States. The report emphasized that despite its vastness Siberia currently accounted for barely 6 percent of the wheat acreage of all Russia (see the summary of the report in “Russia’s Wheat Surplus,” *National Geographic Magazine*, October 1906, pp. 580-583).

In a crucial—yet rarely noted—paragraph of the 1904 address Mackinder underlines this clearly: “Perhaps **the change of greatest intrinsic importance which took place in Europe in the last century** was the southward migration of the Russian peasants, so that, whereas agricultural settlements formerly ended at the forest boundary, the centre of the population of all European Russia now lies to south of that boundary, in the midst of the wheat-fields which have replaced the more western steppes”¹³ (my emphasis).

It was the economic development of the Black Sea steppe that in no small part provided the Russian state with the capability to expand into Western Turkestan in the latter half of the 19th century. If the development of the steppe in Europe gave the Russian state the economic/financial edge to further expand into Asia and consolidate its power there, what would happen if Russia’s vast Asian provinces were to be developed in a likewise manner, providing the Russian state with a much larger resource base that can be utilized toward even more ambitious political/military ends?

The unmistakable underlying assumption in Mackinder’s 1904 article is that a repeat performance is inevitable in Inner/Central Asia. Once the Russian state began the full-scale utilization of the “incalculably great” resources of Inner Asia, it would be only a matter of time before it started expanding, first into the crescent of Eurasian rim, and then overseas by becoming a sea power as well. The resources of Inner/Central Asia, he is afraid, will set Russia on its way to becoming the global hegemon.

This preoccupation is clear in Mackinder’s 1904 presentation, and was well understood and shared by his audience as indicated by the discussion after the address at the Royal Geographical Society. A Mr. Amery,¹⁴ pointing out that “many countries which were steppe became agricultural and industrial,” reiterated: “The Russian Empire, which covers the great steppe region, but is no longer in the hands of the old steppe people, is really a portion of the agricultural world, economically, which has conquered the steppe and is turning it into a great agricultural industrial power... Mr. Mackinder referred to the fact that it is only within the last century that the agricultural races have occupied and populated the southern steppe of Russia proper. They are doing the same thing in Central Asia.”¹⁵

A Mr. Hogarth wanted Mackinder to confirm that he understood the argument correctly: do you mean, he asked, “that the state of things which is coming to pass in this inner pivot land will be entirely different to anything that has been seen there before? That is to say, something like a stationary state of things has been brought about, and the country is being developed, till it will even be able to export its own products to the rest of the world.”¹⁶

“I do mean exactly what Mr. Hogarth says,” responded Mackinder, “I mean that for the first time within recorded history ... you have a great stationary population being developed in the steppe lands. This is a revolution in the world that we have to face and reckon with.”¹⁷ A Russia replicating in the steppes of Central Asia the experience of “New Russia” at a many-fold magnitude, and in the process growing economically and demographically in giant steps, would eventually present a global military challenge to all other powers. Mackinder had no doubts as to the gravity of the situation as he saw it: “As regards the potentialities of the land and of the people, I would point out that in Europe there are now more than 40,000,000 people in the steppe land of Russia, and it is by no means yet densely

¹³ H.J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” pp. 433-434.

¹⁴ Although not specified in the published text, it is certain that he was Leopold Charles Maurice Stennett Amery (1873-1955), journalist and Conservative politician. Born in India, he later served as Colonial Under-secretary (1919-1922), First Lord of the Admiralty (1922-1923), Colonial Secretary (1924-1929), and Secretary of State for India (1940-1945).

¹⁵ H.J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 441.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

occupied, and that the Russian population is probably increasing faster than any other great civilized or half-civilized population in the world. ...you have to face the fact that in a hundred years 40,000,000 people have occupied but a mere corner of the steppe. I think you are on the way to a population which will be numbered by the hundred million; and this is a tendency which you must take into account in assigning values to the variable quantities in the equation of power for which I was seeking a geographical formula.”¹⁸

And because of the inaccessibility of this heart of Asia for sea powers like Britain, there was little to do for them but to watch as Russia was “steadily hastening the accomplishment of what I may call the non-oceanic economic system.”¹⁹ The way Mackinder saw it, after consolidating this non-oceanic economic system built on the resources of the Eurasian steppe, Russia was bound to make a move on the “marginal regions” of the continent (what he alternately calls “the Inner Crescent;” this is also what Spykman later called the “Rimland”), and thus increasing its industrial strength further, would develop the fleet necessary to found the world empire. The only thing to do for sea powers like Britain to prevent such an eventuality, Mackinder said, was “to act upon the marginal region, maintaining the balance of power there as against the expansive internal forces. I believe that the future of the world depends on the maintenance of this balance of power. It appears to me that our formula makes it clear that we must see to it that we are not driven out of the marginal region. We must maintain our position there, and then, whatever happens, we are fairly secure.”²⁰ This, of course, was the recipe for what later came to be known as the policy of containment.

To the very end of his years Mackinder maintained his conviction of the vast economic potential of the Heartland. In his 1943 article revisiting the Heartland notion, he still unequivocally insisted that “upon and beneath the Heartland there is a store of rich soil for cultivation and of ores and fuels for extraction, the equal—or thereabouts—of all that lies upon and beneath the United States and the Canadian Dominion.”²¹

III. The Absent Pivot

For Mackinder (in the 1904 address, anyway), Inner/Central Asia did not possess some innate, almost metaphysical strategic value. He argued that the region was important because of the very concrete and substantial economic contributions he thought the Russian Empire would be able to get out of it. In other words, mere formal possession of Inner/Central Asia was not of any significance, unless the presumably vast economic potential of the region could be put into the service of the Empire. The whole argument, therefore, stood on the validity of two premises: one, that Inner/Central Asia possessed vast resources, especially regarding commercial agriculture and extractive industries; and two, that railroads were competitive with maritime transport even over long distances.

Both premises were erroneous, and consequently the argument invalid. But as it happened, in the long run that mattered little. Sir Halford Mackinder and his 1904 thesis, pretty much ignored in the English-speaking world for four decades, was suddenly rediscovered in the 1940s and acquired great fame by mid-century; not on account of the validity of the underlying premises and the merits of the argument, but because its conclusions recommending the containment of Russia fit snugly into the emergent Cold War discourse.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ H.J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” p. 604.

The Cold War affirmation of Mackinder's 1904 policy recommendations rendered the invalidity of the underlying premises and argument practically inconsequential. Once the Mackinderian "Heartland" proposition came to be recognized as a primary geopolitical "reality" by the practitioners of geopolitical analysis, it acquired an axiomatic quality for the subsequent generations. This is not surprising given the perception of the main tenets of their discipline by geopoliticians. As Ó Tuathail points out, "a consistent historical feature of geopolitical writing, from its origins in the late nineteenth century to its modern use by Colin Gray and others, is the claim that geopolitics is a foil to idealism, ideology and human will. ...Geopoliticians have traded on the supposed objective materialism of geopolitical analysis;" geopolitical analysis claims to address "the base of international politics, the permanent geopolitical realities around which the play of events in international politics unfolds. These geopolitical realities are held to be durable, physical determinants of foreign policy."²² And as long as the central strategic importance of Inner/Central Asia was unquestioningly taken to be a "fact," other implied attributes of the region in the heartland thinking—such as vast economic resources—quietly piggybacked on it. In other words, the axiomatic maintenance of the Heartland thesis on account of its conclusions/policy recommendations has ensured the survival of the original premises and argument as well, irrespective of the latter's demonstrable invalidity.

Almost immediately after Mackinder was rediscovered in the United States in the 1940s, his main premises and central argument came under severe criticism by many, including prominent names such as Spykman. Whatever the merits and flaws of his own theory, Spykman effectively challenged the very foundations of Mackinder's Pivot/Heartland argument. Most importantly, he rejected Mackinder's vision of Inner/Central Asia as a treasure-house of resources and wealth capable of nurturing and sustaining a world power/conqueror.²³ In his two books published in the mid-1940s, G.B. Cressey challenged Mackinder's basic assumptions regarding Inner/Central Asia even more strongly than Spykman. In terms of the nine geographical elements of power he identified (including accessibility, location, minerals, and climate) Cressey found the Heartland falling far short of the billing given to it by Mackinder. His conclusion instead was that "as a consequence of its very considerable physical disadvantages, a really significant world power was unlikely to be centred in the Heartland."²⁴

All such criticisms directed against the premises and the central argument of the Heartland thesis largely failed to make much of a dent on the Mackinderian "Inner/Central Asia as the Heartland" notion, however, especially as it soon became an integral part of Cold War discourse. Many political geographers complained,²⁵ but it was the Cold War geopoliticians who prevailed. Colin Gray was arguing as late as 1988 that Mackinder's ideas "provide an intellectual architecture, far superior to rival conceptions, for understanding the principal international security issues."²⁶

²² G. Ó Tuathail, "Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy," *Political Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1992, pp. 191-192.

²³ See Spykman's posthumous short book of 1944 (*The Geography of Peace*, Harcourt Brace, New York). Later commentators have frequently presented the arguments of Mackinder and Spykman as complementary. That, however, is an optical illusion, brought about from inattentively looking at them through the lens of the containment policy. Beyond a similarity in their policy recommendations, the two arguments were almost diametrically opposite. For Spykman, Inner/Central Asia by itself had little to offer and was rather inconsequential except for allowing the Soviet Union means of access for its expansionist designs on the "Rimland" which was the real prize, well endowed in population, resources and wealth, and with access to maritime transport which he thought had uncontested superiority.

²⁴ Quoted from: G. Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Croom Helm, London, 1985, p. 128.

²⁵ For instance, R. Muir, who is often cited/quoted for his comment: "On several occasions the Heartland thesis has been systematically dismantled only to rise Phoenix-like for further punishment" (*Modern Political Geography*, Macmillan, London, 1975); or M. Blacksell who remarked on Mackinder's arguments: "despite being repeatedly challenged ... they are still allowed to form a basis for argument. The ghost seems never to be completely laid" (*Post-War Europe: A Political Geography*, Dawson, London, 1977). For both quotes, see: W.H. Parker, op. cit., p. 213).

²⁶ C.S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Super Power*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1988, p. 4.

To be clear, Inner/Central Asia indeed does have some economic resources, especially in its north-west, and railroads surely have made a significant impact on the region. Nonetheless, neither has come anywhere close to living up to the expectations/predictions set by Mackinder back in 1904. After a whole century—and intense Soviet efforts during much of it—, the record of Inner/Central Asia as a whole remains a far cry from the image of Heartland put forward by Mackinder in 1904.

A second and vast “New Russia” in the heart of the continent has never materialized. Russian Asia had neither the soil quality, nor the climatic conditions, nor the locational advantage of proximity to ports and international markets of the Black Sea steppe’s “New Russia.” It could not, and as it turned out did not, offer Russia the chance of replicating on a larger scale the phenomenal development of southern Russia in Europe.²⁷ Mackinder was off the mark by a large margin in assessing the amplitude as well as the commercial operability of the resource base of Inner/Central Asia.

While the extremely fertile *chernozem* soil of the Black Sea steppe extends wedge-like into northern Kazakhstan, for instance, such fertile soils constitute a minuscule proportion of the soils in Inner/Central Asia.²⁸ Nor are the climatic conditions in Inner/Central Asia, aside from a few exceptions, nearly as accommodating of agriculture as the Black Sea steppe. Attempts to introduce large-scale agricultural commodity production were largely unsuccessful with only limited exceptions. In some cases, such as cotton production in Soviet Central Asia, the result was an unmitigated environmental disaster. In Inner/Central Asia, even when excluding the forest zone of Siberia, less than 7 percent of the land is arable; furthermore, given the ecological fragility of the region, little of that arable land can accommodate any large-scale commercial agriculture.

The north-west of this vast region does possess oil reserves, and western Siberian oil continues to be important in the economy of the Russian Federation; but there is little oil in the rest of Inner/Central Asia, especially if we focus on the Central Asia proper of contemporary usage.²⁹ Much of the ongoing attribution of “oil riches” to Central Asia in the media and academia alike, is little more than a myth. The most recent figures show that Kazakhstan has 9 billion barrels and Turkmenistan 0.5 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (put together, about 1 percent of proven global reserves).³⁰ All the rest of Central Asia has about as much oil as Denmark. To call Central Asia “oil rich,” therefore, is analogous to calling Sub-Saharan Africa “oil rich;” after all, Nigeria alone has more than twice as much oil as all of Central Asia.

Central Asia’s natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, totaling 3.7 percent of world proven reserves, is not a negligible asset.³¹ There are, however, two important considerations that reflect on the commercial prospects of this resource as an export commodity. First, natural gas, unlike oil, is still a primarily regional commodity as it needs pipelines to take it all the way to its consumer market. Technologies that can potentially render natural gas a compet-

²⁷ Ironically, long after Mackinder many in the West continued to hold their breath in anticipation of an agricultural boom in Central Asia. Both misinformation and disinformation helped to keep the expectation alive. Typical are the remarks of a rare Western visitor to the region in the late 1950s: “...the opening of Central Asia to agriculture is one of the most daring feats of Soviet development and, if successful, could have incalculable effects on Soviet and world markets” (L.W. Henderson, *A Journey to Samarkand*, Longmans, Green and Company, Toronto, 1960, p. 109).

²⁸ See: W.W. Newey, “Biogeography—the Vegetation, Soils and Animal Life,” in: *The Soviet Union: A Systemic Geography*, ed. by Leslie Symons, Routledge, New York, 1990.

²⁹ That is, “Inner/Central Asia” minus the current territory of the Russian Federation; roughly corresponding to the territories of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China. Below I will use “Central Asia” as a term to refer to these seven countries plus Xinjiang.

³⁰ See: *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2003*.

³¹ See: *Ibidem*.

itively mobile and hence global commodity (LNG processing and gas-to-liquids synthetic oil manufacturing) are still too expensive. For the time being, therefore, the costs of building and operating long-distance pipelines to the far away natural gas consumption clusters in Europe and East Asia reduce the comparative commercial attractiveness of developing the Central Asian reserves. Second, Central Asian gas reserves are dwarfed by those of neighboring Russia and Iran which between them hold almost half of the global natural gas reserves. These two factors in combination (i.e., vast neighborhood reserves of a regional commodity) continue to have a dampening effect on the development of Central Asian natural gas.

There are varying quantities of other mineral deposits in Central Asia, some of which are of potentially high commercial value. Kazakhstan, especially, is known to possess large deposits of both iron ore and various nonferrous metals.³² Unavoidably, however, the question of distance and transportation costs emerge as a major factor in the development and prospects of these resources. Especially for the lower value ores and products (such as iron ore and iron and steel products) the difficulties remain considerable. Regarding iron ore, for instance, Sagers notes how Russian imports of Kazakh ore went down after the end of the Soviet command economy, not only because of a production decline in the Russian steel industry but also because of the cost of using Kazakh ore. Even when the ore is locally processed and higher value steel and iron products are exported instead, distance still very adversely affects the price, hence the competitiveness, of these products.³³

Ironically for a geographer, Mackinder greatly underestimated the significance of distance. Transportation costs over vast distances have imposed a considerable burden on the economic feasibility of most Central Asian commodities and goods—and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Space limits of this paper do not allow a detailed elaboration of the natural resources profile and economic performance of Inner/Central Asia, but especially the picture that emerges as the dust settles from the collapse of the Soviet Union unmistakably exposes the fallaciousness of the main premises and argument of Mackinder's 1904 address. Perhaps nothing emphasizes this better than the fact that a full century later the average GNP per capita in Central Asia stood at some 600 U.S. dollars, only marginally better than that of Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴

The "Heartland," has never been. The "Pivot," was never there.

IV. The Fallacy Lives On

In the mid-1980s Geoffrey Parker observed that the fame of the Heartland theory was less due to the strength of the underlying argument than the apparent fit between its conclusions and the ideological layout of the Cold War: "The subjection of the Heartland to the most rigorous examination certainly revealed its shortcomings in fulfilling the world role allotted to it by its protagonists from Mackinder on. ...Perhaps the truth is that it is not so much its real attributes which account for its persistence as its role in the international scene as perceived from the West since World War II. From the late 1940s this had come to be dominated by the global confronta-

³² See: M.J. Sagers, "The Nonferrous Metals Industry of Kazakhstan," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 39, No. 9, 1998; idem, "The Iron Ore Industry of Kazakhstan: A Research Report," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1999.

³³ See: M.J. Sagers, "The Iron Ore Industry of Kazakhstan: A Research Report," pp. 220-221.

³⁴ Calculated from World Bank, *2003 World Development Indicators*, and *2001 International Yearbook and Statesmen's Who Is Who*.

tion of the two antagonistic superpowers, and the Heartland theory took on a new lease on life in this context. At a time when it was again coming under strong, and frequently disapproving, scrutiny by political geographers, it was seized upon as a method of giving a new explanatory dimension to the world scene. The Soviet Union had increasingly come to be viewed in the West as being a dangerously aggressive state, and it appeared to draw its great power from the remote fastness of Central Asia.”³⁵

Fifteen years later and with the hindsight of Soviet collapse, Geoffrey Parker followed up on that thread of thought: “As the Cold War drew toward its conclusion, the continentalist scenario of the political geographers of the immediate post-war period, which reached its most dramatic expression in the Heartland thesis, was vigorously called into question. The immense potential ascribed to the Heartland had not materialized and the specter of Soviet power was increasingly perceived to be illusory. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 appeared to be conclusive proof of this and consequently demonstrated that the associated continentalist idea had also been a false one. The Cold War image of the maritime world as a weak and scattered periphery around a powerful Soviet world centre, its strength founded on the enormous potential of the Heartland, gave place to that of a West as the centre of the capitalist world-economy and with the United States as its contemporary hegemonic power.”³⁶

Or rather this is what should have happened. But Parker, like so many before, underestimates the resilience of the Heartland notion. I agree with him that the ghost of the Heartland thesis should be put to rest for good at long last, but I disagree with his suggestion that this has already occurred.

Even a cursory survey of the discussion on post-Soviet Central Asia amply demonstrates that. Academics and journalists, politicians and technocrats, from within and outside the region, cheerfully join in a discourse where Central Asia is depicted as a strategically crucial region with immense natural resources, where the problems are “transitional” and the future is bright. The Mackinderian Heartland fallacy unmistakably serves as a key element in the construction and maintenance of this discourse.

Let me quote from a 1994 address by Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat, the President of Mongolia between 1990-1997, for a typical example. Central Asia, he says, is “a region destined to play an important role in global political and socioeconomic life... We the Central Asian nations living in the heart of the Eurasian landmass, are all linked by many common traits determined by geography, our historical and cultural backgrounds, security interests and traditional relations. ...Today all countries of the region are carrying out structural changes in their economies in order to make a transition to market economy relations. ...This region is rich in energy-generating and other types of natural resources, as well as in intellectual potential which has not yet been fully tapped. Furthermore, in geopolitical terms it is a bridge that links Europe and Asia, and as such will play an important role in international relations. In this sense our region has bright prospects for development.”³⁷

This poster-boy image of Central Asia is not only false but also harmful. As long as the remnants of the Mackinderian Heartland fallacy continue to set the parameters of our thinking about the region, as long as the severe geographical predicament of the region and its inhabitants in the age of globalization is not unequivocally recognized, the peoples of contemporary Central Asia will continue to lose precious time in false starts after false hopes.

³⁵ G. Parker, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-134.

³⁶ G. Parker, *Geopolitics: Past, Present and Future*, Pinter, London, 1998, p. 151.

³⁷ P. Ochirbat, “Foreword,” in: *Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, ed. by Shirin Akiner, Sander Tideman and Jon Hay, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1998, pp. vii-viii.

V. Globalization and Central Asia's Geographical Predicament

Our vision of Central Asia suffers from an obstinate astigmatism brought about by several and overlapping misconceptions. The survival of themes such as the Heartland, helping to sustain the attribution of an innate vital significance to Central Asia in world politics and economy, may be at the top of the list but there are others as well. For decades we labeled the region as a part of a "Second World"—as it turns out, a term with little descriptive or analytical value—and now often refer to the countries of Central Asia as "post-communist transition countries," implying that the problems here are not only qualitatively different from the familiar ones in what we have come to know as the Third World, but also merely transitory. The modest oil reserves at the western end of the region have been blown out of all proportion to build fantasies of an oil-rich Central Asia inhabited by people with an affluent future. Suffering from the curse of inaccessibility, Central Asia resembles more a cul-de-sac in a globalizing world, yet we insist on imagining the region as the Great Silk Road, a hub of busy routes connecting the East and the West and the South.

It is imperative to shed this conglomeration of misconceptions and fallacies and try to see where Central Asia actually stands at the threshold of the 21st century: a region unable to overcome the tyranny of its geography and marginalized in a fast globalizing world.

We are often told that in this age of globalization distances mean little and location hardly matters, and are urged to look at how cellular communications networks are on the verge of covering every square meter of the globe, how TV channels broadcast around the world via a network of satellites, how global financial markets are electronically and real-time integrated, etc. Some go as far as bluntly announcing the death of distance.³⁸ What such pundits greatly underplay is the fact that, all the achievements and impact of the communications revolution notwithstanding, globalization is also, and arguably even more so, about production and trade—or should I say production for global trade—of commodities and manufactures. Countries and regions are expected to produce what they can trade in the global market; and the prospects and the extent of that happening is still determined to a considerable degree by geography, by access, by costs of transportation. The claim that communications technologies have neutralized the impact of geography on the economic performance of societies cannot be taken seriously. Just to the contrary, there is a strong argument that economic globalization have in certain ways rendered geography even more important than before.

For some time now, the global volume of trade has been rising at a rate roughly twice the growth of the global economy. World exports of goods and services more than tripled in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, as Held *et al.* point out, it "is not just that trade today is greater than ever before. Trade has changed in a way that links national economies together at a

³⁸ Which, actually, is the title of a widely read book by Frances Cairncross, now in its second edition. She makes "goods" (which have the terribly inconvenient trait of not being convertible to electrons for transmission over fiber-optic cables or via satellite) to disappear through some semantic legerdemain ("The old divide between goods and services is giving way to a new divide, between products requiring physical delivery and products that can be delivered on-line" (F. Cairncross, *The Death of Distance 2.0.*, Texere, London, 2001, p. 189) and raves throughout the book about a new global economy of "on-line products." It is as if what she renames "products requiring physical delivery" is now something marginal to the global economy, something that is no longer relevant to our lives. In her brave new world of this global on-line economy, geography hardly matters as societies now engage in the production and trade of what she calls "weightless products." Companies can locate pretty much anywhere to run their screen-based activities as long as they find good bargains in skills and productivity, she argues, and offers a magic remedy for development: "Developing countries will increasingly perform on-line services—including monitoring security screens, inputting data and forms, running help-lines, and writing software code—and sell them to the rich countries that generally produce such services domestically» (ibid., p. xi).

deeper level than in the past.” The distinction between international trade and domestic economic activity has been increasingly blurred, a trend further intensified by the growing activities of the transnational corporations: “A quarter to a third of world trade is intrafirm trade between branches of multinationals.”³⁹

There are several factors behind this explosion in global trade and the transnationalization of production. Some of these, such as the declining trade barriers and the “opening up” of more and more countries, have been extensively discussed in the literature. One very important factor, however, has received relatively less attention: the sharply falling cost of moving goods around. As concisely observed in a report on globalization, “behind the scenes, a series of technological innovations, known broadly as ‘containerization’ and ‘inter-modal transportation,’ has led to swift productivity improvements in cargo-handling—and in the process, has lowered one of the biggest obstacles to trade.”⁴⁰ The rather quiet revolution in transportation of goods has been one of the pillars of the global decentralization of production. In Axtmann’s words, “the emergence of a global economic structure is premised on the development of a technological infrastructure regarding transportation and the generation and circulation of information. This infrastructure must provide for faster and more cost-effective rail, sea and air transportation and the establishment of more extensive interconnections between them.”⁴¹

If the international circulation of goods is part and parcel of economic globalization, this circulation, in turn, is made possible by maritime transportation which bears almost the full weight of international trade of goods. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, world seaborne trade tripled from about two billion tons a year to nearly six billion tons. In the big picture, land transportation, even after the improvements affected by inter-modal transportation, serves only in a complementary capacity to seaborne transportation as about 90 percent of internationally traded goods is carried in ships. The significance of this fundamental reliance of the global economy on maritime transportation for those regions without easy access to ports cannot be overstated.

For millennia land transportation has suffered from a distinct disadvantage compared to waterborne alternatives in long-distance trade, except in the rare circumstances when luxury items such as silk and spices rendered certain land routes profitable enough. In the time of the Roman Empire, it cost less to ship grain across the entire Mediterranean than to move it overland for some 100 kilometers.⁴² Land transportation has never been able to close that gap; for all the remarkable improvements in land transportation (especially in the last century and a half, with the railroads and motor vehicles), the improvements in sea transportation have been even more drastic. As we enter the 21st century, with a few exceptions neither land nor air transportation can offer anywhere near the cost-efficiency of maritime transportation for long-distance trade of goods. As Hausmann notes, “Shipping a standard container from Baltimore to the Ivory Coast costs about \$3,000, while sending that same container to the landlocked Central African Republic costs \$13,000.”⁴³

The perplexing thing is that in promoting global decentralization of production, the economic orthodoxy of our era simply assumes that a Central African Republic is in the same position as any coastal country to take advantage of what the contemporary transportation technology has to offer. As a consequence, the neoliberal recipes can neither in theory nor in practice cope with situations where serious and debilitating access problems exist.

³⁹ D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, J. Perraton, “Globalization,” *Global Governance*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1999, pp. 490-492.

⁴⁰ *The Economist*, 15 November, 1997, pp. 85-86.

⁴¹ R. Axtmann, “Globalization, Europe and the State: Introductory Reflections,” in: *Globalization and Europe: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, ed. by R. Axtmann, Pinter, London, 1998, p. 4.

⁴² See: M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1973, p. 126, citing an earlier work by A.H.M. Jones regarding an edict by emperor Diocletianus (reigned between 284-306 AD).

⁴³ R. Hausmann, “Prisoners of Geography,” *Foreign Policy*, January-February, 2001, p. 7.

The prevailing trade theory takes it for granted that goods move rapidly and with little cost from place to place. Paul Krugman drew attention to this problem over a decade ago: “The analysis of international trade makes virtually no use of insights from economic geography or location theory. We normally model countries as dimensionless points within which factors of production can be instantly and costlessly moved from one activity to another, and even trade among countries is usually given a sort of spaceless representation in which transport costs are zero for all goods that can be traded. ...[T]he tendency of international economists to turn a blind eye to the fact that countries both occupy and exist in space—a tendency so deeply entrenched that we rarely even realize we are doing it—has, I would submit, had some serious costs.”⁴⁴ Krugman then called on his profession to “admit to ourselves that space matters and try to bring geography back into economic analysis,”⁴⁵ but his call has so far had only a limited effect.

The “geographic-blindness” common among so many economists manifests itself frequently in studies involving Central Asia. Quite typical are the attempts to account for the economic hardships in Central Asia almost exclusively in terms of the effects of the disintegration of the Soviet economy aggravated by insufficient implementation of economic liberalization reforms.⁴⁶

Jeffrey Sachs, one of the best-known gurus of market reforms in the so-called transition countries, to his credit recognized that there are situations where geography overwhelms policy. In a 1997 article reaching a wide audience,⁴⁷ he drew attention to the predicament of “those countries dealt a weak hand by geography” in the age of globalizing capitalism. “For the first time in history, almost all of the world’s people are bound together in a global capitalist system,” he observed. “In the past, differences in policies across regions of the world resulted in vast differences in economic performance; in the future, policies are likely to be more similar. As a result, large parts of the developing world will narrow the income gap between themselves and richer nations. But this process of convergence, by itself, will go only so far. With or without markets, many developing countries will be left far behind. Adam Smith understood the limits of convergence, and the role that geography plays in defining those limits, better than many modern economists.” Despite his faith in globalizing capitalism in general and his conviction that it leads to economic prosperity across the globe, he admitted to a big exception: “...for much of the world, bad climates, poor soils and physical isolation are likely to hinder growth whatever happens to policy.”⁴⁸

In a 2001 article appropriately titled “Prisoners of Geography,” Ricardo Hausmann discussed the question of geography even more bluntly than Sachs and is worth quoting here at length. “Economic-development experts promise that with the correct mix of pro-market policies, poor countries will eventually prosper. But policy isn’t the problem—geography is,” he argued. “The countries left behind have distinguishing geographical characteristics: They tend to be located in the tropical regions or, because of their location, face large transportation costs in accessing world

⁴⁴ P. Krugman, *Geography and Trade*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Examples are far too many to cite but I would like to make an exception by mentioning a study by two senior World Bank economists (M. de Melo, A. Gelb, “A Comparative Analysis of Twenty-Eight Transition Economies in Europe and Asia,” *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 37, No. 5, 1996) who assessed twenty-eight “transition economies” and tried to account for the differences in economic performance among them by the different intensities and timing of “liberalizing reforms,” because it was ironic that an article that so utterly ignored geography and location was published in the journal *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*.

⁴⁷ See: J. Sachs, “The Limits of Convergence: Nature, Nurture and Growth,” *The Economist*, 14 June, 1997, pp. 19-22.

⁴⁸ Between his enthusiasm about global capitalism as “the most promising institutional arrangement for worldwide prosperity” on the one hand, and his recognition of the constraints imposed by geography on the other, Sachs is forced to engage in a balancing act: his expressions of optimism are often followed by bleak reservations. “Capitalism has now become common property. So too can economic prosperity become common property,” he suggests, “at least for those regions not impeded by fundamental geographical barriers.” He believes Asia’s prospects to be bright, but immediately excludes Central Asia which “faces profound, and largely unsolved, geographical obstacles.”

markets—or both.”⁴⁹ “Nations with populations far from a coastline,” he observed, “tend to be poorer and show lower rates of economic growth than coastal countries. ... That means, for example, that the post-Soviet republics will experience as much difficulty battling their geographical disadvantages as they will overcoming the aftereffects of communism.”⁵⁰ Hausmann too points out the importance given to “access to markets” by Adam Smith, the “prophet” of economic liberalism, and discusses the implications: “For Adam Smith, productivity gains achieved through specialization are the secret to the wealth of nations. But for these gains to materialize, producers must have access to markets where they can sell their specialized output and buy other goods. The larger the market, the greater the scope for specialization. In today’s global marketplace, most industrial products require inputs from various locations around the world. Therefore, if transportation costs are high, local companies will be at a disadvantage in accessing the imported inputs they need and in getting their own goods to foreign markets.

“Unfortunately, transportation costs are often determined by a country’s geography. A recent study found that shipping goods over 1 additional kilometer of land costs as much as shipping them over 7 extra kilometers of sea. Maritime shipping is particularly suited to the bulky, low-value-added goods that developing nations tend to produce; therefore, countries lacking cheap access to the sea will be shut out of many potential markets. ... Land transportation is especially costly for landlocked countries whose products need to cross borders, which are a much more costly hurdle than previously thought.”⁵¹

It is important to recognize that economic globalization is a geographically uneven process, and that this unevenness is not accidental or at random. As Roland Axtmann points out, entire regions and countries around the world remain marginalized within the global economy; they are deemed “structurally irrelevant” in the new pattern of international division of labor.⁵² Although sometimes the main cause of such marginalization may be social and political (as in areas with collapsed states such as Liberia or Haiti), most of the time it has to do with geographical factors, especially resources and access. While the freight revolution may come as a blessing for the “liberalizing” countries in the favored zones of global economy especially for those with easy access to open seas, it puts the backwater zones at a greater than ever disadvantage.

The proponents of the neoliberal gospel single-mindedly advocating an outward-oriented economic strategy based on market liberalism and comparative advantage are very hard pressed to identify what comparative advantages Central Asia actually commands so as to successfully integrate itself to the mainstream of globalizing capitalism.

Richard Pomfret, a prolific writer on the economy of post-Soviet Central Asia, implicitly reveals the very implausibility of the promise of neoliberal salvation. After urging the Central Asian countries to follow the neoliberal recipe by undertaking the requisite market reforms in a 1995 book, he cannot altogether evade the question of “then what?” His response tacitly admits to a lack of answers and exposes the feebleness of the neoliberal stand: “Indeed, they could not compete on low wage costs with the large transition economies of China and Vietnam. The international evidence, however, is that low wages are not the only basis for export-led growth. The point of outward-oriented growth is to maximize economic well-being by pursuing comparative advantage. Economists may be poor predictors of where detailed comparative advantage lies for most countries, but that does not matter because the market will give the answer if it is allowed to.”⁵³

⁴⁹ R. Hausmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

⁵² See: R. Axtmann, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁵³ R. Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, p. 134.

The corner Pomfret puts himself into is quite a crowded one: pretty much everybody who offers market liberalism as a panacea for the region's problems end up there. What they are in effect telling Central Asians is: We cannot really figure out what exactly are the comparative advantages of Central Asia in this fast globalizing world, but don't let that lead you into questioning the path. Fix your gaze on the "tigers" of the Asian Pacific, put your faith in the "market," do what the neoliberal gospel says, and lo and behold you will be delivered—somehow! This is no economics, but hollow evangelism.

So far only a few have raised their voices against these "evangelists" and tried to bring a measure of reason into the discussion. Pointing out that most economic experts and policymakers in Central Asia hold a fascination for the export-driven economic models of East Asia, Sander Tideman wrote, for instance: "Focusing on statistics alone, one easily overlooks the fact that the East Asian growth countries had very different characteristics to start with, such as large reserves of cheap labor, some basic infrastructure (harbors and other transportation facilities), relatively easy access to foreign capital, ties with richer overseas ethnic communities and—above all—an advantageous geographical location. Central Asian nations are landlocked, have few transportation facilities, restrictive physical conditions and little capital and labor, and most distinctively, have fragile soils."⁵⁴

Sadly, considerably more people seem to have chosen instead to listen to those who are engaged in building a mirage based on two prevalent dogmas: the Mackinderian one that Central Asia has vast resources of great global significance, and the neoliberal one that economic liberalization is a panacea to problems of development irrespective of geography. These two articles of faith, despite their distinct genealogies, have come to conveniently complement each other in much of the literature on contemporary Central Asia,⁵⁵ and their confluence weigh heavily upon current perceptions of the region and its prospects. Mackinder's fallacious premises of a century earlier are still stubbornly maintained, except now it is transnational corporations that will presumably succeed where the Russian state has ostensibly failed.

What, then, are the options available to the peoples of Central Asia? I do not pretend to have any ready answers, and obviously there are no easy ones. What I want to emphasize is that if feasible strategies are ever to be developed, it is crucial to start searching sooner rather than later by recognizing the stark geographical realities of the region in a rapidly changing world. The tyranny of the region's geography cannot be possibly overcome without first facing up to it. An excellent starting point is dismantling the prevalent myths and the neoliberal wishful thinking which have jointly managed to divert the agenda and postpone the essential debate.

⁵⁴ S.G. Tideman, "The Shortcomings of the Classical Economic Model: Appropriate Economic Parameters are Required for Sustainable Development in Central Asia," in: *Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, ed. by Shirin Akiner, Sander Tideman and Jon Hay, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998, p. 85.

⁵⁵ For a typical example, see Zbigniew Brzezinski's widely-read 1997 book. After paying due tribute to Mackinder, Brzezinski keeps repeating the assertion that the region possesses vast natural resources, and trusts the United States with the task "...to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it" (Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 148). He proceeds to envision "large-scale international investment in an increasingly accessible Caspian-Central Asian region" and "accelerated regional development, funded by external investment" (*ibid.*, p. 203).

DETERMINISM VERSUS FRICTION: A CRITIQUE OF MACKINDER

Bahodirjon ERGASHEV

*Masters student, Junior Fellow
at the Department of Political Science,
University of World Economy and Diplomacy
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

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

“Mackinder was not a determinist,” declared Colin S. Gray, arguably the most celebrated contemporary scholar of geopolitics.¹ He has further proclaimed that Mackinder’s classic geopolitical theory “has outlasted the criticisms.”² An ardent advocate of Mackinder, and of geopolitics as an enduring and “overwhelmingly relevant” field of study, Gray defends it vociferously: “Unfortunately, proclamation of the demise of geopolitics is at best pre-

mature, and much more likely is simply wrong-headed.”³ On the other hand, Christopher J. Fettweis is confident that “geopolitical analysis is already as obsolete as major war itself.”⁴

Whilst geopolitics as a field of academic study has slowly descended into relative insignificance in the West, especially after the end of the Cold War, it has thrived throughout the former Soviet Union. Zbigniew Brzezinski’s *The Grand Chessboard* has few competitors in ex-Soviet republics in terms of popularity among

¹ C.S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of the Superpower*, The University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1988, p. 7.

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 Brian Blouet, Frank Cass, London, 2005, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ Ch.J. Fettweis, “Revisiting Mackinder and Angell: The Obsolescence of Great Power Geopolitics”, *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April-June 2003, p. 119.

The author would like to thank Nick Solly Megoran of Cambridge University for invaluable comments and close supervision of this paper. Besides, John Lewis Gaddis of Yale University deserves infinite gratitude for providing the author with an exciting opportunity to spend a year at Yale to study Grand Strategy, so does Laurence Jarvik of Johns Hopkins University for availing himself to a debate-rich friendship.

students majoring in International Relations.⁵ The “rose revolution” in Georgia of November 2003, the Ukrainian “orange revolution” of early 2005, the so-called “tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan of March 2005, and the ongoing endeavor to “spread democratic values” throughout the former Soviet Union by Western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), might all be seen as suggestive of the continuing relevance of Halford Mackinder’s “Heartland” concept if one accepts the popular view that it is the United States government who is behind all these transformations.

This paper seeks to contribute to the debate as to whether Mackinder’s theories, after one hun-

⁵ When referring to an academic field of study, International Relations is written with capital letters, whereas as a social phenomenon, as real-world relations among nations, it is used with small letters.

dred years, are to be taken seriously, or to be regarded with sober reservations. To do so, it would be appropriate to contrast his conceptions with those of other thinkers, as well as my own observations. Thus I first offer some reflections with respect to Mackinder’s well-known formula on international politics, proceeding then to discuss how much emphasis we ought to place on geographical factors when dealing with strategic issues. Other sections will inquire into the land power-sea power debate, and discuss to what extent Mackinder’s writings offer us a truly theoretical knowledge, given the fact that he is often included in the realist tradition within International Relations theory. This paper will argue, from that same realist theoretical position, that his writings are deeply flawed, and add nothing to our understanding of the international relations of contemporary Central Asia.

The (In)Famous Formula

In his famous speech before the Royal Geographical Society, United Kingdom, on 25 January, 1904, and its subsequent publication in *The Geographical Journal*, Sir Halford Mackinder defined the distribution of power in the international system as follows: “The actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organization of the competing peoples... And the geographical quantities in the calculation are more measurable and more nearly constant than the human. Hence we should expect to find our formula apply equally to past history and to present politics...”⁶ “My aim is ... to make a geographical formula into which you could fit any political balance.”⁷

Mackinder’s use of words such as “at any given time” and “of course” makes one cautious in assenting to this “formula,” especially if we consider, for example, Israel’s strategic position. Neither the geographical conditions nor other factors do necessarily precondition Israel to pose as a preponderant power in the Middle East. Geographically, it has a very small population, territory, and hence lacks strategic depth, possesses very few strategically important endowments such as oil and gas, nor is it geographically insular like America. Had the Jewish state not enjoyed a close, yet informal, special relationship with Washington,⁸ it would have been barely possible for it, surrounded as it is by arch-enemies who have posed an existential threat, to survive, let alone to be preeminent in the region.

⁶ H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, p. 437.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 443, from Mackinder’s response to his critics at the end of the discussion following his presentation of his thesis to the Royal Geographical Society.

⁸ During the first years of its independence Israel’s “protector” was Stalin’s U.S.S.R., then France and the U.K., epitomized during the Suez War of 1956, and from the 1960s up until now—the U.S.

The “relative number, virility, equipment, and organization” of its people would have probably mattered little if Israel had attempted to struggle to survive on its own. The same can be said of the Baltic states which feel no less powerful than their giant neighbor to the east, due to their accession to NATO and newly established intimate relations with America.

Clearly, there is a contradiction in Mackinder’s formula. He accurately points out that, unlike geographical factors, the human dimension is not a constant feature because the relative organization, virility and equipment of peoples are both difficult to measure and vary from time to time. At the same time, Mackinder strives to offer a “formula” that could be applied “equally to past history and to present politics.” How one can devise a solid formula in the face of inconsistent factors leaves a big question mark hanging over the whole enterprise.⁹

Thucydides, the fifth century BC Greek historian widely regarded as a central reference point by realist thinkers, seemed to disapprove of all simple formulas. Human nature, internal structures of states (particularly, their political institutions), are equally, if not more, important in determining states’ behavior, and thus geopolitical outcomes. Thucydides also demonstrated in his seminal *History of the Peloponnesian War* how such trivial events as the spread of epidemic among the population could exert an influence of the utmost importance.

The structure of the international system defined in terms of the distribution of power among states is one of the essential elements in a long list of significant factors. “The real cause,” wrote Thucydides, “I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable.”¹⁰

Distinction between democratic Athens and autocratic Sparta, and the overall impact that this had on the turn of events, prompted Thucydides to explore this factor at great length. Thus the amount of energy spent by him in enquiry into the form of government as one of the principal pillars supporting an historical conception, indicates how indispensable it is in shaping the course of events.

The character of people, underscored by Athenian daring and Spartan moderation as well as by the former’s entrepreneurial and the latter’s agrarian natures, was instrumental in determining how they acquired their empires and how this led to war between these two empires, Thucydides believed. For example, he tells how immediately after they had successfully resisted the Persian invasion, the Spartans decided to retire from the field instead of retaining their military-political presence in the liberated Greek states. This led the Athenians to be swift to fill the power vacuum and thus establish an extensive chain of dependencies, creating a powerful empire that quickly matched the power of the preponderant Lacedaemonian alliance led by Sparta. Had the characters of the Athenians and Spartans not been as they were, the three-decade-long destructive war would have probably not taken place, making the subsequent Hellenic degradation less likely.

Thucydides identified the “individual factor” as another determinant of international relations. “The influence of individual personalities on the course of the war [is remarkable] . . . the violent demagogue Cleon, the statesmanlike Pericles, the ambitious Alcibiades, the Athenian-like Hermocrates, and the overly pious Nicias” were subjected to intense scrutiny by Thucydides.¹¹ Had Alcibiades not

⁹ This leads us to the dilemma of parsimony in theorizing, on the one hand, and of all-inclusiveness or eclecticism on the other. It can be argued that theoretical parsimony is often misleading, while eclecticism inhibits a cogent, theoretical, strategic thinking. It seems more desirable to me to be inclined to analyze every situation in its own right, rather than to be misled by parsimonious theories.

¹⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book I, Modern Library, New York, 1951, p. 24. Transl. by John Finley.

¹¹ L.M. Johnson-Bagby, “Fathers of International Relations? Thucydides As a Model for the Twenty First Century,” in: L.S. Gustafson, *Thucydides’ Theory of International Relations*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2000, p. 29.

led the already-winning Athenians on the ill-fated expedition against Syracuse (a democracy, incidentally), Athens would probably have emerged triumphant. This could have had enormous consequences for subsequent events such as the advent of Alexander and the Roman Empire, and hence the course taken by Western civilization. We would probably live in a totally different world today if, say, Pericles or Diodotus were in Alcibiades's place.

Singling out the geographical determinants as the principal factor, therefore, hardly seems appropriate. Wary of the perils of determinism, Thucydides proceeds from systemic-level causes (change in the balance of power in Greece with the ascendance of Athens), to domestic political factors, and further to individual-level constituents.

A similar study was undertaken by a contemporary scholar, Kenneth Waltz, in his 1959 book, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. Whereas Thucydides' is an essay where his theory is laid out by implication, Waltz's is an overt scientific explication, with the reverse order of elements: from individual-based component to the state factor up the ladder to international-systemic prism. Commenting on the human factor, Waltz makes the following conclusion that is valuable to our present discussion: "The assumption of a fixed human nature, in terms of which all else must be understood, itself helps to shift attention *away* from human nature—because human nature, by the terms of the assumption, cannot be changed, whereas social-political institutions can be."¹²

Whether human nature is constant or not is not a matter of discussion here; what is of use here is the possible replacement of the word "human nature" in this passage with "physical geography."

In Geography We Trust

Technology changes geography. The Persian Gulf is arguably as much a strategic backyard for the United States as Latin America is. Whereas the latter has been a backyard for almost two centuries, the former has become one in the last couple of decades. Latin America is a natural backyard for the northern giant purely for geographical reasons. The Persian Gulf, in contrast, is a backyard not because of geography but thanks to technology. Had the United States not enjoyed a global military-technological reach, the Persian Gulf would have never become an American backyard, to be defended jealously. Thanks to technological progress, the two Anglo-Saxon superpowers, Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first, have been *global* superpowers unlike the ones preceding them.

Because technology changes geography, the invention of intercontinental ballistic missiles led to the Soviet Union and the United States becoming virtual neighbors, although in strictly geographical terms, almost ten thousand miles separate the hearts of Russia and America. For technologically inferior Carthaginians, Rome was two thousand miles away, while for technology-focused Romans Carthage was less than four hundred miles from Rome. Another, though hypothetical, example of how technology changes geopolitical outcomes: if and when a substitute for oil is found, Azerbaijan would almost certainly cease to be a country suitable for U.S. national interests. So too, most probably, would Iran and the Persian Gulf, or Venezuela.¹³

¹² K.N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1959, p. 41. Emphasis in the original.

¹³ Azerbaijan is vital to the U.S. not only in terms of economic interests, one could contend, but also for geopolitical reasons, in line with Mackinder, as an outpost from where Russia and Iran could be pressured. However, if that is the major concern for U.S. strategists, there are enough alternatives to Azerbaijan.

To be sure, technological progress is unlikely to provide significant reasons to necessitate substantially revising the art of conventional warfare with respect to military strategy.¹⁴ Yet when it comes to understanding, explaining, and analyzing in the international strategic environment, taking the geographical factor for granted and as constant would almost certainly prove misleading. Geography, in grand strategic terms, is subject, therefore, to technological factors, and hence can hardly be counted as a permanent feature in the analysis of history and politics. Mackinder's conception, in contrast, takes geography as a primary factor determining the course of history. There is no doubt, of course, that geography has had a certain impact on political outcomes. However, as argued above, factors including personal ambitions and rivalries, the nature of government, economic interests, and even just misperception or foolishness, may be more important than geography.

Mackinder vs Mahan

The original "Pivot" paper of 1904 had stressed the strategic importance of land power, pointing to Russia as the key contender for the Pivot designation: "Russia replaces the Mongol Empire... She can strike on all sides and be struck from all sides, save the north. The full development of her ... railway mobility is merely a matter of time... The oversetting of the balance of power in favor of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight."¹⁵

In his 1943 article for *Foreign Affairs*, however, Mackinder hinted at a revival of sea power, acknowledging, therefore, his "defeat" by Alfred Mahan, an advocate of thalassocracy. "My second geographical concept [the first being the "pivot" or the "heartland"] ... [is] the Midland Ocean—the North Atlantic—and its dependent seas and river basins. ... A bridgehead in France, a moated aerodrome in Britain, and a reserve of trained manpower, agriculture and industries in the eastern United States and Canada. So far as war-potential goes, both the United States and Canada are Atlantic countries, and since instant land-warfare is in view, both the bridgehead and the moated aerodrome are essential to amphibious power..."¹⁶ "Sea power must in the final resort be amphibious if it is to balance land power."¹⁷

Colin Gray confesses that "Mackinder was wrong ... since a maritime alliance overcame a continental alliance in the three great conflicts of the twentieth century."¹⁸ Mackinder himself could not be sure at the time whether his thesis would ultimately trounce Mahan's. He could not know the future global military preeminence of the United States, which first and foremost was built upon the U.S. Navy's ability to wage a successful *sea-borne* air campaign anywhere in the world at any given time.¹⁹ The British geographer was committing a fatal strategic blunder when he wrote that "no adequate proof

¹⁴ Alfred Mahan's definition of strategy and tactics is instructive here. As long as one is in direct contact with the adversary on the battlefield, tactics are in play, according to him, whereas strategy is detached from direct contact. "Before hostile armies or fleets are brought into *contact* (a word which perhaps better than any other indicates the dividing line between tactics and strategy), there are a number of questions to be decided... All these are strategic questions..." (A.Th. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea-Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1957. Original: 1890, p. 7). Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ H. Mackinder, op. cit., p. 436.

¹⁶ H. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4, July 1943, p. 604.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 601-602.

¹⁸ C.S. Gray, "In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On," p. 21.

¹⁹ The twelve aircraft carriers owned by the United States guarantee the undisputed command of the world seas by America, which is the key element in her overall military-political preponderance in the world.

has yet been presented that air fighting will not follow the long history of all kinds of warfare by presenting alternations of offensive and defensive tactical superiority, meanwhile effecting few permanent changes in strategical conditions.”²⁰

It would be interesting to know whether Sir Halford, by switching his emphasis on to sea power, knew that he was implying that his theories were subject to chance and probability. After all, it was World War II, a “friction,” to use Carl von Clausewitz’s term, that Mackinder had not foreseen earlier, that made him adjust his original conceptions. True, he can scarcely be lambasted for being unable to foresee any turn of circumstances, nor is it fair to criticize his writings because they reflected their time. Yet, the claim to have found a “formula” is an extremely grand one, and it is a claim that must be tested vigorously.

Theory

Mackinder’s writings are the first and the last of the great geopolitical theories, if we accept Gray’s definition of a theory. Gray wrote that “although theorists’ concepts frequently tell people what they know already, nonetheless they can perform a most valuable function helping organize, sort, and make sense of a messy reality,”²¹ and Mackinder has for one hundred years scored highly on this. He offers a unique, insightful text that can help shape a strategically thinking mind. If one consults the *Oxford Reference Dictionary*, however, a somewhat different conclusion can be reached. Here, a theory is defined as “a supposition or system of ideas explaining something, especially one based on general principles independent of the particular things to be explained.”²² Mackinder’s work, from this perspective, represents not a comprehensive theory, but policy-oriented prescriptions intended to “influence policy choice so that a geopolitical and geostrategic context unfavorable for Britain should not emerge. His theory contained a warning.”²³ Eastern Europe and Central Asia seemed to be areas of great significance primarily because East-Central Europe was very likely to fall into the hands of Germany, the monster that British imperialism feared the most because the beast had already become the master of continental Europe. The other object of British concern was the bear further to the east of the monster—Russia. With Central Asia firmly secured by St. Petersburg, and the extensive railroad system under construction across the vast Eurasian landmass, British imperialism came to fear Russian imperialism, with an eye on India, as much as it did with regard to Germany flexing its muscles in Europe. Accordingly, the significance of the “pivot of history” seems to have been highly conditioned by circumstances and the overall balance of power.

It is conceivable that Mackinder’s overall work may be regarded as a *historical* masterpiece that, in terms of temporal sweep and conceptual insight, has had very few (if any) competitors. Practically, however, nowadays Mackinder’s “Heartland” is hardly a heartland. Had this concept been *theoretical*, and that theory had proved accurate, present-day Central Asia would have already become a hotspot of a fierce great-power geopolitical competition right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Other regions of the globe, the Persian Gulf and East Asia to name but a few, score much higher in terms of significance in international politics.²⁴ Chris Seiple of the Institute for Global Engagement has struggled to be heard in urging the United States to pay closer attention to the “Heartland,” especially

²⁰ H. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” p. 602.

²¹ C.S. Gray, “In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On,” p. 25.

²² *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, ed. by J. Pearsall and B. Trumble, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 1496.

²³ C.S. Gray, “In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On,” p. 22.

²⁴ See, for example: W. Cohen, *The Asian American Century*, Basic Books, New York, 2002.

Uzbekistan, only to find Washington distancing itself from that country as the time passes on. Central Asia is “a vital region that demands sustained engagement,” argues Seiple. “Yet American foreign policy toward Uzbekistan has missed ... geostrategy.”²⁵

Mackinder and Realism

Geopolitics in general fits into the realm of classical realism within International Relations theory as developed in Western political science. So too does Mackinder, one of the founding fathers of geopolitics. His theories primarily deal with international conflict and the balance of power, with a highlight, of course, on geographical factors. He opined: “...the function of Britain and of Japan is to act upon the marginal region [around the Heartland], maintaining the balance of power there as against the expansive internal forces [of the Heartland]. I believe that the future of the world depends on the maintenance of this balance of power.”²⁶

Gray is quick to attack the liberals who condemn geopolitical study to have been obsessed with conflict; he argues “one might as well condemn medical research for its obsession with disease.”²⁷ One might as well contend that medical research should be likened to peace studies in International Relations, not geopolitics, for the latter does not try to treat the “disease.” The liberals are, of course, incorrect in accusing geopolitical study of inflaming conflict. Thus, while liberals’ claim that international relations can be transformed benignly should be accepted with strong reservations, so should Gray’s belief in the “eventual return of major conflicts.”²⁸ To be sure, limited wars, between small powers, or major powers and small powers, have proved perpetual. Gray’s dictum holds relatively true if he implies a future great-power cold war, short of a hot one because of the extensive nuclearization of major powers.²⁹

There is little evidence to suggest that Mackinder’s prescriptive theory represented a new conception for Britain’s policymakers. Winston Churchill is noted for having asserted once that for four hundred years England’s grand strategy had been to oppose the strongest power on the continent, and that that had nothing to do with rulers or nations—what mattered most was who was the most powerful.

Mackinder’s theory resembles Waltz’s in one important aspect: both are deterministic, one way or another. Waltz, in his most celebrated work, overemphasizes one dimension as having the most profound influence on states’ behavior—the structure of the international system.³⁰ Mackinder, too, tends to downgrade other, sometimes more important, factors whilst stressing one constituent, geography. Nonetheless, Waltz’s is a theoretical attempt to explain international relations, whereas Mackinder’s is simply policy prescriptive.

Conclusion

Sir Halford Mackinder can be charged with an oversimplification of the way the world works, and his views of history and politics can be considered parochial. Like Karl Marx, whose philoso-

²⁵ Ch. Seiple, “Uzbekistan: The Civil Society in the Heartland,” *Orbis*, Spring 2005, pp. 246-247.

²⁶ H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 443.

²⁷ C.S. Gray, “In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On,” p. 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁹ See: S. Sagan, K. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, 2nd edition, W.W. Norton, Baltimore, MD, 2001.

³⁰ See: K.N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1979.

phies suggested that the human society spins around economic interests and class struggle, Mackinder offers us a somewhat “deterministic” approach to international relations and history. He drew the attention of the Royal Geographical Society by asking them “to look upon Europe and European history as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history, for European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion.”³¹ During the discussion following the speech, Spencer Wilkinson aptly raised the following objection: “...these great movements of Central Asian tribes on to Europe and on to the different marginal countries ... [are] over-estimated in their importance. They ... very seldom represented any permanent alterations in the conditions of mankind; and they have been possible because the expanding forces of Central Asia hit upon a very much divided margin.”³²

The British geographer can be contrasted to Thucydides, who implied that a myriad number of factors can influence historical outcomes, or to Clausewitz, who introduced a concept of “friction” suggesting that chance and probability play not less significant a role in determining the outcomes of great events.

Mackinder’s contribution to geography is, without doubt, immense. Yet his belief in the possibility of finding a notorious “formula” to understand, explain, and predict historical outcomes conditioned chiefly by geography, is little more than a great illusion. In the same fashion, one may speculate about the potential re-emergence of Central Asia as a spot of geopolitical significance for great powers. Only when China is powerful enough to challenge the predominant American power, may the “pivot of history” once again become an object of intense interest by extra-regional powers, namely the United States driven by a search for places from where it could deter the expansion of Chinese sphere of influence as well as to exert pressure on Beijing with the manipulation of Uighur and Tibetan separatism. To grasp this does not require familiarity with Mackinder; rather, common sense in political observation and historical knowledge would probably suffice. Major shifts in the global balance of power, with China or Russia as principal challengers, would be necessary for the “Heartland” to again really matter for great powers. Even then, it would hardly be as important a “prize” as, say, East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Persian Gulf. To be sure, “proclamation of the demise of geopolitics is at best premature,” as Gray has put it. Mackinder should be read closely, if only in its own right and as a classical historical work. However, his central concept of “Heartland” should be approached with great caution, as it only hinders a clear understanding of Central Asia’s international relations.

³¹ H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 423.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 438.

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

Dr Nick MEGORAN

*Research Fellow at Sidney Sussex College
(Cambridge CB2 3HU, U.K.)*

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

The author would like to thank Gerard Toal for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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.

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.

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 de-politicizing 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

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 spørsmål 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 G8, 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.

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 crack-downs 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.

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 contextualizing 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.

MACKINDER'S "HEARTLAND" THEORY AND THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

Dr Sevara SHARAPOVA

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
International Relations and Law,
Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

The term "Atlantic partnership" refers to the strong diplomatic and military links between the U.S. and major Western European countries such as Great Britain, Germany and France. The union established by these countries has been durable and reliable, especially during the Cold War. The European allies consistently supported the U.S. in military actions. However, in spite of dependence on the U.S., even during the Cold War the European states had many trade conflicts with the United States.

Nowadays both security and economic issues have emerged as weak points in the Atlantic relationship. The President of the U.S., G.W. Bush, paid his first visit after reelection for the second-term in February 2005 to European countries with the aim of improving these relations. The Atlantic relationship was put under strain when some European partners of the U.S. rejected participation in the U.S.-led military action against Iraq in 2003. This article will address the questions of why some European countries refused to sup-

port that military action, and how they responded to it.

France and Germany were the most prominent states that refused to side with the U.S. over Iraq. Historically, France's foreign policy has been characterized by the "traditional De Gaulle style" which, with some qualification, represents two important trends. On the one hand, it stresses friendship with Washington and NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) to provide an opportunity of balance in transatlantic relations. On the other hand, it seeks the renewal of European military forces to provide some distance from Washington.¹ As for Germany, it has always sided with U.S. military actions since World War II. In 2003 Germany broke with that policy for the first time.

Being one of the most significant and strongest countries of the EU, Germany's position

¹ See: A. Suyomarch, H. Machin, P. Hall, Y. Hayward, *Developments in French Politics*, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 162-171.

cannot be ignored. It is an indication of changes in mutual relations between Germany and the U.S., as well as shedding light on the role of Germany in the EU and its relations with other EU states. What kind of changes of Germany's position can thus be identified? At the same time, the U.K., another important EU country, supported the U.S. in this action. What was the motivation for the U.K. to do so?

Since we study these relationships in terms of security issues, we will focus on NATO. There are two approaches that can be related to the formation and development of NATO and be applied in this case—the theory of military alliance, and Mackinder's Heartland theory.

We think that it is possible to make here two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on various versions of the theory of alliances. According to the autonomy-security trade-off model, leaders may trade away some autonomy for security or some security for autonomy, depending on their domestic and international circumstances.² The surrender of some degree of autonomy in exchange for security was the main reason for Germany to be in the asymmetric NATO union,

² See: B.B. de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, CQ Press, A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc., Washington D.C., 2000, p. 406.

but perhaps in the case of Iraq Germany doubted the capability of the U.S. to provide it with security, especially in the region that is located very close to it and that is very unpredictable. Let us also imagine that Germany chose that position because it had very significant economic interests in Iraq and because public opinion was against the participation of Germany in this operation, while the U.K. had neither economic interest in Saddam's Iraq nor was public opinion against it. We can suggest that Germany opposed the operation in Iraq in order to change the status of NATO from asymmetric to symmetric, and to increase the military capability of European forces. The second assumption is that with the ending of the Cold War the special circumstances that forced Germany to always ally with the U.S. disappeared and for Germany a new period started when it began pursuing a different policy, the basis of which might be the theory of Mackinder. There is a desire to strengthen European cooperation where Germany naturally will be the most powerful country, to take more European common responsibility for the situation in Europe, and also to strengthen relations with Russia.

So, the main question facing us is to assess which of these two is the more important—the rational interest approach, or the traditional geopolitical view of seeking security.

The Theory of Mackinder

The theory of Sir Halford Mackinder about the "Pivot" or "Heartland" region of the world is well known. He divided the world into three main areas: the Pivot region (the pivot state is Russia), a great "Inner Crescent" (Germany, Austria, Turkey, India and China) and an "Outer Crescent" (Britain, South Africa, Australia, the U.S., Canada and Japan).³

Aiming to produce a formula that would "apply equally to past history and to present politics"⁴ he strove for the balance of power. In his opinion such a balance would be threatened if "Germany were to ally herself with Russia" and thus create "the empire of the world."⁵ He also underlined the special role of Eastern Europe and the massive advantage to the country which could

³ See: H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-437; H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Constable and Company, London, 1919.

⁴ H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 437.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

rule this area. On this basis, the role of Germany worried him considerably and he emphasized necessity for America and Britain to pay more attention to this country in order to prevent its strength and influence increasing.

He sought to advise the U.S. and the U.K. about how to ensure their security. It seems that two pieces of advice in particular were most important. The first was the necessity of building up buffer countries between Germany and Russia in order to avoid the situation where these two countries unite their strengths. The second one was to unite the capabilities of the powers of the second region—"Midland Ocean" (Atlantic region) and its "four subsidiaries" (Mediterranean, Baltic, Arctic and Caribbean Seas)⁶ which together are almost equal to the Heartland.

The players that Mackinder paid most attention to in his writings were Germany, Russia and the Midland Ocean (meaning especially the U.S., Canada and the U.K.⁷). As stated above, he sought to pursue a balance of power. That is why, for example in 1943, he supported cooperation between Heartland Russia and the Midland Ocean powers against Germany.

Subsequently, West Germany cooperated with the Midland Ocean powers against the Soviet Union in accordance with the logic of postwar international relations known as the Cold War, which saw East Germany allying with the U.S.S.R. The creation of NATO after World War II was actually one of the practical implementations of Mackinder's vision. Sir Winston Churchill, who highly valued the ideas of Mackinder, was a supporter of NATO.

NATO has been successful in achieving goals that resemble those Mackinder desired: it helped to avoid uniting the strengths of Russia and East Germany and at the same time led to the inclusion of West Germany in the sphere of the Midland Ocean countries and the creation of the Atlantic community. Thus Mackinder's Midland Ocean region became known as "the Atlantic community," a counterweight to the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact. Since that time the Atlantic community has consisted of the countries of Western Europe and Americas—the Latin states on both sides of the Atlantic, the British Commonwealth of nations, the low countries and Switzerland, Scandinavia and the U.S.⁸ It is noteworthy that West Germany was included among the countries of Western Europe. Germany is considered to be a part of this community because it shares the values and common traditions in political, economic and social life of these countries.

According to Mackinder, the U.K. is a country of the Midland Ocean. At the same time, Britain is one of the "chief components of the Atlantic Community" for whom it is vital to be allied with another Midland Ocean country—the U.S. Germany is also very important, and profoundly worried Mackinder as a country which might potentially command the world, and at the same time was part of the Atlantic community at the end of World War II. Like Britain, Germany has been one of the most significant allies of the U.S. Both countries oftentimes took the same political position as the U.S. and supported most U.S.-led military actions. However, Germany resolved to oppose U.S. actions in Iraq while the U.K. supported them. Does this mean that Germany has proved more of a continental country in the sense that Mackinder describes it, and less an Atlantic one?

The Theory of Military Alliance

According to the theory of military alliance, "a military alliance is an agreement between two or more sovereign states concerning the actions each will take in the event that a specified military con-

⁶ H. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4, July 1943, p. 602.

⁷ See: *Ibid.*, p. 596; H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 436.

⁸ See: W. Lippman, "The Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, No. 65, Spring 1987, pp. 884-889.

tingency occurs.”⁹ The weaker members of an alliance compromise more and lose more sovereignty. The strongest partner gains more from the alliance than do the weaker partners.

The motivation for the creation of a military alliance is the desire to enhance strength and security. The strong partner of the alliance is able to act more freely in the region where his weak allies are located, but in return the weak partners get reliable protection and thus more freedom of action.

The variety of the alliances that have occurred in history can be divided into three main types: mutual defense agreements, neutrality and nonaggression agreements, and consultation agreements.¹⁰ Another important classification of the alliances is to divide them into symmetric and asymmetric. In accordance with the theory, asymmetric alliances exist longer than symmetric alliances. In this case the asymmetry means the situation where one strong state creates the alliance with less strong countries.

An important part of the theory of alliance is the notion of reliability. The extent to which your ally is reliable influences whether or not you will suffer aggression. Here the attention should be put to such significant factors as moral considerations. The alliance cannot support the action of another member if he will “hold different expectations of what are normal.”¹¹

The U.S., Germany and the U.K. are the members of the NATO military alliance. NATO was created in 1949, and has always been an asymmetric union because it has included countries that are weaker than the U.S. It was important for the U.S. to create this alliance as it ensured the preservation of its control over Western Europe and the opportunity to act against the U.S.S.R. It was also significant for other countries as NATO freed them to concentrate resources on economic and political issues without needing to spend excessive amounts on security.

This alliance belongs to the category of mutual defense agreements, as all sides are obliged to assist each other in the case of aggression, according to the NATO charter.

The balance of power theory,¹² the theory of balance of threat,¹³ the power transition theory¹⁴ and other models (the capability-aggregation model, the autonomy-security trade-off model, the domestic politics model and the institutionalization model) are the methodical basis for analyzing the operation of alliances under the realist theoretical paradigm. According to Morgenthau and Waltz, the alliance is a necessary tool for keeping the world system in balance and for avoiding the possibility of one country becoming disproportionately strong. The balance of threat theory is slightly different. According to this position, countries unite with each other not against the strongest country, but against the most threatening one. Waltz also considered it important that symmetric alliances are more flexible than rigid asymmetric ones, and that whilst symmetric alliances are compatible with the multipolar system, asymmetric ones are compatible with the bipolar system.

In the power transition theory, one strong country creates an alliance with less powerful countries that share its ideology. Thus each part gets credit in being the ally, and this alliance is enduring because they are bound by common values and ideology.

In the capability-aggregation model the primary reason that countries wish to join the alliance is the desire to improve their security. D. Bennett argues that this reason is the most significant, while hypotheses such as “as allies’ security position improve over time, their alliance will be more likely

⁹ B.B. de Mesquita, op. cit., p. 402.

¹⁰ See: Ibid., p. 403.

¹¹ J. Goldstein, *International Relations*, American University, Longman, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 263.

¹² See: J.D. Morrow, “Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability-Aggregation Model of Alliances,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4, November 1991, p. 926.

¹³ See: D.S. Bennett, “Testing Alternative Models of Alliance Duration, 1816-1984,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 3, July 1997, p. 848.

¹⁴ See: J.D. Morrow, op. cit., p. 927.

to end' as well as 'the greater mutual threats to the members of an alliance, the less likely the alliance is to end,' proved not to be as significant" over time.¹⁵

The autonomy-security trade-off model "suggests that alliances are more likely to break as their members' capabilities change, and that second-rank major power are more likely to form asymmetric alliances as their capabilities increase."¹⁶ In his article, Bennett's research validated this model (as well as others), and he came to the conclusion that "the more the capabilities of alliance members change, increasing or decreasing, the more likely the alliance is to end."¹⁷

The domestic politics model predicts that regime change in one country very often leads to its decision to break off membership in an alliance. This was, however, rejected by Bennett, who concluded from his research that "no support is found, however, for the idea that certain polity changes led to a shortening of alliances." At the same time, he confirmed the idea that liberal countries' alliances last longer than alliances "involving less liberal states." In other words, domestic politics is important "in the term of the regime type."¹⁸

The institutionalization model noted out that the organization strives for self-preservation and development that imply the necessity to increase its size, influence, and budget. Bennett, who also tested this model, made a conclusion that "no support was found" for this.¹⁹

Thus, our hypothesis for Germany's behavior in this case is the following: Germany is going to strengthen European integration in order to be an equal partner of the U.S. That means that Germany would like to change the status of NATO because it determines the position of Europeans toward many military actions. We would like now to figure out what kind of factors play important roles in the desire of the country to change its status in the alliance and at the same time to change the status of the alliance from asymmetric to symmetric.

The Official Positions of the Two Countries Toward the "War on Terror"

The main military events that took place after 9/11 were U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Britain and Germany supported the U.S. in the first operation. In this regard it is especially interesting that even in the days following 9/11, British and German officials showed that despite common solidarity with the U.S., the two sides had some differences in their approach to preventing these acts in the future. So, whilst Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Great Britain, said: "We here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our land,"²⁰ the Federal Foreign Minister of Germany, Joschka Fischer, said almost the same: "In the face of this atrocious crime, Germany stands at the side of the U.S. in a spirit of unyielding solidarity,"²¹ but then added that "I very

¹⁵ See: D.S. Bennett, op. cit., pp. 873-874.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 930.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 870.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 874-875.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 875.

²⁰ *War on Terrorism*. The United Kingdom's contribution to the fight against global terrorism, 3 December, 2003: available at [<http://www.britainusa.com/sections>].

²¹ *Federal Foreign Minister Fischer: Statement on the Terrorist Attacks in New York and Washington*, 12 September, 2001: available at [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029], 3 December, 2003.

much regret that Europe has not made more progress with its political integration. This crisis makes it particularly clear. But we should move beyond the stage of regret. I have always been of the opinion that in this decade we need the political union, a Europe that is a global player, conditioned by the enlargement of the European Union, conditioned by the economic consequences of the euro and conditioned by international crises, which affect us from the outside. In any case, I did not expect it to come to a caesura like this. It will therefore be even more important that we Europeans become politically mature a great deal faster.”²²

The subsequent operation in Iraq was intended to lead to regime change that, in the opinion of some experts, would be in the interest of EU as these countries depend on oil from the Middle East region, and Iraq is the second largest source of oil in the world. For example, Kh. Diab mentioned in his article that “a *quick* regime change in Iraq could be good for EU economies” (emphasis added).²³ Germany’s Chancellor Schroeder was especially outspoken in his opposition to the war. At the same time, the positions of other senior EU figures were very similar. So, the European Commission President Romano Prodi said that “war was not inevitable,”²⁴ and EU foreign policy Chief Javier Solana opined that “without proof it would be difficult to start a war.”²⁵ Germany acted alongside France, Belgium and some other European countries. As for Great Britain, Prime Minister Blair insisted on including in the text of the Joint Declaration of the EU summit (2003) the possibility of waging war as “a last resort” because he thought it would have been “the final opportunity to disarm peacefully.”²⁶

So, it is necessary to establish the reasons that influenced the positions of these two countries. We think that detecting these factors will enable us to test whether Mackinder’s Heartland theory is applicable and can be demonstrated in this case.

Germany as an Ally of the U.S.

Which factors played the most significant role in effecting German foreign policy decision toward Iraq: domestic factors (including public opinion), economic interests, influence within the EU, or geopolitical factors?

German-U.S. bilateral relations

Germany is considered to be both a pro-Atlantic and at the same time pro-European country. This cliché has become one of the characteristics of Germany since the end of World War II. Being in the asymmetric NATO alliance gave Germany more freedom in its political and economic development. This being so, some scholars were able to argue that despite some cooling in mutual relations between Germany and the U.S., Germany generally had good relations with the U.S. because of strategic and military dependence on the U.S. during the Cold War. At the same time, this relationship is difficult to study because much of it was maintained in secret.

²² Federal Foreign Minister Fischer: *Statement on the Terrorist Attacks in New York and Washington*, 12 September, 2001: available at [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029], 3 December, 2003.

²³ Kh. Diab, “Markets Braced for Expensive Iraq War,” *European Voice*, Vol. 8, No. 35, 3 October, 2002: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=002/0013460&FILE=.../session/10].

²⁴ G. Parker, “Europe ‘Will Lead Aid Effort in Iraq,’” *Financial Times*, 11 January, 2003: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005016&FILE=.../session/10].

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ G. Parker, “Warning by EU Leaders to Iraq Narrows Gulf with US,” *Financial Times*, 18 February, 2003: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005194&FILE=.../session/10].

The situation following the decision of Germany to refuse to participate in military action showed that this statement continues to be relevant for current relations between the U.S. and Germany. Despite obvious difficulties between the two countries, they wanted to cover these up. In support of this we can cite the opinion of Colin Powell who said: "With respect to U.S.-German relations, we have been in some turbulent times in recent weeks. We will get over the problem, for the simple reason that Germany and the United States are two nations that are bound together by a common purpose, by common values, by common beliefs and democracy."²⁷

Some scholars have considered historically developed stereotypes as a basis for such conclusions. In particular, according to some researchers, the U.S. harbors historical animosities toward Germany, but not the U.K. This may explain why Americans of German descent—around 23 percent of the total population of the U.S.—have not had the impact on the development of American politics that Irish or Polish Americans have. To some extent the stereotypes of the U.S. toward Germany as "the strongest and historically the most aggressive state in Europe"²⁸ have taken root and influenced U.S. policy toward this country.

At the same time, Germans have tried to change this opinion about them. Since the end of World War II German society has been characterized by pacifism. So, even though military participation in foreign peacekeeping operations was legalized in 1994, Germany still concentrates its efforts on participation in actions of a multilateral character, and avoids military engagements. It tries to provide aid, and to foster a comprehensive security system by promoting the development of disarmament. Chancellor Schroeder frequently underlines this aspect. Thus, "...he drew attention to the transformation in the foreign policy since he took office in 1998, with an unprecedented commitment to peacekeeping missions abroad. Germany was now the world second biggest contributor to peacekeeping after the U.S."²⁹

Public opinion

The position of the government is influenced by German public opinion, which has been very sensitive to the issue of the peaceful settlement of world problems. The solving of the Iraq problem without war was one of the issues that determined the perspective of politicians in the election that was held in September 2002 in Germany. It was very significant for Schroeder and his opponent E. Stoiber. Whereas during the election process, E. Stoiber proposed to side with the U.S. in military action, Schroeder chose to rely on his image as crisis manager.³⁰ The victory of Schroeder showed that the public supported his position even though, from the point of view of some German researchers, he expressed his opinion too clumsily and failed to pursue a subtle approach to the issue on the international stage.

Influence within the EU

After World War II, Germany has steadily striven toward the creation of a united Europe: indeed, Germany has been called the "locomotive" of the European Union. Now many Germans prefer common European positions on many issues of international politics, and in particular significant issues such as Iraq. So, Foreign Minister Fischer, in an interview to the newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* in August 2002, responded to the question about whether the involvement of the Federal Armed

²⁷ R. Wolffe, "Powell Keen to End Dispute with Berlin over Iraq," *Financial Times*, 30 October, 2002: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0004350&FILE=.../session/10].

²⁸ *The Logic of International Relations*, ed. by W.S. Yones, New York, 1997, p. 29.

²⁹ H. Simonian, "Schroeder in Passionate Defence of Iraq Policy," *Financial Times*, 14 February, 2003: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005225&FILE=.../session/10].

³⁰ See: "Politbarometer. Wähler sieht Rot-Gruen nicht am Ende," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 November, 2001: available at [<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/schwerpunkt/749/9740/index.html/deutschland/artikel/183/3>].

Forces would not be in Germany's interests, by answering: "This is not about German interests. We must find a joint European position."³¹

Two main factors generated Germany's position regarding the EU: a pragmatic approach and the lessons of history. The pragmatic approach follows the following chain of logic: the EU is important for Germany because they see in a common Europe an alliance which could increase the capabilities of all European countries and make this part of the world stronger. Hence, Germany considers the EU as a force that is capable of contributing significantly to solving such problems as terrorism. That is why in the Iraq crisis the German government tried to find consensus and a "joint European position."

The impact of history cannot be excluded from the equation. Sensitive to their heritage of two world wars, Germans have tried to decrease the possibility of again dividing Europe. Former Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Kohl, said that without a united Europe these countries could return to a phase of internecine warfare.

The geopolitical factor

Germany is at the center of continental Europe, very close to the region where Iraq is located. In particular, Fischer said also in the interview cited above that the U.S. desire to carry out its operation in Iraq alarmed him because of its proximity to Germany: "The U.S. has the military means to bring about a change of regime in Iraq by force but is it aware of the risks? And is it aware that this would result in a completely new order in the Middle East, not only in military but, above all, in political terms? That would possibly mean a U.S. presence in this region for many decades. Whether the Americans are prepared for this is not at all certain. However, if they withdrew their presence too soon then we Europeans would have to take the fatal consequences as the direct neighbors of this region."

Being a European country with a rich but sometimes tragic and fierce history, Germany values very highly the norms of a common Europe. All Europeans, and especially Germans, are committed to closely following the rule of law. Today Germany, along with other European countries, seeks to export basic democratic values around the world. Its commitment to an open society unites it with the U.S. Germany in this regard sees terrorism as a threat to peace and is willing to collaborate with the U.S. against it. But, consistent with their esteem of the value of open society, the German government believes that every single action should be legitimated, so demanded genuine evidence of Iraq's supposed terrorist links.

Economic interests

As for economic interest of German's businesses in Iraq we could not find any evidence that they had any during Saddam Hussein's time.

Conclusion

NATO, being an implementation of Mackinder's view, was constructed on the assumptions contained in the Heartland theory. However, Germany, which would appear to be a Heartland power and also a part of Atlantic community, sees that its own interests are subtly different from those of the U.K. and the U.S., which is located very far from Europe. The doubts of Germany about the capability of the U.S. to provide it with security, especially in the region that is located very close to Germany, determined the decision of this country to oppose the operation in Iraq and at the same time fueled its desire to increase the military capability of European forces.

³¹ The interview of J. Fischer to the newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* on 7 August, 2002: available at [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029].

It is also obvious that this position is being supported by the German population. The very successful regime change that took place in the 1950s in Germany bred a very peaceful population that is committed to democratic norms and values. That is why since World War II, Germany has been a pro-Atlantic country. This commitment led Germany not to be intolerant domestically, and to strive for legitimacy in foreign policy.

Thus, because its position has been determined by geopolitical factors, we can conclude that Germany's case can be explained well by recourse to Mackinder's theory, augmented by the autonomy-security model and the domestic model.

Great Britain as an Ally of the U.S.

Having analyzed the German position on the Iraq war, we now turn to the U.K. What reasons made Britain choose a position completely opposite to Germany's one? Was it in the interests of Great Britain? To what extent did public opinion affect the decision in this country? This section will address these questions.

U.S.-U.K. bilateral relations

Great Britain has usually been the most important and trustworthy ally of the United States. On the basis of her island position, which sustains a mythology of freedom, she has sought a special close relationship with the U.S., at the same time remaining a European country.

According to the arguments of some scholars, during the Cold War, because of economic problems and its geographical location, the U.K. was no longer able to play "first fiddle" in world politics in its own right, but thus sought to establish a global role by making itself useful to the U.S. in Europe. That is why the U.K. has concluded that only by means of Europe can it maintain its position as a world force, and that its decisive weapon in this quest is NATO.

Geopolitical factors

The island position of the U.K. has determined the nuances of its foreign policy toward the EU as well as Iraq. The fallout of the operations in Iraq is unlikely to be particularly dangerous for the U.K. because of its distance from the Middle East and its island position. Geopolitically it is more important for the U.K. to be in a close relationship with the U.S., because this will be the tool by which it increases its capabilities in world politics.

The EU factor

After the operation in Kosovo, Great Britain increasingly pushed harder for the development of European processes, and to be actively involved in European affairs in order to promote the creation of joint European armed forces within NATO. The U.K. based on its national interests, consistently strives to deepen the Atlantic relationship. One example is provided by Washington's request for the help of Special Forces, Royal Marine commandos, and mid-air refueling aircraft. The U.K. government indicated that it wanted to contribute much more than this.³²

At the same time, the U.K. traditionally is very cautious toward EU integration. Quentin Peel wrote in the *Financial Times* that the British "do not trust it, they do not really understand it, they do

³² See: A. Travis *et al.*, "Poll Shows Voters are Split on Iraq," *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,847305,00.html>].

not feel part of it, but they do not want to be left out of it either.” He also added that “the U.S. and former British colonies” tend to see the EU through a British prism.³³

Public opinion

Public opinion is traditionally very important in the decision making processes in Great Britain. In this case it was not so, although Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the BBC that the government had to “take account of public opinion.” In general, public opinion was against military action. However, this attitude was not as strong as it was in France: in the French capital an opinion poll showed that public opinion had hardened against going to war. In December 2003, for example, 87 percent were against military action, up from 77 percent six weeks earlier.³⁴

Opinion polls on U.K. attitudes toward the Iraq crisis carried out by the *Guardian* newspaper over one year shows these fluctuations (see Table 1). A September 2002 poll asked what would be necessary for people in order to support the war: 65 percent of voters said they would be prepared to back a war against Iraq if evidence could be demonstrated to show that Saddam Hussein has acquired new chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.³⁵ November’s poll showed that two-fifths remained opposed to military action.³⁶ The largest number of people who were against the war was in February 2003.

Table 1

British Public Opinion about the War on Iraq
(According to the *Guardian’s* poll.* Table drawn by Sevara Sharapova)
(percent)

	September 2002	October 2002	February 2003	March 2003	April 2003	September 2003
In favor	65**	42	29	38	56	38
Against		37	52	44	29	53

* ICM interviewed a random sample of 1,001 adults aged 18 and over by telephone. Interviews were conducted across the U.K. and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults.

** If the dossier shows evidence that Saddam has acquired new chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

According to a poll from March 2003, following the commencement of the U.S.-U.K. invasion, “public opinion has shifted dramatically toward military action against Iraq, with the anti-war lead narrowing from 23 to only six points in the past month. This has been accompanied by a recovery in Tony Blair’s personal rating.”³⁷ Interestingly, even the attitude toward the U.S. President had changed:

³³ Q. Peel, “Talking Europe, Thinking Britain,” *Financial Times*, 25 September, 2003: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011351&FILE=.../session/10].

³⁴ See: A. Travis, “Support for War Falls to New Low,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,11538,879105,00.html>].

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ A. Travis, “Support for Attack Jumps, but Opposition Still in the Majority,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,916494,00.html>].

the poll also showed quite good ratings for Bush with 53 percent of voters saying they had confidence in him to make the right decisions on Iraq, while 43 percent had no confidence in him.³⁸ In April the situation continued to be favorable for Tony Blair. But even in the time of strong support among the population “the level of opposition among British public opinion” was “still significantly higher than at any time during the first Gulf war, the Kosovo crisis or more recently the war in Afghanistan.”³⁹

According to the *Guardian*'s poll in June 2003, one third of those questioned declared that they had lost faith in Labor over the Iraq conflict, while over half said they believed the government had “deliberately exaggerated” the risk from “weapons of mass destruction.” “Overall support for the military action in Iraq also declined, failing from 64 to 58 percent, although over two-thirds of those polled said that, regardless of WMD, the war had been justified in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime.”⁴⁰

This situation created a split in society: a clear majority—51 percent—believed the war was justified. However, at the same time, the proportion of those who believed that the military attack on Iraq was unjustified was also up—by two points—to 42 percent. Negative attitudes toward President Bush also hardened: “While earlier this year British voters broadly endorsed his strategy for tackling the Iraq crisis, his personal rating in Britain is now worse than Tony Blair's, at minus 30.”⁴¹ The evaluation of Blair became increasingly highly negative, with voters commonly regarding him as Bush's “poodle.” 41 percent of voters told ICM that they agreed with the statement that “Tony Blair acts as the foreign minister of the U.S. and does anything that Bush wants him to do.” But 9 percent of voters, including 71 percent of Labor voters, said they do not share that view and agreed instead that he “does what he believes is right for Britain.”⁴²

The Guardian reported in September 2003 that Blair had decisively lost the debate over Iraq with a clear majority of voters now saying that the war was unjustified. In the immediate aftermath of the war in April public support for the war peaked at 63 percent. By July it had slipped to 51 percent but a majority still said the war was justified. In September for the first time a clear majority said the war was unjustified (53 percent), and only 38 percent believed it was right to invade Iraq.⁴³

Economic interests

There is no evidence that Britain had substantial economic interests in Iraq.

Conclusion

The U.S. provides Great Britain with security and gives it the possibility of playing an important role in Europe. There is no danger for Great Britain from Iraq in geographical terms. Great Britain's support of the U.S. had a dual purpose. It provided the U.S. with moral support, and to some extent enhanced the military capability of the U.S. (as the capability-aggregation model would suggest), but it was also a way of demonstrating gratitude to the U.S. for supporting the role of the U.K. in Europe (in the terms of the autonomy-security trade-off model). As for the domestic model, it allows us to predict the vulnerability of the current position of the U.K. government because the support inside the country is not as strong as it was before. Consequently, this means that a substantial segment of the population will not be in favor of the Labor Party.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ B. Whitford, “Labour Damaged in Polls by WMD Claims,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,979420,00.html>].

⁴¹ A. Travis, “Iraq Rows Slash Labour's Poll Lead,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,1003342,00.html>].

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem.

Thus, Mackinder's theory, as well as the capability-aggregation, autonomy-security trade-off, and the domestic model, can be applied in the case of Britain's position on the Iraq war. The Heartland theory can be seen to be operating as the basis of the British government's decision to side with the U.S., whilst the models of alliances are subsequent to this basic position.

C o n c l u s i o n

Mackinder's theory is still relevant, and the German and British governments' attitudes toward the U.S. action in Iraq are a case which proves this. This example shows us the extent to which Mackinder's Heartland theory determines the characteristics of the foreign policies of the main western countries. The logic of Mackinder, as C. Gray said in his work *In Defence of the Heartland*, is still applicable as "it is a 'timeless truth' that the great peril to the West can come only from Eurasia."⁴⁴ Hence the power who rules Heartland commands the world, according to Mackinder's logic. Regardless of who controls it, it will remain a potential danger for western countries.

This logic has forced the western countries either to decrease the capabilities of the Heartland, or to effect change within it in order to ensure that the countries of Heartland become pro-Western.

Western and non-western countries have some differences. The most significant of them are cultural diversities and the resultant differing political cultures which derive therefrom. Regime change in Iraq should have made this country closer to western countries in regard of the above-mentioned aspects. At the same time, it should also have distanced Iraq from the non-Western culture of Eurasia. Therefore, the logical conclusion of this argument is that Germany, as a western country, should have supported the action in Iraq out of self-interest. In fact it did not. Why is that?

Let us consider one possible explanation for Germany's—the geopolitical. According to this logic, the goals of the U.S. and of Germany were different. The first is a Midland Ocean country, and the second is a country whose location affords it some ability to rule the Heartland. Different geopolitical conditions determine the foreign policies of different states. Geopolitical factors remain significant in the decision making processes of any country. They may change their policies over time, but nonetheless the basic approach remains the same.

Although being an Atlantic country, Germany at the same time occupies a unique geopolitical place amongst European countries. Germany possesses real and dual capability: it is one of the strongest countries of Europe, and it can also rule the Heartland. During the Cold War, when there was a real threat to its security from the Soviet Union, Germany allied with the U.S. It was also in the interests of the U.S. as well as the U.K. to establish such an alliance with Germany as a potentially powerful country and almost equal to Russia. Cultivation of common values has led to some changes in the relations between these powers, but different geopolitical interests have been the main factor that determines their positions. Nowadays when there is no threat from Russia—the significant country of Heartland—Germany has chosen the position of providing itself with security.

Germany has started to feel that together with its European partners it can carry out an independent foreign policy. In this case Germany plays the role of one of the most significant countries of the EU in order to try to resist American hegemony and create a balanced world. As it was in their past when the European countries created so-called "Concert of Europe," today the new European concert is not organized around the common goal to prevent revolutionary movements, but rather to support the democratic values by constraining American hegemony. This is the reason why Germany desires to change the status of NATO, and to create a more balanced world.

⁴⁴ C. Gray, *In Defence of the Heartland. Global Geostrategy*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, New York, 2005, p. 31.

This position has been supported by public opinion. So, according to a public opinion survey of 8,000 Americans and Europeans carried out by the German Marshal Fund, only 37 percent of the American respondents want to see Europe as superpower, whilst 70 percent of Europeans would like the same. Europeans want to be an equal partner for the U.S. So, “45 percent compared with 62 percent in 2002, see strong U.S. leadership as desirable—with Britain, the Netherlands and Poland strongly backing such a role while majorities in France, Germany and Italy strongly oppose it.”⁴⁵ It is also important that “majorities in Europe believe the EU and not the U.S. is vital to their national interest.” Finally, “82 percent want Germany to play an active role.”⁴⁶

These different geopolitical factors can explain the different attitudes of Germany and the U.K. toward the EU and the transatlantic relationship. So, even though both the EU and the transatlantic relationship are very important elements of the foreign policy of both countries, Germany considers itself primarily as a part of the European Union, whilst Great Britain also considers itself as a part of it, but with a special status derived from its island position. It is more significant for the U.K. to maintain a close connection with the U.S. than it is for Germany. To have a strong EU and to have good relations with Russia are particularly in the interests of Germany, as these strengthen its position in world politics.

Obviously, Mackinder’s theory still works as a basic point in decision making on important issues of foreign policy. The foundational differences—geopolitical factors—continue to make their presence felt in spite of all the efforts which have been taken in order to eliminate them.

We think that the understanding of this fact was the reason both why Germany opposed the U.S.-led action in Iraq and Britain supported it. We have no another explanation for their behavior.

We found out that all the other factors that could influence the decision making of these countries toward U.S.-led military action in Iraq played minor roles in comparison with the geopolitical factor. The reason which induced the decision of Germany not to support the U.S.-led military action was the absence of strong evidence about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the very high potential cost of the operation, and the unpredictability of negative results due to Germany’s relative proximity to the region. Great Britain, on the other hand, considered the maintenance of the Atlantic union, bound through common values and interests, to be of paramount importance.

Both countries have strong economic relations with the countries of the Middle East and they both depend on its oil. But neither Germany, nor Great Britain has had serious trade relations with the government of Saddam Hussein, and therefore economic interests were not the major issues at stake.

Public opinion in both countries evinces concern with the terrorist threat but, according to polls carried out throughout the year, it generally did not support military action. Even in Great Britain, the change in public opinion in support of the war took place in the month an intelligence file about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was published (which later proved to be false, provoking a political scandal), and whilst the operation in Iraq initially seemed successful. However, soon public opinion returned to its initial position of its negative attitude toward the invasion.

The factors influencing the behavior of Germany are domestic factors and at the same time the need for more autonomy of action. So, we can confirm that the first hypothesis about the theory of alliances was also right, as well as to agree with Bennett who concluded that the domestic model as well as the autonomy-security model are especially important for the prediction of future alliances.

⁴⁵ J. Dempsey, “Survey Tracks Relations between U.S. and Europe,” *Financial Times*, 4 September, 2003: available at [http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011138&FILE=.../session/10].

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

Generally, we can conclude that Sir Halford Mackinder articulated a theory which remains relevant in spite of changed times, technologies, and values. As in nature where two almost equal animals in limited space will always compete with each other, so there are two almost equal groups—Heartland and Midland Ocean—in international relations. They both possess very good geographical settings, access to natural resources, and populations, and they both always like to compete successfully with each other. The Midland Ocean countries have done this better because they have been better organized, and because their representative produced the theory which has helped them to understand that reality and to make efforts in order to preserve their position in the world. Obviously, we can witness at work the famous British logic of “divide and rule” where Midland Ocean countries choose, depending on circumstances, either Germany or Russia as an ally, and through that alliance seek to dominate the world. It seems to us that too great a concentration of power in the hands of the U.S. was a reason that Germany changed its policy in order to rebalance the Heartland as an equal to the Midland Ocean.

Halford Mackinder wrote in his famous paper *The Geographical Pivot of History* “...we should expect to find our formula apply equally to past history and to present politics.”⁴⁷ It seems to us he made such formula where three players—Russia, Germany, and the Midland Ocean—try to balance each other through the creation of alliances.

⁴⁷ H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 437.