Chapter Four

Evolution and Analytical Framework of Heartland Concept Critical Evaluation & Modification
Around 1900 Ratzel presented a coherent pattern for political geography emphasizing space as the basis of power, which led him to look at North-America, Russian Asia, Australia and south America as the future power houses of history. It took Sir Halford J. Mackinder, British Geopolitician a catchy simple map to marry the significance of space and strategic location with the dichotomy between land and sea power.

'Heartland Concept' is probably the best known and most widely used metaphor in geopolitical theory. The term coined by the English geographer was presented in his thesis under the title of 'The geographical Pivot of history', in 1904, before the Royal geographical society in London. The original paper, presented most of the principal ideas involved in his theory, though the modified original version twice, one in 1919 and next in 1943, in light of world developments.

His concept of political geography was similar to Ratzel's in that it was influenced by the same objective: the development of laws of spatial relations which would explain the political rise and fall of states and civilizations. A
number of propositions would illuminate geographical patterns of political history. From these patterns the present and future political relevance of certain geographical configurations could be revealed. These geographical patterns would also act as a guide for the future developments of the international state system.

One of his basic propositions was that political data and their relationship to physical geography has to be given coherence and made intelligible by being subsumed under a number of laws: 'we hold that no political geography can exist that is not built upon and subsequent to physical geography. At the present movement we are suffering under the effects of an irrational political geography whose main function is not to trace classical relations.' (Mackinder, 1889:15). The second proposition which Mackinder put forward is that of the geographical configuration and location within which political power is exercised is of importance. Thus the power of any particular state is relative to its location and the physical features which it encompasses. Mackinder maintained that if political geographers did not base their explanations of the changing political relevance of states geographical location, then any conclusions drawn about the contemporary and future political relevance of various geographical

---

conceptualisations would be erroneous: ‘A superficial analysis is likely to lead into error: on the one hand by failing to go beneath the superficial similarity of things essentially differing, on the other hand by failing to detect the essential similarity of things superficially unlike.’ (Mackinder, 1904: 78).

The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)

In many respects the original version of Mackinder’s heartland theory which was formulated in 1904, pronounced, for the first time in the history of international relations, a closed international state system.

From the present time forth, in the post columbian age, we shall again have to ideal with a closed political system, and none the less that it will be one of world wide scope. (Mackinder, 1904: 422)

As a geographer he was well aware that mans use of his physical environment constantly changed and that environment itself was subject to change albeit at an almost imperceptible pace. This is one of the most important facts to be borne in mind while analysing the geopolitical ideas of Mackinder. The substance of his idea, at the preliminary stage of its development, is contained in the following lines: ‘Man and not nature initiates, but Nature in

---


3  Ibid., p.422.
FIG 1
H.J. MACKINDER'S HEARTLAND CONCEPT OF 1904 (WORLD ISLAND AND WORLD OCEAN)
large measure controls. My concern is with the general physical control, rather than the causes of universal history.\(^4\) (Mackinder, 1904:422).

In his first theory, Mackinder argued that the inner area of Eurasia was the pivot of regional world politics. The main focus to measure great geographical features against the events of history was on what was called the eternal geographical pivot of history.

It was an area which was roughly contiguous with the present day boundaries of the Soviet Union (See fig.1) Mackinder deemed it historically significant that the flat steppes had facilitated the raids of Mongol tribes on European and Mediterranean lands: ‘The hordes on European and Mediterranean Lands: ‘The hordes which ultimately fell upon Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century gathered their first force 3,000 miles away on the high steppes of Mongolia’\(^5\) (Peary, 1959: 21) The crusades were interpreted by Mackinder as the beginning of a European war against these hordes from inner Asia. The confrontation between sea and land-power was for Mackinder one of the basic patterns of international politics. He gave a mature expression to geopolitical

\(^4\) ibid., p.422.

concepts. He combined space and location to a geographical setting that gave pre-eminence to one continental portion of the world. In doing so, he brought to light the significance of the geographic distribution of Landmasses and bodies of water. He interpreted history as essentially a struggle between land and sea power.\(^6\) (Mackinder, 1904:423). He was the first thinker to assess global geopolitics from the point of view of a seaman and a Landman.

It’s the ‘pivot’ around which he organized all the rest of the land and water areas of the globe. His premise is perhaps more easily grasped if his organization of the continents and oceans is first understood. He notes that three quarters of the area of the world is water, one-quarter land. The oneness of the several oceans and the unity of the land masses are better comprehended if thought of in terms of a world ocean and a better comprehended if thought of in terms of a world ocean and a world Island. Politically, the pivot area was entirely Russian in Eastern Europe and largely Russian in Asia, although it included western China, part of Mongolia, Afghanistan, and, except for a narrow coastal strip in each case, Baluchistan and Persia. The rest of Eurasia was termed by Mackinder, ‘the inner or Marginal crescent’.\(^7\) (Mackinder, 1904: 423).

---

\(^6\) op.cit., p.423.

\(^7\) ibid., p.423.
FIG 2
ARC OF MARGINAL AND INSULAR CRESCENT
H. J. MACKINDER 1904
Around the ‘pivot’ is the arc of coastlands, the inner crescent of amphibian states whose unifying characteristics is the fact of drainage that empties into navigable seas. It consists of three sections: the coastlands of Europe, the Arabian middle east desertlands, and the monsoon lands of Asia. (Fig 2). It is an area that looks both to the land and the sea, an intermediate belt lying between the Heartland and the waters of the world ocean. Except for the mid-east deserts, this is an area of generally navigable rivers, of plentiful rainfall and fertile soil, and in general, of dense population. The powers of the pre-world war period were numbered among these coastlands states, or were located in the off shore Islands. (Britain and Japan belong to these latter states).

Beyond the inner crescent are the world ocean and the widely separated lands of the outer (Insular) crescent. The offshore Islands, the outlying Islands (including North and south America, and Australia and Africa south of the Sahara comprises this belt of territories. Mackinder, in 1904, placed little importance on these outer-lands as compared to those of the world - Island. Although later in his writings he modified this view.

What is the significance of this geopolitical organization of world regions as Mackinder Viewed it? He feared an over balancing of power in favour of the pivot area that might result in ‘its expansion over the marginal
lands of Euro-Asia, which in turn would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and that then, the empire of the world would be in sight. (Mackinder, 1904:436). In 1904, he did not anticipate Russia (which occupies the pivot area) as the nation to fear, but visualized instead that Germany might attempt to conquer and become the master of the world Island and eventually conquer the world.

This might happen if Germany were to ally herself with Russia. The threat of such an event should, therefore, throw France into alliance with the over-seapowers, and France, Italy, Egypt, India and Corea would become so many bridge heads where the outside navies would support armies to compel the pivot allies to deploy land forces and prevent them from concentrating their whole strength on fleets.

Makinder's assertion in 1904 were a warning that the basic pattern of international politics could be reversed again, in favour of land power:

'But the land power still remains, and recent events have again increased its significance. While the maritime people of western Europe have covered the ocean with their fleets, settled the outer continents, and in varying degree made...
tributary the oceanic margins of Asia, Russia has organized the Cossacks.\(^9\) (Mackinder, 1904:244) The confrontation between sea and land power was, for Mackinder, one of the basic patterns of international politics. This struggle was, however, relative to changes in one of the important variables on which Mackinder’s main axioms were based, that of transport and weapons technology: changes in land transport technology, such as railway network, which Mackinder claimed would span the whole of the Eurasian continent, would have profound political consequences. In the close political system which was emerging in international society, these changes in transport technology made the idea of world domination, for the first time, a viable political aim:

‘Railway 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 heartland of Euro - Asia.'\(^10\) (Mackinder, 1904:245).

Mackinder perceived, the importance of integrating geography with the rest of political knowledge as opposed to the subordination of all political knowledge to the primacy, of geography ‘The actual balance of political power

\(^9\) ibid., p.244.

\(^10\) ibid., p.245.
at any given time is, of course, the product on the one hand of geographical condition, both economic and strategic; and on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organisation of the competing people'.\(^{11}\)

(Mackinder, 1904: 437).

Mackinder’s geopolitical thesis aimed to give an understanding of the international state system from a set of propositions which paid attention to such variables as changes in transport technology. The essence Mackinder’s theory was affected by academic vogue:

‘It is a curious characteristic of western scholarship that from time to time European savants have adopted certain exotic areas and cultures as the foci of their studies. One can recognize Persian periods, Chinese periods, Arab periods in the changing Kaleidoscope of academic and artistic fashions of the past, reflected in the founding of centres of learning and the institutions of specialised journals. Just as at present (1964) it is Africa that is in fashion, the Vogue at the beginning of the century was inner Asia. Here was a little Known and therefore exciting area - a frontier of exploration populated by strange, nomadic folk... and at the beginning of the twelfth century the battleground of Russian, British and

\(^{11}\) ibid., p.437.
chinese imperial designs.\textsuperscript{12} (Kirk, 1964:7-8).

Hence in 1904 he suggested 'we should expect to find our formula apply equally to past history and to present politics. The social movements of all times have played around essentially the same physical features'.\textsuperscript{13} (Mackinder, 1904:422).

**Democratic Ideals and Reality (1919)**

In 1919, as a warning to the states men assembled for the Paris Peace conference, Mackinder published his famous treatise, Democratic Ideals and Reality, giving a more detailed account of his geographical ideas. He pointed out that three quarters of the world consisted of water and one quarter of land. The world Island comprising the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa and forming one landmass constituted two - third of the entire land area. North America, South-America, and Australia made up the remainder. The world Island had seven eights of the world population.

There is one ocean covering nine-twelfths of the globe there is one continent the world Island covering two twelfths of the globe; and there are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} W.Kirk, 'Geographical Pivots of History, Inaugural Lecture, University of Leicester, 24 November 1964, pp.7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{13} H.J. Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot of History', 1904, p.422.
\end{itemize}
FIG 3
MACKINDER'S EXTENDED HEARTLAND AREA • 1919 MODEL
many smaller Islands, where of North America and south America are, for effective purposes, two, which together cover the remaining one twelfth. The term 'New world' implies, now that we can see the realities and not merely historic appearances, wrong perspective." (Mackinder, 1919: 65).

In his major work, Democratic Ideals and Reality, published in 1919, Mackinder redefined his pivot area along more expressive lines, (Fig.3) and he borrowed the felicitious term Heartland from Sir James Fairgrieve. (Fairgrieve, 1941:329).

That whole patch, extending right across from the icy, flat shore of Siberia to the torrid, steep coasts of Baluchistan and Persia, has been inaccessible to navigation from the ocean. The opening of it by railways for it was practically roadless beforehand - and by aeroplan routes in the near future, constitutes a revolution in the relations of men to the larger geographical realities of the world. Let us call this great region the Heartland of the continent'. (Mackinder, 1919: 73-74). But the basic opposition was the same - Land power, which he held to have a growing advantage, versus sea power.

In 1919, Mackinder set out what the political objectives should be for the peace negotiators at versailles. He attempted to trace the classical relations

---


16 op.cit., pp.73-74.
between the geographical features of the heartland and Eastern Europe, and the bearing which variables such as the power of a particular state or region would have being relative to its location and the physical features which it encompassed. The rising level of transport technology that change the political meaning of certain locations and configurations were also considered. From these variables, Mackinder, in the rationalist traditions, attempted to make the international state system and its future fortunes explicable in terms of geographical causation in political history:

Unless you would lay up trouble for the future, you cannot now accept an outcome of war which does not finally dispose of the issue between German and Slav in East Europe. You must have a balance as between German and Slav, and true independence of each. You cannot afford to leave such a condition of affairs in East Europe and the Heartland as would offer scope for ambition in the future, for you have escaped too narrowly from the recent danger.17 (Mackinder, 1919:194).

But it is important to stress that Mackinder always maintained the importance of integrating geographical knowledge with the rest of political knowledge. 'Geographic must underlie the strategy of peace if you would not have it subserve the strategy of war'.18 (Mackinder, 1919: 195). Thus geographical determinism and historicism, the two labels which are most

17 ibid., p.194.
18 ibid., p.195.
frequently applied to German geopolitics, cannot be applied to the original formulations.

While Democratic ideals and reality was written to influence the participants of the Paris peace conference, initially it enjoyed little publishing success.19 (Sprout, 1979). But it did have one important consequence. On 23 December 1919 Mackinder was appointed by the then foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, as British High commissioner to south Russia. This appointment can be interpreted as nothing extraordinary. When it is considered that the geopolitical perspectives of these two men were broadly similar:

'Curzon and Mackinder shared a profound interest in the problems of geostrategy Curzon as viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905 had dealt at first hand with the problems of imperial defence, and in particular had experienced the pressures placed upon the subcontinent by Russian expansion into central Asia.'20 (Blouet, 1976:231).

19 'Mackinder's book published in 1919 was a position power of the British delegation at the peace Conference at Versailles, and developed into a book. It was published in the United States in 1919, and went out of print quickly. It was also narrowly received. I never came across more than six reviews; Interview with Professor H. Sprout, 18 April, 1979.

FIG 4
SOUTHERN HEARTLAND AND (WORLD ISLAND DIVIDED INTO SIX NATURAL REGIONS)
Mackinder also envisaged another heartland, of less importance, which he called the southern heartland (Fig 4). This was Africa south of the Sahara one of the best natural barriers in the world as well as a barrier between the Blacks and the whites: 'We may therefore, regard the inter interior of Africa south of the Sahara as a second heartland, let us speak of it as the Southern heartland, in contra diction of the Northern heartland of Asia and Europe'.21 (Mackinder, 1919:80). The two Heartlands were similar in that both possessed rivers, grasslands, and forests. From the viewpoint of communications by land, the Bridge of Arabia afforded a link between the Northern and southern heartlands. Thus, in 1919, Africa and Eurasia were together named the world Island Africa south of the Sahara i.e. the southern heartland, and the other lands of the outer crescent were regarded as satellites of the world Island.

Mackinder advocated what can be described as a compartmentalisation of the area designated South Russia. This would be in addition to the new nation - states which were being created under the Treaty of versailles. With the creation of a number of buffer states - white Russia, the Ukraine, South Russia, Georgia, Armenia Mackinder hoped to reverse permanently the long history of expansionism of the Russian state. If these objectives could be fulfilled then the danger of a heartland power expanding to dominate the Eurasian continent would

---

21 op.cit., p.80.
be greatly reduced. Such views found few friends in the cabinet: 'Cabinet on Russia - Mackinder's absurd report. As I had to leave early I let PM know in writing that I disagree with it.' 22 (Fisher, 1920).

In terms of assessing the future political potential of the Russian state, taking into account the combined effect of geographical and demographic factors, combined with the organisational ability of the Bolshevik regime, Mackinder's report could be described as prophetic. He asserted the emergence of 'A New Russian Czardom of the proletariat, the advance of Bolshevism sweeping forward like a prairie fire towards India and creating a world which would be a very unsafe place for democracies'. 23 (Mackinder, 1920:97).

This volume by Sir Halford Mackinder has the rare quality of timelessness. Although it was written in 1919 with special reference to the then impending settlement with Germany, there is no better statement anywhere of the facts of geography, which condition the destiny of our world. There is nowhere else no realistic an appraisal of the relative strength of sea power and land power and the manner in which the balance between them may be upset by

inventions such as railways, motor transport, submarines and aviation. No other work of a generation ago foresaw so clearly the circumstances which tended to bring about the resurgence of a powerful, militarized Germany, governed by an autocrat. His theory - the first succinct, authoritative, statement in English of geopolitical theories, is credited by General Karl Haushofer with having made a deep impression on German strategical thought. Through Haushofer, in turn, Mackinder has had an impact on Hitler's mental processes, with the result that some of his ideas have found their way into the pages of 'Mein Kampf'. This is notably true of Hitler's policy towards eastern Europe, the region which Mackinder has designated as the geographical pivot of history.

The explanation of the Nazi adoption of Mackinder's views, is not to be found in any sympathy on his part for German imperialism. In fact, he warned that by reason of her ambitious and her strategic position in relation to the rest of Europe, Germany is in a position constantly to threaten the security and independence of other states, including our own. He has been keenly aware from the beginning that German dreams concerning domination of the world were quite capable of becoming realities. Forty years ago - when Mahan's theories concerning the supremacy of sea power were at the height of their prestige, Mackinder told his fellow countrymen that Britain had no 'indefeasible title to
maritime supremacy,\(^{24}\) (Earle, 1942: xxii) that sea power could be out flanked by land power, that the rise of great industrial states in Europe (nourished by protectionism) could undermine the foundation of British economic and strategic security, that it was no longer possible for England to pursue a policy of limited liabilities. Further more he warned that, should Britain once surrender the long lead which she then held over her competitors, she probably would have lost for all time both her naval supremacy and her position as a great power.

He saw that Germany and Russia were so situated on the continent of Europe that, should they combine or should either acquire control of the other, they would rule the world. He understood that modern transportation was reducing continents to Islands. Europe, Asia and Africa constituted not three continents but one - the ‘world Island’. This ‘world Island’ is the true centre of gravity of world power the western Hemisphere being only an Island of lesser proportions, lesser manpower, and lesser natural resources. The ‘Heartland’ of this world Island is central and eastern Europe, so situated geographically and strategically that it could dominate the ‘world Island’ as a whole. Hence his classic warning which he argued that the victors should keep in mind.

A victorious Roman general, when he entered the city amid all the head turning splendour of a 'Triumph' had behind him on the chariot a slave, who whispered into his ear that he was mortal. When our states men are in conversation with the defeated enemy some airy cherub should whisper to them from time to time this saying:

Who Rules East Europe Commands the Heartland
Who Rules The Heartland Commands the World - Island
Who Rules The World Island Commands The World.\(^25\)
(Mackinder, 1919:113).

Democratic people as Sir Halford points out, dislike to think in terms of strategy and power politics, and they will do so only under compulsion. This compulsion is now being exerted by forces so powerful and ruthless that they cannot be ignored. Hence democratic Ideals and Reality, which provides significant exposition of the foundations of strategy, is genuine contribution to our war effort. 'There can be no more momentous questions shall we succeed in soberly marrying our new idealism to reality?'\(^26\) (Mackinder, 1919:7).

One of the outstanding purposes of this work was to give a more correct understanding of the basic issues of the last war and of the true shortcoming of

\(^{25}\) op.cit., p.113.

\(^{26}\) ibid., p.7.
the treaty of versailles. The war of 1914-1918 was considered a struggle for power. For Germany and her allies, it was an attempt to seize whatever power might be necessary to dominate the heartland of the world Island and thus ultimately to rule the world. To Great Britain and the United States, it presented the imperative necessity of retaining that minimum of power without which they could not survive as free people. As Mackinder puts it, we were fighting not merely for the idealistic purpose of making the world safe for democracy but for the reality of emerging triumphant in ‘a straight dual between land power and sea power’.27 (Earle, 1942: 24). He always questions, ‘what if the great continent, the whole world Island or a large part of it, were at some future time to become a single and united base of sea power? would not the other insular bases (Great Britain and the United States) be outbuilt as regards ships and outmanned as regards seamen? Their fleets would nodoubt fight with all the heroism begotten of their histories but the end would be fated.... If we take the long view, must we not still reckon with the possibility that a large part of the great continent might someday be united under a single sway, and that an invincible sea-power might be based upon it?28 (Mackinder, 1919:70).


28 op.cit., p.70.
Mackinder was a believer in the league of Nations. But he felt that the league of Nation had a ‘housing problem’ - that is, that it could live in a Europe free from domination or the threat of domination by military power. He saw that the temptation of the moment is to believe that unceasing peace will ensue merely because tired men are determined that there shall be no war, whereas reason and the experience of history point to the probability that international tensions will recur even after a struggle of world wide propositions. He was convinced that Germany, despite the defeat of 1918 would be able in a short time to mobilize enough strength to upset any treaty which did not place effective and lasting restraints upon Prussianism.

He believed that the danger was less that there would be ‘injustice’ to Germany than that there would be too much ‘justice’. He felt that an indecisive peace that is to say, one which would permit a German military resurgence - would be a catastrophe. He pointed out, in fact, that the only decisions which last are those which are truly decisive, citing as evidence the unconditional victory of the union in the civil war and the settlement thereby for all-time of the questions of slavery and secession. As he said, failure to secure the full results of the victory of 1918, was no service to the Allies, to Germany, to Europe, or to the world.
FIG 5
THIRD VERSION OF MACKINDER'S HEARTLAND CONCEPT - YEAR 1943
Mackinder's endeavour, was to measure the relative significance of the great features of globe as tested by the events of history, including the history of the last four years, 1916-1919, and then to consider how to best adjust ideals of freedom to these lasting realities. But first according to him was to recognize certain tendencies of human nature as exhibited in all forms of Political Organization.

The great organizer is the great realist. Not that he lacks imagination very far from that, but his imagination turns to "map and means," and not elusive ends.29 (Mackinder, 1919:14).

The Round World and the Winning of the Peace' (1943)

The third and final version of Mackinder's heart land theory appeared in 1943. The details of Mackinder's theory altered as circumstances changed. By 1943, he had left far behind the notion of a Heartland defined in terms of Arctic ocean and continental river drainage. (Fig. 5) Instead he claimed that 'for our present purpose, it is sufficiently accurate to say that the territory of the USSR is equivalent to the heartland.'30 (Mackinder, 1943:598). For the first time the geographical area which was termed the heartland was interpreted as being synonymous with the soviet union.

29 ibid., p.14.

As with earlier versions of the heartland theory, Mackinder maintained that the balance of political power at any given time was a product of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, combined with the number and organisational ability of a particular population:

The vast potentialities of the Heartland, however, to say nothing of the natural reserves in Lenaland are strategically well placed. Industries are growing rapidly in such localities as the southern urals, in the very pivot of the pivot area, and in the rich Kuznetsk coal basin in the lee of the great natural barriers east of the upper Yenisei river.\(^{31}\) (Mackinder, 1943:600).

The most important geopolitical contribution which this third version made was the identification for the first time of a geographical area apart from the heartland which was capable of sustaining, economically and strategically, a major political power. By 1943, Mackinder found it necessary to revise somewhat his original organization of states and his interpretation thereof. In that year, as both the USSR and the united states continued to prove their increasing power and strength, he:

1) changed somewhat his ideas of what constituted the Heartland by excluding Lenaland;

\(^{31}\) ibid., p.600.
recognized that the fulcrum of world power rested not only in the world
- Island but in the industrial might of the United States as well, and
began to realize that the threat of domination of the world Island and of
the world could come from the pivot area itself, namely the USSR. He
wrote:

All things considered, the conclusion is unavoidable that if the Soviet Union emerges from this war as
conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land power on the globe. Moreover, she
will be the power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The Heartland is the greatest
natural fortress on earth. For the first time in history it is manned by a garrison sufficient both in
number and quality.\(^32\) (Mackinder, 1943:601).

Mackinder recognized the area that was called the Midland ocean to have
the capability to balance the combined area of the heartland and eastern Europe
which he predicted would be dominated by the Soviet Union after the end of the
second world war. He changed the area of the heartland slightly by moving its
boundaries to the east, but it still was essentially the territory of the Soviet Union.
He envisioned a continuation in the postwar world of the alliance between
lenaland (his new name for the heartland) and the ‘Midland Basin’ (North
America and western Europe) against Germany. As we know now, with the
defeat of Germany this alliance soon waned, However, the midland ocean

\(^32\) op. cit., p.601.
alliance soon took on the guise of NATO (North Atlantic treaty organization) including the specific elements noted by Mackinder, that of the Midland Ocean - the North Atlantic and its dependent seas and river basins. Without Labouring the details of that concepts, let me picture it again in its three elements -

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.33 (Mackinder, 1943:602).

This version is also evidence to the fact, that Mackinder interpreted the political relevance of geography not as a passive environment in which states act out their relations, but as being dynamic in nature and closely related to changes in transport technology, especially that of air power, although Mackinder was sceptical about some of the more extravagant claims which were then being made about air transport technology.

It can only be said that no adequate proof has yet been presented that air fighting will not follow the long history of all kinds of warfare by presenting alternatives of offensive and defensive tactical superiority, meanwhile effecting few permanent

33 op.cit., 602.
FIG 6
THREE VERSIONS OF MACKINDER'S HEARTLAND CONCEPT
changes in strategical conditions.\(^{34}\) (Mackinder, 1943:600).

Mackinder regarded, in 1943, the Heartland thesis as 'more valid and useful today than it was either twenty or forty years ago'. The heartland concept was thus shifted to conform to a national power base one of the many things remodeled by the five-year plans. He wrote that, it is sufficiently accurate to say that the territory of the USSR is equivalent to the heartland, except in one direction. This exception is 'lenaland' or Siberia east of the Yenisei. West of the Yenisei lies what I shall describe as Heartland Russia... it contains four and a quarter million square miles and a population of more than one hundred seventy million.\(^{35}\) (Mackinder, 1943:599).

A Critical Analysis of Mackinder's Model

The three versions of Mackinder's heartland theory, (Fig. 6) published over forty years, were of importance for a number of reasons. First, the initial assertion of the existence of a geographical pivot of history had a remarkable coincidence with the inception due to changes in transport technology of a closed political system in international society. Mackinder attempted to elucidate a geographical pattern or transparency of political history that took account of

\(^{34}\) op.cit., 600.

\(^{35}\) op.cit., p.599.
such variables as rises in transport technology and the power of any particular state being relative to its location and the physical features which it encompassed. It attempted to give both an account of the present and future political relevance of the area termed the geographical pivot of history as well as a guide for statesmen.

Secondly, Mackinder’s theory of spatial relationships and historical causation recognised that, ‘Each century has had its own geographical perspective’.36 (Mackinder, 1919:39) Mackinder, geographical pattern of political history contained two important differences. First, it was global in its scope. Secondly, it was designed among other things to act as a guide for foreign policy makers. Mackinder’s geopolitical theory raises a member of questions for example, to what extent has geopolitics, as a theory of spatial relations and historical causation, moulded the perceptions and actions of the makers of strategic policy?

Politics is a medium through which geographical configurations, and geographical patterns of political history, may become relevant, in that geographical perceptions can account for much of the interaction between states:

It is clear that although each individual, each generation, and each government develops its own

peculiar view of the world as a result of geographical location and historical tradition, there are a number of major perceptions, which have persisted over long periods and exercised great influence upon strategic thinking and political behaviour. Sometimes it has been a map constructed on a particular projection, that has served generation of statesmen as the basis of political and military planning. Sometimes it has been a compelling theory of spatial relationships and historical causation that has moulded the viewpoint and action of political leaders.37 (Kirk: 23-4).

Mackinder’s heartland theory was formulated to illuminate the redundancy of the basic geopolitical patterns of the nineteenth century, the opposition between British naval power operating along the circumferential maritime routes and Russian land power trying to find a breach in the encircling ring. Mackinder’s theory underlined the continually changing nature of the political meaning of geography in international society.

It is important to understand the may in which the political relevance of geography was perceived in the soviet union itself. Until 1963, ‘geographical deviation that is, environmentalism, was one of a number of real or imaginary heresies’.38 (Matley, 1966). Since 1963, when the communist party officially


38 For a comprehensive insight into the role of geography in the Soviet Union, See I.M. Matley, ‘The Marxist Approach to the Geographical
rejected Stalin’s rulings, soviet geographers have tended to interpret geopolitics being no more than the hand maiden of western imperialism: ‘We could cite a number of examples of geographers capable of objective research in their own field of study. Who cease to be objective and turn into plain ideologists of imperialism, when they assume the role of Geopolitician i.e. when they attempt to justify the claims of an imperialist power to world leadership and the need for the organization or military blocs, and closed political grouping, or a new campaign against the East. The arguments they offer are not particularly original, they still come down to the old geopolitical dogmas, no matter how purified... Mackinder’s old idea (1904) about the ‘heartland’ of Eurasia and the opposition between ‘maritime’ and ‘continental’ nation has again become popular.’39 (Isachenke, 1962:425).

Mackinder’s geographical thought exerted a tremendous influence on the thinking of the Geopoliticians. He was the first to point out the pre-eminence of a continental portion of the world on the basis of the advantage of movement. The was also the first to deal with global geopolitical problems from the points of view of a sea power and a land power.


Although without doubt the most influential and perspective geopolitical thinker was Sir Halord Mackinder. Unfortunately, many of his critics and admirers both neglected the evolution of his views. (His explicitly geopolitical writings span the period 1904-43) and vulgarized, and even perverted, his arguments. As with most great conceptions, Mackinder's basic theses were of a devastating simplicity (rather like Mahan 'discovery' of sea-power). The basic idea is that, while Eurasia was for centuries properly considered a promontory, as a consequence of the greater efficiency of sea, as opposed to overland communication and the impenetrability of the Arctic ocean, the railroad revolution of the late 19th century foreshadowed, such a change in the comparative advantage of land over sea communication that Eurasia - Africa should properly be considered a vast two-continent. 'World Island'.

The alleged comparative ease of land as opposed to sea transport (in the rail-road age) is of fundamental importance to geopolitical theory. Mackinder observed, in 1904, that there is what he termed a pivot area in Eurasia which is inaccessible to sea power. This pivot area was defined, initially, as that region where the rivers drain into the ice-bound Arctic ocean or into inland seas (the Caspian and the Aral). Just as the 'pivot area', was beyond the reach of (British) sea power, so the sea powers of his outer crescent (Great Britain, Japan, the United States) were invulnerable to the direct application of land power. But
Mackinder predicted that the coming of railroads, and eventually air routes, within the pivot area of the world Island, would alter the power relation between sea power and land power to the disadvantage of the former. Above all else, Mackinder feared that one or a combination of powers (Russia Germany in particular) would utilize the new means of rapid overland communication, first, to create a vast imbalance of power in Eurasia, then to conquer the Eurasian world Island and eventually to utilize the resources of the world Island in a bid for world conquest. He foresaw that such a bid, on the basis of the rival resource bases of the world Island and the outer crescent, would succeed.

In his major work, Democratic Ideals and Reality, published in 1919 Mackinder redefined his pivot Area along more expansive lines, but the basic opposition was the same land power, which he held to have a growing advantage, versus sea-power. Mackinder was not deterministic, nor was he an apostle of world conquest or of brutal realpolitik. Contrary to a popular image of geopolitics, this leading theorist in the genre was profoundly humane in his motive, which were as different from those of the semimystical creed of geopolitik as could be imagined. Mackinder did not claim that land power, in the form of one power or a tight axis of powers, must come to dominate the world Island (or great continent as the sometimes preferred to call Eurasia) and hence the world. Rather did he claim that, the grouping of lands and seas and of
fertility and natural pathway, is such as to lend itself to the growth of empires and in the end of a single world empire. He foresaw a danger (to Britain in particular his primary concern), not an inevitability to the insular powers of the outer crescent, in support of countries on the inner crescent, should therefore seek to ensure that no single power or alliance came to control all of the resources of the world Island.

It is paradoxical that Mackinder’s world view was focused, in its formative years, upon a posited fundamental rivalry between British sea power and Russian land power - a focus entirely natural to a British writer prior to 1907 (the year of the Anglo-Russian entente). Mackinder predicted that the ocean highways of the world, the interior lines of communication of the British empire, were about to be overtaken in the relative strategic advantage by a railroad age in, and leading from, the Heartland. In short Russia would enjoy superior access to the keys to British overseas wealth and influence around the inner crescent.

Leaving aside for the moment some technical weaknesses in Mackinder’s theory, the paradox was that the danger to British power until the early 1940s did not stem from a dynamic and aggressive Eurasian Heartland but rather from the vulnerability of that Heartland to conquest by peninsular European Germany.
Mackinder did, of course, recognize this variation upon his early scenario. Indeed, in 1919 he urged most forcefully the construction of a tier of states in Eastern Europe that could serve as a strong buffer zone for the protection of the Soviet Republic against a German attempt to control the Heartland. It was in this context that Mackinder coined his famous dictum of commanding the world. Mackinder was wrong, he had too little faith in the robustness of his own conception. In 1941-43, Nazi Germany not only ruled East Europe, its armies stood on the banks of the Volga at the gateway to Asia - and yet the Heartland power recovered and secured total victory. By 1943, Mackinder de facto acknowledged the frailty of the dictum, for he sketched, though only in barest detail, the thesis that, a threat that might be posed by the Soviet Union after the defeat of Germany. Mackinder pointed to the development of a second ‘embankment of power’, embracing America, Britain, and France.

Pride of place has been given to the theories of Halford Mackinder, because this author judges his conceptions to be of the greatest inherent interest, the most relevant to contemporary policy, and to have been the most influential.

Mahan’s writing on Sea power are often contrasted with the land power orientation of Mackinder. Such an opposition is largely misleading. Mackinder did not challenge Mahan’s argument that British power and influence in the
FIG 7
SPYKMAN'S CONCEPT OF THE RIMLAND
world was substantially a consequence of the rise of British sea power. But Mackinder did claim that Mahan greatly underrated the importance of the geography of the British Isles as a secure, indeed well-nigh impregnable, base for the development and exercise of sea power. Further more, Mackinder argued that because of the coming of railroads and air routes, fewer and fewer of Britains Naval bases and facilities around the littoral of the Eurasian-world-Island would have secured hinterlands, and that more and more of the great ocean highways would come to warrant description as ‘closed seas’, dominated by land power (and land-based air power). But the most important of Mackinder’s arguments vis-a-vis Mahan and lesser sea power enthusiasts (apart from the crucial claim that the revolution in transport technology had changed the comparative advantage of land as opposed to sea communications) was that dominant land power in the world - Island would permit the development of dominant sea power.

**Variants of the Heartland Concept**

*N. J. Spykman*

Writing in the early 1940s, an American political scientist, Nicholas Spykman, (Fig.7) took over the geographical elements of Mackinder’s theory and offered a strong critique that rested upon the historical facts of the first half of the 20th century. Spykman was highly critical of Mackinder’s *Leitmotiv* of the
opposition between British sea power and Russian land power. Spykman reminded his readers that world wars I and II were not simple land power-sea power struggles. Furthermore, Spykman was not convinced that Mackinder’s Heartland (which spykman - with Mackinder - interpreted, correctly as of 1942, as being effectively coterminous with the Soviet Union) had the potential, in the foreseeable future, to make the predicted bid for control of the world-Island. Indeed, Spykman boldly offered a counterdictum to that offered by Mackinder in his 1919 book.

Who Controls The Rimland Rules Eurasia; Who Rules Eurasia Controls and Destinies of The World.⁴⁰ (Spykman, 1944).

Spykman observed that the United States had twice this century entered a world war in order to prevent the domination of the Eurasian (essentially European and, in 1941, East Asian also) Rimlands by a single power. In short, Spykman did not challenge the fundamental thesis of Mackinder, that maintenance of a balance of power on the world-Island was essential to the security of insular powers; rather did he disagree as to the potential strength of the Eurasian Rimlands - if organised by a single power or axis - vis-a-vis the Eurasian Heartland. Spykman must be judged to have over estimated the resting power of the Eurasian Rimlands and to have underestimated the power potential

of the Soviet Union. But looking at the world of the late 1980s, the theories of Mackinder and Spykman yield a common logic for policy. The United States cannot afford to tolerate the effective control of Eurasia-Africa by the Soviet Union. It must serve, in its own vital interest. It was the functional successor to Great Britain as an active balance of power on, and bearing upon, the Rimlands of Eurasia. Such a geopolitical task is as essential as it should - given steadiness of purpose and an appropriate popular understanding of that purpose - be successful.

Superficially, the geopolitical perspectives of Spykman appear to be similar to Mackinders. Spykman’s theory, like Mackinder’s represented a systematic attempt to make the assertion that political predominance is not just a question of power. What is also of importance is the geographical structure of the field within which power is exercised. This approach asserted the possibility that explanations could be deduced from geographical patterns, which would indicate the present and the future political relevance of certain geographical configurations. Both theorists maintained that international politics was explicable in terms of a particular geographical pattern of political history. Mackinder maintained that the political importance of a particular geographical configuration was dynamic in nature and relative to changes in transport technology. It is at this juncture that the differences between Spykman and
Mackinder begin to manifest themselves. Spykman maintained that the geographical factor in a state’s foreign policy and in international society was passive and unchanging.

Because the geographic characteristics of states are relatively unchanging and unchangeable, the geographic demands of those states will remain the same for centuries, and because the world has not yet reached that happy state where the wants of no man conflict with those of another, those demands will cause friction. Thus at the door of geography may be laid the blame for many of the age-long struggles which run persistently through history while governments and dynasties rise and fall’.41 (Spykman, 1938:29)

Yet Spykman asserted that the power of a particular state was relative to its location and its physical features. But geography was not interpreted as being the single determining factor.

The geography of a country is rather the material for, than the cause of, its policy and to admit that the garment must ultimately be cut to fit the cloth is not to say that the geography of a state cannot be ignored by the men who formulate its policy’.42 (Spykman, 1938:181).

Spykman’s main contribution to geopolitical theory was to focus attention on a geographical area which he called the inner crescent or the Eurasian


42 ibid., p.181.
rimland. Like Mackinder's geopolitical theory, Spykman's theory was formulated within the context of a close international state system, in which the idea of world domination was a viable potential aim. It was presented as a strategic confrontation between the western Hemisphere consisting of the north and south American continents and the Eurasian continent which consists of the heartland and the rimland combined. Any final balance of political power which emerged would be a product of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, combined with the number and the organisational ability of the respective populations.

If the new world can be united or organised in such a manner that large masses of unbalanced force are available for action across the ocean, it can influence the politics of Europe and Asia. And if the old world remains divided and balanced, that external force can play a determining role in its political life. If, on the other hand, the old world can be united and organised in such a manner that a large mass of unbalanced power can become available for action across the ocean, the new world will be encircled and depending on its powers of resistance may have to submit to the dictates of the old.43 (Spykman, 1942:179).


157
The most important difference between Spykman and Mackinder is that explanations which were deduced from the geographical area that Spykman described had actually played an important part in world history: 'Between the centre of the Eurasian land mass and the circumferential maritime route lies a great concentric buffer zone. It includes western and central Europe; the plateau countries of the Near East, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, Tibet, China and Eastern Siberia, and the three peninsulas of Arabia, India and Burma-sian. In this border zone have developed all the great civilization of the world except Egypt and carthage on the southern littoral of the European Mediterranean and the early civilization of Sumatra and Java on the southern littoral of the Asiatic Mediterranean.'\textsuperscript{44} (Spykman: 1944:181).

Spykman's geopolitical analysis of the aims of Russia were essentially static and unchanging, to break through the rimland area to warm-water ports: 'For two hundred years since the time of Peter the Great, Russia, has attempted to break through the encircling ring of border states and reach the ocean. Geography and sea power have persistently thwarted her.'\textsuperscript{45} (Spykman, 1944:182).

\textsuperscript{44} ibid., p.181.
\textsuperscript{45} ibid., p.182.
Apart from drawing attention to a geographical area, such as the rimland which had, unlike the Heartland, played an important part in world history, Spykman’s geopolitical analysis was also based on the continued existence of a balance of power system within which political power was infinite. An accurate assessment of interests by states would dictate restraint. If there were no possibility of balancing power then there would be no possibility of restraint. With respect to the Eurasian continent Spykman maintained that if a balance of power system could be maintained, then the United States could in the post war world play the role of balancer: ‘As long as Stalin’s armies fight in Russia, Chiang Kai Shek’s troops resist in China, and British sea power rules the Indian ocean, the Eurasian land mass will remain balanced and ours will be the deciding role in the power struggle of the old world’.46 (Spykman, 1944:194). Yet this stance was qualified in that it was recognised that the outcome of the second world war would determine the role which the United States could play in a balance of power system: ‘The outcome of the second world war will determine whether the United States is to remain a great power with a voice in the affairs of the old world, or become merely a buffer state between the mighty empires of Germany and Japan.’47 (Spykman, 1944:195).

---

46 ibid., p.194.
47 ibid., p.195.
Some of Spykman's intuitive predictions are remarkable. In a manner similar to Mackinder, Spykman maintained that explanations could be deduced from these geographical configurations and patterns which he drew attention to. These explanations were also to act as a practical guide for political action for both statesmen and policy makers. Spykman's geographical explanations tended to treat the geographical area on which they were focusing attention as a military actor when it did not have such capabilities. This in turn led to a universalisation of western concepts of spatial political organisation. These concepts were often erroneous, in that they did not reflect the actual geographical environment but the one perceived by theorists and policy makers.

Implicit in Spykman's geopolitical analysis was the continued existence of a balance of power system where states would pursue limited national objectives. His remark in December 1941 about the future political alignment of the rimland Axis powers is an excellent illustration of this important point. What he proposed was that the United States should seek only to remove the then existing regimes of Germany and Japan, but that the United States should not

48 'On 22nd December 1941 Just two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Spykman presented a paper in New York at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers. In this paper he stated that the rimland axis powers, of Japan and Germany would after the end of the war become the new allies of the United States in Countering Russian expansionism. This assertion not surprisingly caused uproar at the time'. Interview with Professor Jean Gottman.
have as its objective the complete destruction of these two states. In the postwar world they would have a major role to play in restraining the soviet union which would, according to Spykman, attempt to achieve hegemony in the Eurasian rimland. Many academics perceived Spykman’s emphasis on a theory of spatial relationship and historical causation from which explanations could be deduced about the contemporary and future political relevance of various geographical conceptualisations as having a close affinity to German geopolitics:

**Karl Haushofer**

In Germany however, Mackinder’s warnings about the future ascendancy of land power were widely read, and had a profound influence on Karl Haushofer. Mackinder’s assertion of the strategic implication for western maritime powers if the Russian Heartland were to ally itself with Germany, complemented the Geopolitical perspective which had been advocated in the nineteenth century by such conservative thinkers as Konstantin Frantz.

In 1913 Haushofer advocated an alliance of interests between Germany Russia and Japan. This later became Known as the ‘inner-line: ‘A community of interests between Japan, Russian and the central European Imperial power would be absolutely unassailable. Haushofer was within an already established
geopolitical perspective'.

Whittlesey, 1942:p.65).

My father knew that geography was in a very difficult position between the maritime powers and the heartland (Russia) and that there could be no real union between the Heartland (Russia) and Germany because of different systems of social and political thinking. He once said, 'Germany occupies the geopolitical situation of a man who is set free in a China shop in utter darkness, blindfold. He knows that every movement will break china, so the only thing he can do is to be quiet and have patience, and perhaps the situation will arise where he will have freedom of movement.'

Dr. Heirz, 1978).

From Mackinder he took the idea of the struggle of land locked versus oceanic peoples and held that the conflicts in policy between states derive from this basic antagonism. He went to great lengths in his attempts to develop this idea.

Kaul Haushofer repeatedly acknowledged Mackinder as one of the few masters of geography to whom he was indebted: quoting Ovid's dictum, 'It is a duty to learn from the enemy.' P. Whittlesey, German strategy of world conquest London, F. Robinson, 1942, p.65.

Interview with Dr. Heirz Haushofer, son of Karl Haushofer, 22nd July 1978.
Post Mackinder Era

Since the second world war, the geopolitical concept of the world has developed in following directions:

Diversified geopolitical concepts based on the Heartland idea and the concept of national powers. With the enunciation of the theory of the inner portion of Eurasia as the Heartland, in accessible to sea power, there appeared a tendency to characterise the inner portions of certain other regions as the Heartland. The most notable example of this is to be found in the writings of J.B. Cressy and Renner.

In 1945 observing the greats trength of the united states, cressy propounded a heartland theory of Mackinder. He said that the real centre of the heartland lay in the southern Hemisphere and specifically in Northern American rather than in Eurasia. He wrote:

If there is anywhere a world citadel or Heartland, it may well lie in North America rather than in Eurasia. The American continent has adequate size, compact shape, internal accessibility, a central location, good boundaries, access to two oceans, favourable topography, rich minerals, excellent climate, and dynamic spirit in its people.51 (Cressy, 1946:245).

---

Thus, Cressy defined the Heartland as a ‘power citadel’ satisfying all the above mentioned power criteria, including access to the oceans.

Renner propounded his Heartland concept in the light of air transport. According to him, every great power, perhaps every state has a Heartland of its own. He stated: ‘The natural world fortress, or heartland, has been expanded including the inner part of all the landmasses, which form a ring around the Arctic, Mediterranean Europe, Asia and North America’.\(^5\) (Renner, 1944:44-45). This Heartland concept has two aspects—transpolar and national. The transpolar Heartland combines a region of high attitude areal mobility—the Arctic region with the interior power bases of Eurasia and North America. As in the ‘pivot area’ of Mackinder, mobility is the chief strategic factor.

Donald Meinig

The second type of heartland is confined to the interior power bases of each nation, especially of the powerful nations of the region. The heartland-Rimland debate has received the attention of a number of political geographers.

---

FIG 8
MEINIG'S CONCEPT OF FUNCTIONAL HEARTLAND
Donald Meinig in 1956 made a significant contribution, (Fig.8). He pleaded for a functionally defined heartland on the basis of broad similarity of physical conditions, basically similar cultures, an interior nodal position possessing the nexus of historic land routes interconnecting various ancient centres of civilization on the oceanic margins of Eurasia.

Meining suggested therefore, that on a functional basis we must recognize the Rimland as divided into an inner (i.e. towards the heartland) oriented and an outer (i.e. towards forces in opposition to the Heartland) oriented rimland. The former was termed as continental rimland and the latter as maritime rimland. Wherever global politics is viewed in terms of the Mackinder thesis, the dynamic criterion of functional orientation within the rimland must be kept in view. (Fig 8).

**Hooson: The Heart of the Heartland**

D.J.M Hooson\(^{57}\) (1962) attempted to identify the core of the real heart of the Heartland rather than considering it in terms of global strategy. Hooson concluded that we have the continued existence of the established "European" core from Moscow to the Black Sea, and a significant eastern zone stretching from the Volga to Lake Baikal. Hooson regarded this eastern zone as the one of critical importance, for he thought, what happens to and in this zone... might well have a decisive effect on the fortunes of the Soviet Union as a world power.

**Cohen's Model of Geostrategic and Geopolitical Regions**

Saul Cohen is the only geographer working in this field who has attempted a complete revision of the Heartland - Rimland thesis. His basic purpose is to question the policy of containment with its implication that the whole Eurasian littoral is a potential battleground. He exposes, once again, the poverty of Heartland - Rimland theory. His revision of strategic thinking consists, therefore, of providing a much more military flexible and geographically sensitive model.

In his 'geography and politics in a world divided' Cohen (1973) offers

---

FIG 9
COHEN'S GEOSTRATEGIC REGIONS AND THEIR GEOPOLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS
a hierarchical and regional world model. According to Cohen there is not a strategic unity of space but rather there are separate arenas in a fundamentally divided world. Geostrategic regions are functionally defined and express the interrelations of a large part of the world.

Cohen's (1973) use of these concepts to produce a world model as shown in (Fig.9). He defines just two geostrategic regions, each dominated by one of the two major powers and termed, 'the trade dependent maritime world and the Eurasian continental world'. His initial spatial structure is thus similar to the old geopolitical models. However, he goes a step further and divides each geostrategic region into five and two geopolitical regions respectively. In addition, South Asia is recognised as a potential geostrategic region. Between the two existing geostrategic regions there are two distinctive geopolitical regions, which are termed 'Shatter belts' - the middle east and south - east Asia. Unlike other geopolitical regions these two are characterized by a lack of political unity, they are fragmented with both geostrategic regions having 'foot holds' in the region. Essentially Cohen is saying that not all part of the Rimland are equally important and policy must be sensitive to this fact. Selective containment rather than blanket containment is the policy line with his geographical realities.
In a revision of his model Cohen (1982) has further emphasized the divisions of the world strategic system. He has modified some of the details of his initial spatial structure—notably the designation of Africa south of the Sahara as a third Shatterbelt. But the major change is one of emphasis on ‘Second order’ or regional centres of power. In the original model geopolitical regions were the basis of multiple power nodes and this comes to the fore in the revised model. Three geopolitical regions have developed new world powers - Japan, China and Europe to join the US^A and the USSR. Other geopolitical regions have developed, second order powers which dominate their region, such as India, Brazil and Nigeria. Cohen assesses twenty seven states as second order powers and beyond these he defines third fourth and fifth order states.

In his latest revision Cohen (1992) suggests an even more complex model with further differentiation between the functions of places across the world.

**A Critical Revaluation of Mackinder’s Thesis**

It is virtually a generation since Sir Halford Mackinder first averred that ‘Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island,’ yet, despite the apparent mutability of international affairs, this proposition raises the most momentous question of our times. Since the Soviet Union controlled most all of the heartland of mackinder’s conception till end of cold war his proposition,
translated into contemporary terms, invites, as a matter of no mere academic importance, the inquiry is the Heartland still relevant in the new world order? The Chinese mainland are significantly located, in Mackinder’s terminology, beyond the Heartland, and beyond its transitional zones, in the outer coastlands themselves. But it is both necessary and fitting, as Isaiah Bowman emphasized\(^58\) that in a world of rapid technological progress the geography of territory, since it is ever changing, should be continually revalued. It is important, too, to be ready to discard old geopolitical concepts if, with the passage of time, they can be shown to have lost their validity. While it must be admitted that Mackinder’s geopolitical philosophy has not become irrelevant to the international world of to-day, it is nevertheless clear that it contains generalizations and assumptions which scarcely withstand close analysis. And it, as must be assumed, one of the possibilities of the near future is the renewal of war on a grand scale, it is well to re-examine his sweeping prognostications to determine their present worth. Prediction, a normal function of the experimental sciences, is inevitably more difficult as it is more unusual in the social sciences. A prediction of a political geographer\(^59\) originally foreshadowed


in 1904, developed in a book in 1919, restated with some modifications in 1943, and republished in 1945, has attracted and must continue to attract wide and serious attention. This is due not merely to the rarity of such oracular utterances, but also to Mackinder’s position as elder statesman among British geographers and to the world-wide importance of his prophecy. This he expressed in his Democratic Ideals and Reality in 1919 and repeated during the second world war in the following dramatic propositions.⁶⁰

Who Rules East Europe Commands The Heartland.  
Who Rules The Heartland Commands The World-Island.  

What is so remarkable about these affirmations is the extent to which they have been accepted the geopoliticians of Nazi Germany and Japan certainly tried to apply them and the fact they appear largely to have escaped critical examination. This daring and unnerving pronouncement of a single mind, albeit one maturely philosophic, steeped in the study of history and geography and sharpened in the world of affairs, still appears challengingly to define the ultimate and inescapable destiny of that deeply riven political structure of the world to the repair of which so much effort in thought and action is now being applied. The Delphic Oracle, it may be recalled, was often successful in its

Pelican edition, p.133.
prophecies, for it had behind it what we should now call a good intelligence organization. Sir Halford Mackinder had a sound knowledge of the world in its spatial and historical aspects upon which to base his prediction. But this was essentially a long-term of at least a generation, which included two world wars, it belonged, of course, to that kind of prediction not easy to gainsay, since the chance of its being literally and exactly tested was small.

The world which Mackinder studied, as he was quick to see, was, and so it remains, a single 'going concern', a delicate interlocking mechanism, susceptible to jarring by actions at any point. But this world, finite though it is in its areal contours of land and sea, is for its human occupants rapidly and ever changing. Indeed, 'geography changes as rapidly as ideas and technologies change' were have continually to make new maps and newly evaluate the geography of land and sea areas. Notably our whole conception of mobility and accessibility, considerations to which Mackinder attached prime importance, have been revolutionized by the internal combustion engine and the aeroplane. No less, too, have science and technology in their applications to industry and to the art of war wrought changes to which no end can be seen. The advent of new offensive weapons, notably the atom and hydrogen bombs, in themselves make it ever more necessary to re-examine time honoured assumptions of geopolitical thinking. In the world of international relations, rooted although these are to a
physically unchanging planet and conditioned as they are by a rich and perhaps too well remembered history, it is surely both unwise and dangerous to accept, as a predetermined end, the prediction that world hegemony must, on certain assumptions, inevitably pass to the rulers of one specified portion of the Earth. It is unwise, because neither History nor Geography, either singly or in combination, given the indeterminate character of social behaviour, warrants predictions of this precise kind.

Let us look more closely at Mackinder's theses and the assumptions upon which they rest before considering their relation to the Soviet Union and their validity in the world of to-day.

The World-Island, East Europe, and the Heartland

The "World-Island" of Mackinder raises no problems: by this effective shorthand he embraced the land-linked continents of Europe, Asia and Africa and emphasized their relation to the oceans. "East Europe" which he distinguished from "West Europe." also raises little difficulty it was that broadening zone of Europe, dominated numerically by Slav speaking peoples and continually a zone of political instability, which extended eastward of the peninsulas of Jutland and Istria and far as the Azov Sea, the Don, and the Volga above Stalingrad. northward it included Sweden and south-eastward Asia Minor.
berlin and Vienna lay within its western confines. The Heartland is a somewhat more complicated geographical concept, although a remarkable achievement in generalization.

Mackinder conceived the Heartland in two ways-in terms of the area of internal drainage in Eurasia and also in terms of that area of Eurasia which was (under the ruling conditions of the time) inaccessible to sea-power. He regarded the Arctic Ocean east of the White Sea as virtually a physical barrier to human movement and as comparable with the Caspian Sea and Lakes Aral and Baikal, as basins of internal drainage affording no outlets to the routeways of the world oceans. On either basis the heartland amounted territorially to much the same area. A colossal sub-continental entity, it was separated and almost barred off by transitional zones from the peripheral seaward lands of Europe and Monsoon Asia. The seclusion and natural security of the Heartland, it will be recalled, were attributed to facts of physical geography: the Arctic Ocean, frozen almost everywhere the whole year through, to the north, and mountain chains and vast desert plateaux to the south and east. In contrast, on its western flank the Heartland had easy contact with the well-settled lands of European Russia with Russia in the strict sense. The components of the Heartland, itemized in terms of regional geography, were the Volga Basin, Kazakhstan, Siberia, Central Asia, the Iranian and tibetan plateaux, Politically the heartland was largely russian or
Chinese, together with the semi-independent buffer states of Afghanistan and Persia, and Baluchistan.

Now, it might well seem paradoxical, in view of its remoteness, its climatic rigors, its vastness, and its relative emptiness of humanity, that the Heartland should possess marked geopolitical significance. Vast it certainly is the equivalent of no less than five ninths of Asia’s area or of nearly one-fifth of the whole habitable earth. Virtually empty it was, and, to a lesser extent, still is. Its total population may be estimated to day at 100 millions - about one-twenty fifth of the world’s population, although probably three times what it was when mackinder first, and so emphatically, directed attention to it. Clearly his appreciation of the Heartland did not spring from demographic considerations, although he was the first to publicize the concept of man power as an index of productivity and military power. The Heartland derived importance from its sheer extent. What mattered no less was its natural security and its median position in Eurasia. Nature, he argued, had endowed it not only with remarkable defensive strength, but also command of interior lines of overland communication. So, curiously to us, with memories fresh of the fundamental role of economic potential in modern war, Mackinder was little concerned here with

61 'Man Power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength,' in The National Review, 1905.
either man power or wealth, actual and potential. Geographical position, physical remoteness from the world oceans, natural security from attack afforded by the frozen Arctic seas and by the mountain desert steppe expanses of Central Asia, and space as virtually to defy the logistics of an enemy approaching from without all these considerations seem to have entered into Mackinder's evaluation of the Heartland as a citadel for defence and as a secure base for offensive warfare.

That certain important and inescapable geographical realities entered into Mackinder's conception of the geopolitical role of the heartland is abundantly clear. Whether so much can be deduced from the inert facts of physical geography is no less clearly a matter for discussion. It is true that in history Mackinder found in the recurrent theme of the movements of nomad horsemen from the steppes of Asia into the adjoining lands of Europe, Asia Minor, India, Manchuria, and China evidence of the pressure extended outward from the heartland into the settled agricultural periphery. Within the southern areas of the Heartland the horse caravan did indeed provide much mobility along the almost endless road of the steppe. So far as it went, the historical record served to support Mackinder's these in that the Heartland played a largely active and positive part vis-a-vis the settled peninsular lands of Asia and Europe. yet the theme of nomadic migrations from Central Asia has been perhaps
overemphasized: there were forceful movements into the Heartland which show at least its penetrability. Witness the penetration of Siberia. Some of the native peoples of north-west Siberia may have reached there from northern Russia of Finland rather than the Ural-Altai region; and in more recent times Japanese expansion into Manchuria and Inner Mongolia marked a successful approach at least to the threshold of the Heartland.

Let us return to the three assertions which summarize Mackinder’s views. With the third, alleging that ‘Who rules to World-Island commands the World’, there might appear little around for critical comment. Given this hypothetical situation, the Americans and Australasia, even if assumed to be wholly united in an all-out military effort, might well have hesitated before continuing so unequal a struggle, seeing their only chances of success in their margin of scientific, technological, and air and naval superiority, in the possible retention of bordering islands of the Old World, and in the inevitably large chinks in the amour of the World-Island empire at those points where the writ of its rulers failed to run. But at the most this surviving eight of the world’s population could hardly hope to stage more than a defensive war.

Similarly, Mackinder’s first assertion ‘Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland’ appeared valid. The events of this century indeed have
increasingly confirmed it, although there have been times when its challenge seemed likely when (in 1981-20) Allied forces, supporting ‘White’ Russians, invested Russia in Asia and in Europe, but failed to wipe out bolshevism soon after its seizure of power; and again with the expansion of the Japanese Empire into Korea, Manchuria, and China. For this assertion Mackinder had good geographical and historical warrant. Had the coastlands of the Siberian Arctic been accessible to the seamen of the Great Age of Geographical Discovery, as were those of the White Sea and Hudson Bay, the British or other west Europeans might well have sailed up the Ob or Yenisei rivers, sought Siberian sables direct, set up trading companies there, and made good political claims to Siberian territory. But navigation of the Arctic is a delicate and highly seasonal art, which only the technological achievements of this century have made possible. Control over the Heartland could practically be sought and established only from its marginal lands. It might conceivably have come, as partially it did come at certain periods of history, from South west Asia witness the conquests of Alexander the Great and of the Arab Empire. It was much more likely to be achieved from the populous bases of either Eastern Europe or China proper. The main base of the Mongol Empire, which was created in the thirteenth century, was China proper, although its original nucleus of power was the Mongolian steppes: this is an interesting historical instance of a Heartland power, based not on East Europe, but on part of Monsoon Asia, which penetrated but failed to
hold much of East Europe, still less the European Coastlands or the World-
Island.

The control of the Heartland by the principal State of East Europe, Russia, had at the time of Mackinder’s book been long established. With the emergence of medieval Muscovy in north and central Russia, the eclipse of Mongol ascendancy, and the organization of the Russian State in the sixteenth century, Russians began to penetrate Siberia in search of furs and to make good their control of this vast northern land. The Russian boatmen, using the riverways and equipped with firearms which the scattered semi-nomadic population could not withstand, made their way through the coniferous forests and later pressed southward to control the wooded and treeless steppes of Siberia and the steppes and semi-deserts of Kazakhstan, which they called, with ethnographical inexactitude, the Kirghiz steppe. In this way Russia won a new pioneer land for colonization, so successfully that to-day Russians make up all but a tiny fraction of the population of Siberia and fully half of that of Kazakhstan. In the Caucasus and in those deserts and oases east of the Caspian and south of Kazakhstan, now known as the U.S.S.R.’s (C.I.S.) Middle Asia, Russia intervened in search of not so much new lands for colonization as new fields of economic opportunity. This intervention took place in the second half of the nineteenth century by means of military expeditions, difficult to execute because of great stretches of arid
country. In Siberia the building of the Trans-Siberian railway (1891-1903) bound Siberia and its Pacific coast in no uncertain way to the Russian homeland in Europe; at the same time it permitted immigration into, and settlement of, Siberia at a new and faster pace, and projected Russia into the theater of Far Eastern politics.

Middle Asia, too, as necessary instruments of conquest and consolidation, railways were built, notably the Central Asian line from Orenburg (now Chkalov) to Tashkent and the Trans-Caspian line from Krasnovodsk (on the Caspian) to Merv, Bukhara, and Tashkent with a branch line to Kushka on the Afghan frontier. Quite apart from their internal value for government and trade, these railways had their international aspect. British 'merviness' at the possible threat to India, a threat not so much of direct invasion as of internal disorders such as the Indian Mutiny of 1857, was attributable to the new railways and their possible strategical implications. There can be no doubt that at the time Mackinder was developing his geopolitical ideas, staunch British imperialist as he was and sharer of the current suspicion of Russian designs, the Heartland had become very much a field of Russian control. Not quite completely, because China still held, though loosely, Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet. But China's power was declining, and her hold on these borderlands, beyond the limits of a slender railway system, was weakening, the more so as her attention, too was engaged on her maritime margins by the rising sun of Japanese imperialism.
East Europe in Control of the Heartland

At the present time the political control of East Europe and the political control of the Heartland by the rulers of East Europe, have been more exactly established than at any other time the first place, the Soviet Union, whose western boundaries were withdrawn eastward by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk (1917), has expanded westward in Europe as a result of the Russo German war of 1941-45, by the incorporation of the Baltic Republics, part of East Prussia, eastern Poland, ruthenia, Bessarabia and even parts of eastern and southern Finland. Not only that, but its power and influence range farther west over a tier of states namely, Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania - beyond which it holds its zone of military occupation in Germany. With only a few exceptions Sweden, Asia Minor, and Yugoslavia, with its independent Communism of Marshal Tito-East Europe in Mackinder’s sense falls effectively under one rule Moreover if we turn to the Heartland as it appeared politically till cold war period, it is evident that Soviet control has overflowed the U.S.S.R.’s borderlands into the greater part of what remains of the Heartland. The once Chinese controlled territory of Tannu-Tuva was quietly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1945.

China’s titular rights in Outer Mongolia were renounced in 1945, and the nominally independent Mongolian People’s republic less nominally, a Soviet
preserve. In Sinkiang, too Russian influence was preponderant, although it has now to be shared with China's. The Turkestan-Siberian railway, built in the 1930's, opens up a new approach to the historic road through the 'dry strait' of Dzungaria to central China. Further, Russian prestige stood high among the medley of backward peoples of Central Asia, largely as a result of what the U.S.S.R. had achieved in its own Middle Asian republics by irrigation works, hydro-electric undertakings, mining operations, factory buildings, and the operation of air services. All that remains of the heartland which is not clearly under U.S.S.R. Control are Tibet, Persia, and Afghanistan.

The first statement of Mackinder's triplet thus described a situation which till the end of cold war. The U.S.S.R., as ruler of East Europe, commands nearly all of the Heartland. The word 'commands' has, of course, its shades of meaning. If it is interpreted as 'controls', it might well be argued that the Soviet 'command' falls short in some important areas of the Heartland, markedly in Persia, and also in Afghanistan and Tibet. It 'commands' means only 'has at disposal' or 'has within reach', the Soviet command does not appear so limited, for as Mackinder foresaw in 1943, the destruction of German and Japanese armed forces left the U.S.S.R. the greatest military power in the world. One of the Heartland areas outside the U.S.S.R., although within its field of special political interest, is and have long been geopolitically significant. For the Soviet
Union obtained by the Yalta agreement a specially privileged position in Manchuria, and cannot fail to find satisfaction in the emergence of Communist China, now its ally.

The crux of Mackinder’s prediction - that part of it which is of greatest immediate moment in international affairs and is most susceptible to criticism is his proposition that ‘Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island’.

Conclusion

Halford Mackinder introduced theme that were to reverberate throughout the international relations of the twentieth century. The geographer Mackinder envisioned a relatively self sufficient protected empire from a realist perspective that has dominated subsequent international relations writings. A lineage can be drawn from Mackinder through the geopolitik of Hitler’s Germany to U.S. strategy to counter the USSR as the ‘Worlds Heartland.’

Although Mackinder has perhaps been the greatest influence on global strategic thinking in the modern world, he has nevertheless been variously criticized both in respect of his facts and ideas. First of all, he over simplified history in a rather deterministic fashion as a struggle between land and sea power, which infact was far from the truth. Secondly, Mackinder wrong
equated power potential with sheer geographical area, a factor that made him to
over inflate the resource and hence, power potential of the inner Asian
Heartland. Thirdly, Mackinder generally overlooked the fact that the Heartland
was a region of permanent difficulties because of its interior location and owing
to that, the extremes of climate. It is too cold in winter, and hot and dry in
summer. For all these locational - climatic reasons the heartland is at a relative
disadvantage compared to certain other larger and well endowed areas of the
world. Fourthly, he took a rather simplistic view of the possibilities of the
development of railways in the sparsely settled Heartland region. His
expectations have not come true.

One of the greatest short comings of his thesis lay in that he was trying
to explain the present and prognosticate the future in terms of a technology that
had already become outmoded. He wrote at a time when, in general sense, the
railway age was ending and air age starting. But he failed to take account of this
new form of mobility that had converted the sky into a highway, and there by,
cut into the very basis of his theory of the invincible fortress image of the
Heartland which now lay open to air raids from all sides as much as any other
area on the globe.

Another serious consequence of Mackinder's thinking about the present
in terms of the past technology was that at the beginning of the twentieth
FIG 10
MAP PROJECTION USED IN MACKINDER'S 1904 MODEL: EXAGGERATED IMAGE OF THE VASTNESS OF THE HEARTLAND
century he was explaining global strategy in terms of a Mercator projection map which showed unlimited expanse of permanent ice to the north of the Heartland, whereas in reality the Heartland lies face to face with the North American continent across the Arctic. Although enclosed with an eclipse, Mackinder’s map was in fact drawn on a Mercator projection (Fig. 10) where as Mackinder had thought that the Arctic ice would provide an impregnable barrier around the heartland, the fact is otherwise. Since the shortest air routes between the Soviet Union and the United States lie across the Arctic, this Frozen sea has virtually become the Mediterranean of the modern times.

It is impossible to visualize the Heartland as surrounded by an inner and an outer crescent in the manner depicted by Mackinder if we replace his Mercator map by one drawn on an azimuthal equidistant projection, for on such a projection (as on the globe) North America and the heartland stand face to face across the Arctic. Thus:

‘In terms of air geography the Heartland and North America appear in destitute laden proximity. As viewed over the top of the world, the Heartland assumes a location different from that which Mackinder assigned to it, plotting it from Britain, and with the destinies of Britain foremost in his mind. While time has verified Mackinder’s concept of Russia’s growing importance as a land power in a pivotal area, and while the Political and military control of the
U.S.S.R. over the Heartland and Eastern Europe are at present more firmly established than ever, the skyways of the Arctic Mediterranean gave validity to a new may of regarding the geographical relations of North America and the USSR seen from North America, and in terms of new communications reaching out from many points, on the far flung ‘perimeter of defence’, inaccessibility and vastness on longer conceal the Heartland. It no longer lies behind an impenetrable wall of isolation.62 (Weigert, et.al. 1957, p.217).

With the rapid march of science and technology, surface configuration of the earth surface, i.e. the global distribution of land masses and water bodies, has become very much less significant politically than at the time when Mackinder first presented his ‘pivot area’ thesis. Indeed, ‘when ballistic rockets armed with thermonuclear warheads can be fired from nearly any point upon the earth’s surface, We.... have (virtually) reached the end of the line of geopolitical concepts and theories which purport to explain and to forecast the overall design of international politics by reference to the configuration of lands and seas’.63 (Sprout and Sprout, 1964, p.338).
