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Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, and the Heartland Thesis

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Around 1900 the young geographer, Halford J. Mackinder, grew concerned with the changing balance of international power. He argued that Russia's vast, central territories were outside of the reach of British sea power, that the vast Eurasian territory possessed an invulnerable 'Heartland', and that whoever controlled this Heartland would dominate the world. This idea became a powerful notion in early twentieth-century international politics. This article presents Mackinder's idea in context and traces its impact. First, it follows the evolution of the idea. It then shows how the idea developed during the First World War, buoyed Mackinder's criticisms of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and drove him to expand on the nature of two rivalling approaches to questions of war and peace. Finally, it follows the impact of Mackinder's idea on the evolution of the geopolitical tradition: first in Great Britain, where its impact was slight, then in Germany, where its impact was enormous, then finally in the United States, where it provided a framework that helped President Roosevelt prioritise a war in Europe against Germany over a war in Asia against Japan.

Keywords: geopolitics; heartland; Halford Mackinder; international relations; Idealism; Realism

'Geopolitics', explains the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 'is the analysis of geographic influences on power relationships in international relations'. Its basic proposition is old: that the behaviour of states is affected by the acquisition of natural boundaries, control of strategically important land areas, and access to sea routes. As a scholarly field and an analytic tradition it is a fairly recent construction. It emerged 'at the twilight of the nineteenth century', writes Dodds and Atkinson.[1]

Several scholars contributed to its emergence. This article will discuss the contribution of Halford John Mackinder, one of the earliest and most influential of the contributors to the discussion of how geography influences the power relationships in international relations. The article will first present Mackinder's views and arguments.[2] It will then discuss the ways in which authors in other countries seized upon Mackinder's ideas and integrated them into their own, national tradition of geopolitics.

Life and early works

Halford J. Mackinder (1861–1947) was thrust into fame by a lecture on method. He was only twenty-six when he spoke 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography' before the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in 1887. His teachers at Oxford had

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already spotted his analytic talents when he was a student of Biology and Modern History and served as President of the Oxford Union. He had read for the bar and qualified as barrister (1886). In his 1887 lecture he could draw on natural science, History and Law. His presentation was clear, tight, well-argued, and gave Geography an important academic role - just like the RGS wanted.

The surface of the earth had now been surveyed and mapped, Mackinder began. Traditional Geography had completed its role and was a dying discipline. Geography had to renew itself or fade away in irrelevance, he continued. Geographers should no longer be concerned only with the physical attributes of landscapes; they must also observe how people live on the land, transform it, establish societies, and connect them into expanding systems of steadily growing interdependence. The object of Geography cannot be landscapes alone; it must be the interaction between the landscape and the communities that people established there, argued Mackinder. Geography, in other words, must become a social science.[3]

A few months later, the University of Oxford appointed Mackinder to the position of Reader in Geography. He developed the subject along his own lines, showing more talents than that of a pioneering academic: he was an active champion of ideas, an organiser, a network-builder, and an excellent administrator. Mackinder was engaged in the Oxford extension movement and travelled widely through England with lectures on 'The New Geography'. In 1892, he made an extensive visit to the United States. Upon returning to Oxford he was appointed the first Principal of the University Extension College, Reading.[4] He was a co-founder of the Geographical Association. Together with Sidney and Beatrice Webb he co-founded the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the progressive Co-Efficients dining club.[5] Mackinder led geographical expeditions, one of them to Africa, where he was the first geographer to climb Mount Kenya.[6] He was a driving force behind the creation of a School of Geography at the University of Oxford, and when a Department of Geography was finally established (in 1899), Mackinder was its natural first leader.

At the beginning of the new century, then, Mackinder had three simultaneous careers in education. He administered the new Department at Oxford. He was the Principal of Reading College. He taught Geography in both places, as well as at the newly established LSE. He was a popular lecturer in all three places. He also wrote articles and books, among them an ambitious study which applied his approach of Political Geography to Great Britain and which attracted high praise upon its publication in 1902.[7] Yet, he did not get a full chair at Oxford. He had just turned forty and was about to reconsider his options.

Pivots

In 1903 he resigned from Reading. Two years later he resigned from Oxford to pursue a career in administration and politics. He became director of the LSE, a post which he held until 1908. He also adopted more protectionist views, joined the Conservatives, ran for political office, and secured a seat in the House of Commons in 1910.[8]

Mackinder did not put academic work entirely aside. In 1904 he gave another lecture to the RGS, showing how geography had affected Western history and influenced the relationships of major international powers. This second lecture was to

have more a lasting impact than his first. And it is with this second lecture, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', that the present article properly begins.

Key ideas

Mackinder began by elaborating on his old point that that the surface of the earth had been surveyed - that the world could now be mapped in its entirety and considered 'a single world organism'.[9] He then cast his net wider than before. While he had previously used examples from the British past, Mackinder now drew long lines through world history. He showed how important world events had been shaped by geographical conditions. Also, he drew a distinction between land power and sea power and argued that the balance between the two was changing. The era of sea-power domination, inaugurated by the voyages of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s, was drawing to a close, he averred. The position of the 'maritime lands', with Great Britain as a leading power, was declining. The position of the land powers was ascending. The implications of Mackinder's claims were immense: that the British Empire was declining and that the global pre-eminence of Great Britain was nearing its end.

Mackinder's argument hinged on two original ideas. First that the Earth had now become a closed system. Second that this system depended on the development of one particularly important region, located 'in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia':[10] a vast region that Mackinder described as the hinge or 'pivot' of world politics.[11]

Elaborating upon the first idea, Mackinder argued that over a period of 400 years, explorers had visited all corners of the world, recorded observations of flora and fauna and geographical formations. By the turn of the twentieth century, the surface of the planet was known in its entirety. The globe was fully mapped. Geographical discovery was an activity of the past. Geography had completed a childhood marked by cartographic recordings. It must now take the step into adulthood and redefine itself as a mature social science. The most natural vantage point for such a redefinition was the system perspective, agued Mackinder.[12]

As to the second idea, Mackinder argued that economic and industrial development had led to the relative decline of sea power whilst boosting the significance of land power. 'The pivot region of the world's politics' had developed a particular strategic significance. It was big, stretching continuously 'from the Pusstas of Hungary to the Little Gobi of Manchuria'.[13] It was rich - its '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'.[14] And it was 'inaccessible to ships' - and therefore out of the reach of British sea power.[15]

By developing new technologies of communication, the population who inhabit the pivot had already begun to realise its vast potentials, Mackinder continued. He identified the railways as a particularly important force of change. He saw them as 'transmuting the conditions of land-power'.[16]

In 1904, when Mackinder delivered his lecture, the potential of the pivot was balanced by surrounding states (or what Mackinder referred to as the states of the inner or 'marginal crescent'). However, he continued, 'the offsetting 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. This might happen if Germany were to ally herself with Russia.'[17]

Careers and perspectives

In 1904, Mackinder was director of the LSE and was launching new careers in administration and politics. In January 1910 he obtained a seat in the House of Commons as an MP for the Unionist Party for the Camlachie division of Glasgow. Mackinder was deeply concerned with the decline of the British Empire. His arguments for building up the navy were popular in this Scottish ship-building district.

Mackinder did not make a strong impact on the House. The House, however, made a big impact on him. He concentrated his attention on the cause of imperial unity and developed friends among similarly minded men. When the First World War broke out in 1914, Mackinder had drifted away from the Webbs. He did not join their Fabian circle or any other group upon which the Foreign Office called to prepare for the peace conference in Paris and whose intellectual members paved the way for the new scholarly discipline of IR. Instead, he worked in several House committees and took part in recruitment drives and other wartime organisations. None of them allowed him to penetrate the inner circles of government.[18] He followed the war and the discussions of a prospective peace from his bench in Parliament, connecting issues of Empire and peace with his thoughts on the heartland of Euro-Asia.

Democratic ideals and reality

The Great War ended in early November 1918. When general elections were called, Mackinder campaigned in Scotland and retained his seat in Parliament. Rather than resting on his laurels, he wrote a long commentary on the peace negotiations which were scheduled to begin in Paris in January 1919. He wrote quickly during a handful of weeks following the December elections, recycling arguments from his academic articles and his election campaign. He completed the manuscript in February 1919, a short book which he entitled *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*. He had little time to spend on the proofs; in October the British Foreign Office asked Mackinder to go on a special mission to South Russia to support the white General Anton Denikin and advise him in his war against Lenin's Bolshevik regime.[19] Mackinder was given an opportunity to travel to his Heartland rather than just write about it.

Arguments and concepts

Democratic Ideals and Reality was written as a commentary to the preparations for the peace conference in Paris. It was a warning against Woodrow Wilson's naïve ideals and narrow legalism. It was particularly critical towards the Wilsonian slogans which connected democracy with lasting peace. The Paris Peace Conference would achieve neither lasting peace nor stable democracy without taking into account some fundamental lessons from Political Geography and the basic realities of politics, Mackinder argued.

The book has seven chapters. The first two are general introductions to the nature of politics, and draw on Mackinder's administrative and Parliamentary experience. The next two repeat Mackinder's main ideas on Political Geography. It is only in chapters five and six that the book begins to address the Paris Peace Conference and connect the Heartland thesis to the questions of empire and a stable post-war peace. Mackinder touches the conference itself very lightly; it had hardly begun by the time he completed his book in February 1919.[20]

The book was written soon after the Russian Revolution. The separate peace at Brest-Litovsk between Germany and the Soviet Union helps explain the urgent tone in its discussions of the Eurasian Heartland. Highlighting the larger points of political geography, Mackinder discusses neither the Russian Revolution nor the Brest-Litovsk peace. There is, however, no doubt about his attitudes. The tsarist empire had been replaced by a new sort of centralised and tyrannical state. Its leader, Vladimir Lenin, had made clear his intentions to electrify and industrialise the Russian interior. He had promised to export worker's revolution across Europe and shown willingness to co-operate with Germany. These events suggested to Mackinder that the Eurasian Heartland was not only on the ascendancy, it was falling into the tyrannical hands of Britain's imperial rivals.[21]

On the nature of politics

Mackinder's warning to President Wilson's optimistic supporters is apparent in the very first sentences of his book. 'Our memories are still full of the vivid detail of an all-absorbing warfare,' he begins.[22] It is, in other words, easy to agree on a peace while affected by close memories of the great costs and losses of war. In the longer run, however, the memories will fade. The war will retreat to a distance, and 'international tension will accumulate again'.[23]

Mackinder implored the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference to apply a larger perspective to their work and consider a future ten or twenty years down the line. At this time the initial optimism of the peace conference will have worn away and the balance of power will again have established itself as a dominant principle of international order. Friction, tension, and conflicts of interests will again have manifested themselves in relations among states. The delegates to the Paris conference will be unwise to sweep the concept of balance of power aside and instead rely on international law and fair notions of freedom and rights as the only foundation for international order. 'No mere scraps of paper, even though they be the written as the constitution of a League of Nations, are, under the conditions of today, a sufficient guarantee that the Heartland will not again become the center of a world war.'[24]

These were, in view of subsequent events, prophetic words. But to appreciate them fully, it is necessary to inject two comments. The first is to make clear that Mackinder did not oppose the League of Nations. On the contrary, he supported it. He could not see any other solution to the post-war problem of world order than the creation of a League. He recognised 'that there must be some power or, as the lawyers say, some sanction for the maintenance of justice as between nation and nation'.[25] He warned against establishing a League on liberal-democratic ideals alone. He told the diplomats in Paris that they also needed to take into account 'the realities of power'. In particular, he told them to pay attention to the political geography of central Europe, for this was where the greatest challenges to the League would emerge. They would come from that area where the grand plains of eastern Europe join the Eurasian Heartland.[26]

The second comment is to correct the erroneous view of Mackinder as dismissing the significance of ideals. He did not. On the contrary, he explained very clearly that ideals are the basic fuel of politics.[27] The ideals of freedom and law and the principle of popular sovereignty are important moving forces in political life. Mackinder saw ideals and moral purpose as indispensable ingredients in politics. Without them, political processes will run on empty. Politicians will lack drive and ambition.

However, Mackinder added, ideals by themselves may be dangerous. Ideals must be harnessed, again, by an understanding of 'the realities of power'. The wise statesman must find the right balance between the two principles. The good politician must understand that the ideal can be achieved only under favourable conditions.

To explain his point, Mackinder drew a distinction between two types of politicians. On the one hand are 'the idealists', who are passionate about political goals. On the other 'the administrators', who have their attention trained on ways and means and material resources. The idealists are visionary reformers; they work to transform society according to the progressive ideals of freedom and right. The administrators are the bookkeepers and the bureaucrats; they work to keep the community orderly and stable. Idealists see it as their task to change society for the better. Administrators see change as a threat; they see it as their task to maintain the community - to oil the wheels and ensure that they hum and spin as smoothly as possible.

On sea power, land power, perceptions, and perspectives

Mackinder's view of politics is marked by a tension between political ideals and the realities of power, as suggested by the title of his book. The political ideas he discusses are reasonably clear; they include peace and order, as well as the basic Enlightenment values of the democracies of the West: freedom, law, and popular sovereignty.[28] His 'realities of power' are harder to determine. But they involve the interaction of territorial states, geographically located, endowed with natural resources, affected by climate and other natural conditions. They also involve the population who inhabit the territory. And they involve of the ruling elite of decision-makers and administrators who maintain order among the people and forge them into a human community welded together by common historical memories and informed by collective ideas. Each community nurses its own, characteristic political perspective. Each historical epoch has its own distinctive view of political conditions and opportunities. The ruling elite is always seized by its location and its era. It is formed by the need of their nations and ideas shaped by space and time.

In the Middle Ages the Europeans were preoccupied with local matters. During the Renaissance they widened their perspective. When Columbus discovered America, Europeans had begun to lift their gaze, to look at the sea and to imagine lands beyond it. From this new perspective, the sea was no longer seen as a barrier but as a unifying medium. The sea embraced the entire planet and could be employed as a public thoroughfare for all countries and thus constitute a unifying medium for all people. Perception, then, conditions foreign policy. This is a decisive element in Mackinder's political analysis, as is obvious in chapters three and four of his book, respectively entitled 'The Seaman's Point of View' and the 'Landman's Point of View'.

At the beginning of chapter three Mackinder introduces perception as an intermediate variable that connects innovation and capabilities to foreign-policy behaviour. Innovations in ship-building and navigation produced new perceptions of the sea; 'what men imagined' were in turn formative forces in modern Western politics.[29] Imagination encouraged trade and opened up for the great discoveries, for Europe's colonial expansion and a modern historical era. It drove the Great Powers of the age to build fleets and expand their sea power.

Great Britain became the largest sea power of all. The British became masters of the oceans and built a worldwide Empire. Thanks to the Empire, Britain influenced

the behaviour of other Great Powers. Britain's dominance was, however, never completely safe. For in the final account it is not the command of the sea that is the essential element of power, but the command over land. Navies are dependent on land: ships are built on land and out of resources located on land. Also, navies depend on coastlands for good ports. Sea power, then, cannot survive alone. It depends on the rich coastal areas and on land forces to be dominant.[30]

Britain dominated the world for over 200 years. This was not because of sea power alone. Britain's world domination rested on a combination sea power and a land power interacting in the form of a worldwide empire. In addition, British domination rested on innovations in technology and organisation, on an eighteenth-century agricultural revolution and, later, on a nineteenth-century industrial revolution. Britain's domination declined in relative terms when other powers began to industrialise and catch up. During the late nineteenth century, technological innovations in road construction and railways boosted the significance of land power, and caused a relative decline in naval power.

The contest between sea powers and land powers was a key driving force behind the Great War, argued Mackinder.[31] British sea power played a crucial role in the war. It prevented German ships from gaining a foothold in India or South Africa. It blocked the shipping of the Central Powers and prevented new supplies from reaching Germany by sea, which in turn led to famine among the German population and to slowdown and exhaustion of the German economy. Yet, sea power was on the defensive whereas land power was on the ascent. The First World War demonstrated that there were areas in the world that lay outside the reach of sea power, argued Mackinder, repeating points from his Pivot lecture of 1904. The most important area is located at the centre of the Eurasian continent. Mackinder called it the 'Heartland of Eurasia'. It is big, rich, out of naval reach, and, in effect, invulnerable to the influence of the sea powers like Great Britain and the United States.

In chapter four, 'The Landman's Point of View', Mackinder discusses the Heartland more closely. He presented the Heartland of 1919 as bigger than 'the pivot' of 1904. He expanded it greatly in eastward and southeastward directions, towards the Asian river systems of Lena and Amur. He also expanded it westwards to include central Europe. The Heartland, he explains 'is the region to which, under modern conditions, sea-power can be refused access, though the western part of it lies without the region of Arctic and Continental drainage'.[32]

The function of the Heartland is similar to that of the pivot; it presents opportunities for migration, communication, and entrepreneurship. The Asian armies of Attila crossed the Eurasian Heartland, pressured the West and contributed to the great migrations that shaped the subsequent development of Western history. In the late Middle Ages Genghis Kahn crossed the Heartland with his armies, threatened the kings and emperors of the West, and helped shape both the peoples and states of modern Europe.[33] Also, Western generals like Alexander the Great traversed the Heartland, from west to east, to conquer parts of Asia. Later, Roman legionaries marched through it and subdued parts of Asia Minor. Napoleon led the French Army across Prussia, Poland, and the Russian plains towards Moscow.

In the industrial age, modern means of communication would enable people to cross the Heartland quickly. During the First World War, the area was still sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped. But with the help of roads and railways its territory would inevitably evolve faster. This would increase the importance of the region. It would also change the balance between land power and sea power

and represent a threat to the major sea powers – the United Kingdom and the United States – in the longer run.

This change in the balance between sea and land power would come in addition to a change in perspective that had already altered people's ideas and understanding of the world. The last great explorers, like Scott and Nansen, contributed to this change. They had mapped the planet's last, unknown lands. They had closed the age of discovery and led humanity into a new, post-Columbian age. This was an age in which the economies of the world's industrial nations had become dependent on each other and the world itself could be considered a closed and interconnected system.

> Whether we think of the physical, economic, military or political interconnection of things on the surface of the globe, we are now for the first time presented with a closed system ... Every shock, every disaster or superfluity, is now felt even to the antipodes, and may indeed return from the antipodes ... Every deed of humanity will henceforth be echoed and re-echoed in like manner round the world.[34]

This view introduced a new perspective which allowed Mackinder to analyse human society on a global, macro-historical scale. It portrayed the world as finite and suggested that the old days of imperial expansion were over. The 'exploration of the world is finished' and the inventory of useful places completed[35], Mackinder argued before the Institute of Bankers. No more 'fertile, relatively vacant insular regions' are available. No more opportunities 'of suddenly occupying virgin territories, drawing their new resources from them, and fitting them with capital appliances'.[36]

If no more vacant land is available, expansion must either stop or take place at the expense of land that already belongs to someone else.[37] The Heartland was in a unique position. Situated in the middle of Eurasia and invulnerable to naval power, it was protected from the colonial ambitions of sea powers. This had vast geopolitical consequences. For if this region were developed and exploited, it would enhance the capabilities of whichever power controls it.

Neither Britain nor the United States would be among those controlling powers, because neither could project their naval capabilities into the Eurasian Heartland. The Heartland could not be reached from the north, because of massive barriers of ice which no one could traverse. In the east, the Heartland was protected by high mountain ranges. To the south it was protected by inhospitable deserts. It is only in the west that the Heartland is unprotected, because here lay the large plains of central Europe. And to the west of those plains lies Germany. In 1919, the Heartland was within the grasp of Lenin's control. In the future it might also be within the grasp of Germany. In chapter five, 'The Rivalry of Empires', Mackinder discusses the great political significance of this geographical constellation.

In this chapter Mackinder revised his arguments from 1904. The notion of the pivot and the balance of power is still there, but it is toned down. The notion of the changing balance between sea power and land power is present as an overall framework. But the argument has been recast in light of Mackinder's observations during the Great War. It is now more focused on the nature and the role of eastern Europe.

Throughout Eurasian history, the large, open areas in central Europe have constituted a natural corridor for Europeans who have invaded Eurasia from the west and for Eurasians who have arrived at the gates of Europe from the east. These open areas will play an important role in twentieth-century politics, argues Mackinder.

For when modern technology comes to the Eurasian Heartland, the area will develop quickly. It will grow in wealth and population and its growth will alter the balance between sea power and land power to the advantage of the latter. This development would represent a threat to the world's great liberal trade powers, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Political control over the central European plains will be of crucial importance for Great Powers of the twentieth century, continues Mackinder. The development of industrial technology and modern means of communication will only increase the geopolitical significance of the important corridor between Europe and the Eurasian Heartland. Whoever controls central Europe's geographical corridor, will also control the connection between Europe and Eurasia's invulnerable Heartland. Mackinder summarises this argument in a few famous lines at the beginning of chapter six, 'The Freedom of Nations':

– Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:
– Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:
– Who rules the World-Island commands the World.[38]

Mackinder draws a simple geo-strategic conclusion: if a single power were to control this gateway between Western Europe and the Eurasian Heartland, it would represent a great threat not only to Western Europe but to the United Kingdom and the United States as well. From the point of view of the liberal sea powers, the worst possible future scenario would be if a rebuilt Germany entered into an alliance of friendship with Russia. It is of vital importance to the security of the United Kingdom and the United States to prevent such an alliance. Therefore, the British need to guarantee the independence of countries like Poland, which are located in this geographic corridor. The same logic that has made England guarantee the independence of the Netherlands for over 300 years must now also be applied to Poland, Mackinder concludes.

On Europe's geopolitical baseline

The central European corridor is populated by Germans and Slavs and the relationship between the two groups has a long history of tension and friction, continues Mackinder. In the late 1800s it became clear that the Germans (with Prussian and Austro-Hungarian leaders at the head) wanted to expand their influence eastward and control the Slavic peoples. But it was also clear that the Slavs would be likely to resist such an expansion. Germanic thrusts and Slavic reactions have led to repeated conflicts and crises during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The crisis that erupted in 1914 – when a Slavic nationalist murdered a Germanic heir – pulled Europe over the edge and into disaster. If the Paris conference hopes to bring a lasting peace to Europe, it must resolve this conflict between the Germans and the Slavs once and for all, Mackinder avers.

The book's final chapter is entitled 'The Freedom of Men'. It is a strange conclusion to an otherwise tightly argued book. The chapter does not repeat the book's main arguments. It does not seek to make a synthesis from the reasoning of previous chapters. It is more a continuation of the discussion of the nature of politics from chapter one. But it moves quickly from polemics against free trade, class struggle, and revolution to the nature of popular sovereignty. The chapter seems to have been

written hastily and its message is not entirely focused. The arguments against free trade and class struggle echo conservative points from Mackinder's 1918 election campaign; its most significant message is attached to the discussion of sovereignty. A brief review of the book's basic points may help clarify it.

The administrators are the true realists, Mackinder argues in his introductory chapter. Administrators are concerned with the ways and means in politics – with capabilities – and are wont to reduce humans to agents. Their strength is that they understand the constraints of resources and the realities of power. Their weakness is that they are unimaginative to the point of being politically sterile. They see it as their task to preserve the community's established structures; they have a preservative effect on society and politics. The problem is, Mackinder continues, that it was precisely the established structures that led the world into disaster in 1914. In order to create a lasting peace in the aftermath of the Second World War, it is therefore imperative to transform the established structures of world politics. The administrators cannot manage this alone.

Two things are worth noting in Mackinder's argument. First, that Mackinder uses the term 'structure', but that he struggles to explain it and he supports himself on a new term: 'the Going Concern' – a term he borrows from administration or accounting to convey the image of society as a complex and dynamic organism. Also, he invokes David Hume's old claim that man is a creature of habit, and that every society is an infinitely complex mechanism formed by the habits of countless people. 'By interlocking the various habits of many men, society obtains a structure which may be compared with that of a running machine,' notes Mackinder.[39] In his view, Realists are seized by 'the Going Concern'.

Mackinder creates an image of society as a 'Going Concern' maintained by hundreds of thousands of interdependent citizens who largely act out of habit – who are immersed in daily routine and, through their habitual behaviour, uphold and unceasingly re-create the complex mechanics of society.[40] He then applies this image to interstate relations.

A second noteworthy point is that there is no criticism of Idealism in Mackinder's discussion and no negative comments on the idea of the League of Nations. There is, however, a critique of Realism – or rather, of the preoccupation with administrative routines and the Going Concern. The administrators are seized by the structure of things and they will instinctively conduct a policy of 'business as usual'. This is not what is needed after the war. Rather, it was such a policy that brought on the Great War in the first place. What is needed is a break with 'business as usual'. What is needed is the establishment of a new way of organising interstate relations: a whole new international system which can bring practical and managerial statesmen on board to a new structure where their routines can contribute to a safer and more peaceful world. Such a new structure must have a League of Nations at its core.

This point emerges clearly when Mackinder proposes a plan to deal with post-war Germany: a country that, in his opinion, has Europe's best administrators (and, by implication, Europe's most observant Realists). It is also clear when he discusses the region which is situated just east of Germany, i.e., the opening of the gateway into the Eurasian Heartland. Mackinder formulates two messages to the delegates in Paris. The first is a warning: no lasting peace is possible as long as the basic conflict between Slavs and Germans remains unresolved. The second is advice: there is no alternative to a League. However, it is necessary to build a League on both Idealist and on Realist principles and not on Idealist visions alone. To harness the anarchic

structure of the world and establish the conditions for lasting peace and order, it is necessary to take into account 'the realities of power' – which relies heavily on geographical premises. Ideas should drive policy, but be tempered by facts of political geography.[41]

Mackinder identifies a particularly important fact: viz., the tension between Germans and Slavs. It is an old tension – Mackinder identifies its structural origins in the way the Romans organised their empire – and it has long created conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe. If delegates in Paris are to have any hope of establishing a lasting peace, they have to solve this ancient tension. But, he adds, they must resolve it in such a way that no single power gains control over central Europe and its geographical corridor. How can this be done?

Mackinder explains that if the delegates in Paris probe the political geography of the Central European corridor, they will find that it is populated by several Slavic nations: Poles, Czechs and Slovaks, South Slavs, Rumanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Magyars. These peoples have been previously tied up in three empires: the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman, and the Russian. The two former empires fell apart during the strains of the First World War; the latter wavers under the pressures of a Communist revolution. The delegates at the Paris Peace Conference thus face a historic opportunity. They can give each of these seven sizable Slavic peoples its own state, thus establishing seven sovereign states in Central Europe. These states will then constitute a regional balance-of-power system that can mitigate the conflicts in the area and at the same time prevent a single power from gaining dominion.

Should these new states be democracies? Mackinder gives no clear answer. What *is* clear that the new states must be genuinely autonomous. He devotes many pages to the nature of autonomy and self-rule. But he evades the question of democracy. He equivocates. He plays with the thought that there are traditional (non-democratic) forms of government that meet the requirements of popular sovereignty. But he also conjures up the prospect of centralised states emerging in this region, controlled by an elite of organisers who are able to manipulate national sentiments and mould the perceptions of their half-educated populations.[42] Such states may emerge as nationalistic, strong, and ambitious players in the unruly region. If that were the case, a League might help contain the ambitions of such states.

Is it possible to protect the principle of popular sovereignty without introducing democratic rule? *Democratic Ideals and Reality* from 1919 offers no clear answer. But a quarter century later Mackinder is no longer in doubt. Having observed the rise of both Fascist and Communist rule in the West, Mackinder provides a crystal-clear, pro-democracy argument. In 1943, while Russian and German soldiers fight for control of the entrance to the Eurasian Heartland, Mackinder repeats that this corridor is geostrategically important and that it must consist of several independent states.[43] But he now adds that both the German and the Slavic states in the area must be democratic. He is particularly insistent that the Western powers – with the United Kingdom, the United States, and France in the lead – must introduce a democratic system of government in Germany. His insistence is formulated in evocative terms and is worth quoting in full:

> I have suggested that a current of cleansing counter-philosophy, canalized between unbreachable embankments of power, may sweep the German mind clear of its black magic. Surely no one is going to be mad enough to set foreign teachers to exorcize the evil spirits from the soul of the conquered German nation [. . .]. The cleansing stream

might better be released to flow from some regenerate and regenerating *German* source, between the embankments of power I have named, the one within the Heartland and the other within the territories of the three amphibious powers, American, British and French.[44]

Receptions and implications

Mackinder's analysis had prophetic qualities. By some accounts *Democratic Ideals and Reality* foretold the inter-war rise of expansionist dictatorships in Europe.[45] The book also introduced concepts and tropes which would later help define the field of International Relations (IR), such as the ontological tug between Idealist and the Realist approaches. Yet, the book has largely been ignored by the IR community. Why is that?

One of Mackinder's US fans, Fredrick J. Teggart of Berkeley, provides a clue. He ended a generally favourable review of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* on a note of disappointment. Instead of following up the promise of his 1904 paper, Teggart writes, Mackinder has yielded to the temptation of espousing 'a political philosophy that appears to be out of harmony with the most hopeful tendencies of our times'.[46]

The reception in the United Kingdom

Teggart's assessment is borne out by the British reception of the book. When it first was published in 1919, it was starkly at odds with the dominant approach to the nascent field of IR. It was Woodrow Wilson's optimistic arguments which dominated the new discipline. Leading lights of the emerging IR community spoke and wrote of a world composed of sovereign democracies which related to each other freely in rational co-operation and peace.[47] Mackinder, by contrast, portrayed a world of sovereign states which are shaped by their position in the world system, guided by national interests and whose interrelations were marked by friction and conflict.

Wilson and his supporters argued that the world could change and pretended that change was easy. Mackinder argued that change was difficult and tried to explain why political patterns are constant and why the 'Going Concern' is difficult to alter. Already on the first page of the book, Mackinder sent the message of History repeating itself. In the wake of great wars, people and statesmen want peace. But as time passes and the memory of war weakens, tensions and conflicts re-emerge, and statesmen slide into old habits and established patterns. He did not see inter-governmental co-operation and co-ordination as easy and international law as a guarantee of order. He invoked the balance of power as a fundamental principle of order in international politics. Where Great Powers have reasonably similar capabilities and common interests, principles of international law works best, he claimed.

Mackinder discussed international politics as caught between forces of change and lasting structures, between political ideas and realities of power. His approach had scant appeal when the book was first published. A decade or so later, when the political climate changed and the memories of war faded, Realist arguments grew more prevalent. But Mackinder's book was still overlooked. At that time other, younger writers emerged who drew the same distinction as Mackinder had done twenty years previously.

One of them was Edward H. Carr, who obviously knew *Democratic Ideals and Reality* well. Not only did he reiterate Mackinder's opposition between Idealism and

Realism, he also repeated the main attributes that Mackinder had given to them: Idealists are concerned with policy goals, writes Carr in the introductory chapter to his 1939 book, *The Twenty-Years' Crisis*.[48] The Idealists are visionary reformers who want to transform society according to progressive ideals of freedom and right. They belong to the left side of the political spectrum.[49] They are concerned with production, and they work for progress and development. Realists belong to the right side of the political spectrum; they are concerned with re-production, and they work to maintain society's basic institutions so as to preserve stability and order. Idealists want to change society. Realists look at change as a threat: they see it as their task to ensure that the social order-creating mechanism works as easily and smoothly as possible. They lubricate wherever there is a squeak, repair wherever something is worn down, and they make sure that all activities take place within budgeted limits. The opening discussion of Carr's *The Twenty-Years' Crisis* echoes the opening of Mackinder's *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Both define the distinction between (and the necessary complementarity of) the Idealists and the Administrators/Realists. It may be argued that Mackinder's 1919 discussion anticipated the First Great Debate in IR – *avant la lettre*.

The reception in Germany

IR emerged in the English-language world during the inter-war period, under the guiding star of Woodrow Wilson and his liberal internationalism. The field of study was intimately linked to the ideals of the League of Nations and the organisations it sponsored. Mackinder's book had little influence on the members of the League. It had greater influence on the development of political studies in Germany.

Mackinder had an avid student in Karl Haushofer, an officer in the German Army, geographer, and director of an institute of geopolitics at the University of Munich. Haushofer was inspired by Ratzel's view of the state as a biological organism and took his concept of *Lebensraum* quite literally.[50] He found in Mackinder's book 'the greatest of all geographical world views' and a useful perspective for German foreign policy.[51]

Mackinder discussed world events from a perspective of sea power; with the strategic interests of Great Britain foremost in mind he had worried that some power(s) might gain control over the inaccessible Heartland of Eurasia and, behind a shield of inaccessibility, build up a threat to Britain's Empire. Haushofer put Mackinder's political argument on its head, so to speak. He read Mackinder's map with Germany's strategic interests in mind. And he inferred that if Germany wanted to dominate the world, it needed to gain control over central and eastern Europe. Such domination would pave the way towards a vast German *Reich* that no naval power could shake. The key to such a *Reich* was a German-Soviet alliance, argued Haushofer. He became an advocate of a German-Soviet pact.

Haushofer conveyed these ideas to one of his students, Rudolf Hess, in the early 1920s. Hess was a member of the German Nazi Party. He was later arrested and imprisoned in the Landsberg gaol together with Nazi Party leader, Adolf Hitler. Hess helped Hitler write *Mein Kampf*. Haushofer visited them both in prison, gave them books by Clausewitz and Ratzel and discussed geopolitics with them. Some of the arguments in *Mein Kampf* echo those of Haushofer.[52] This is especially the case in its discussions of Germany's relations to the countries in Eastern Europe. These discussions relied on Ratzel's and Haushofer's elaborations of the concept of *Lebensraum*.

When Hitler rose to power, Haushofer's influence increased in Germany's growing community of geopolitical research. When Hitler signed a pact with Stalin in the late summer of 1939, the move was fully consistent with Haushofer's advocacy of a German-Soviet alliance as a step towards controlling central Europe and the Eurasian Heartland. Two years later, however, Hitler broke the pact and attacked the Soviet Union. Haushofer was shocked. He criticised Hitler's move, as the result of which his career – indeed, his life and family – was destroyed.[53]

Mackinder in the United States

History was not on Hitler's side. Germany was forced on the defensive by advancing Soviet troops in 1943. At that time Mackinder warned that if the Soviet Union expanded too far west and conquered eastern and central Europe, the Western powers would be in real danger. 'All things considered, the conclusion is unavoidable that if the Soviet Union emerges from the war as the 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.'[54] In order to defend the democracies of the West against such a scenario, Mackinder suggested that the Western Powers form a North Atlantic alliance. This would give the liberal democracies of the world a beach-head in France, a moat to protect the aerodrome of the United Kingdom, and a large reserve of agriculture, industry, and skilled labour in North America.

Mackinder was not alone in thinking along these lines. A young US officer, Albert Wedemeyer, a student at the West Point Military Academy, had studied Mackinder's theories and written a paper on US defence needs. His paper was of such outstanding quality that he was awarded a scholarship to Germany's primary military college, *die Kriegsakademie*, in Berlin.

When Wedemeyer wrote his paper at West Point, there were few US officers who knew Mackinder's work. When he arrived at the military academy in Berlin in the autumn of 1936, Mackinder's name was on everyone's lips. His stay in Berlin gave Wedemeyer unique knowledge of Germany's geopolitical debate and military thinking. When Wedemeyer returned to the United States in 1938, he wrote a report which assessed Germany's armed forces and discussed German strategy. The report ended up on the desk of the US Army's Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall. He noticed Wedemeyer's analytical talent and created a position for him in the Planning Section in the US Department of War.

In December 1941, when the United States suddenly found itself in a war against Japan, Wedemeyer argued that the attack on Pearl Harbor must not make the United States lose its head and launch unthinkingly into a war in Asia. It was more important to conduct a war against Germany, Japan's ally in Europe. The United States' immediate war aims must be to prevent Germany from gaining control over the vast plains of central and eastern Europe, argued Wedemeyer. His arguments carried weight when he became a key member of the team which developed a new US strategy of war, the so-called 'Victory program'. It announced that the primary war aim of the United States was to push Germany out of central and eastern Europe.[55]

Mackinder's ideas were discussed in the United States during the war. *Democratic Ideas and Reality* was reprinted by Henry Holt in 1942. The Heartland thesis was debated in the popular press as well as in academic books. Nicholas Spykman, a Dutch-American political scientist at Yale University, used it as the

basis for his influential book on *America's Strategy in World Politics*.[56] Spykman's ideas were much discussed during the war, but they were scarcely followed up after his premature death in 1943. When the war ended, geopolitical arguments faded from fashion.

After the Second World War Realism emerged as the dominant approach in US IR. One would have thought that Mackinder's emphasis on the 'realities of power' would fit the outlook of the age. It did not. To the degree that Mackinder was invoked at all, it was with scepticism, if not hostility. Hans Morgenthau, the leading proponent of US Realism, rejected the Heartland thesis as 'political metaphysics'.[57] Alexander de Severski and others argued that Mackinder's contest between land powers and sea powers had been subordinated to the greater power of air.[58]

Mackinder's ideas were preserved by members of the US strategic-studies community. Interest in geopolitics has flared up intermittently. Around 1970, President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger used a geostrategic approach to extricate the United States from the war in Indochina. After the Vietnam War, and after Nixon's disgraceful fall from power, geopolitics and grand strategy was again considered amoral and suspect.

This changed when Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. President Carter's foreign-policy adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, analysed the Soviet invasion in a geopolitical light. He maintained that he who 'dominates Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia',[59] and in addition have a decisive influence over the oil-rich Middle East.[60] The President followed up by announcing the so-called Carter Doctrine: the United States was prepared to use military means to defend its interests in the Middle East. Geopolitical reasoning was also evident in the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan, who pushed the United States' traditional containment politics aside and replaced it with a strategy that aimed to engage the Soviet Union actively back from selected areas in the world, a doctrine known as roll-back.

Some of the members of Nixon's and Reagan's administrations came back to Washington and joined the administration of George W. Bush in 2000. The many US military bases that have been established since the 1990s from Iraq to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan have been regarded as a geopolitical attempt by the United States to dominate the Asian Heartland.[61] Many writers have been sceptical of this US behaviour. Among them are Michael T. Klare and Samuel Huntington.[62] The latter was sceptical of traditional geopolitics. In the era of globalisation, geography has become less important while ideas, values, and religion have increased in importance, he claimed in *The Clash of Civilizations*. Huntington argued that the most significant political conflicts of the future will not follow geographical but civilisational boundaries. Robert Kaplan has begged to differ. Kaplan has tried to resurrect geopolitical thinkers – especially Mackinder and Spykman – to sustain a new geography-based brand of US Realism.[63]

Mackinder in Russia

The rise of Stalin's Soviet Union to superpower status could easily be seen as fulfilling Mackinder's prediction. Yet Soviet scholars ignored Mackinder and rejected Political Geography as 'bourgeois determinism'. After the breakup of the Soviet Empire, however, discussions of geopolitics erupted in a major way. The emergence of sovereign states in Central Asia triggered a new interest in Mackinder and his concept of the

Heartland, most notably in countries which were themselves located in the pivotal area. In Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan diplomats and scholars were much concerned with Mackinder.[64] In Russia, the interest has also been strong.

One of the most important contributions to the Russian debate has been the book *Geopolitika*, a learned study written by Kalmaludin Gadzhiev at Moscow's Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO). The book begins with an introduction to the history of geopolitical ideas, and gives Halford Mackinder's thesis on the Eurasian Heartland a thorough treatment. In Gadzhiev's mind, it was Mackinder who provided the conceptual basis for what the Russian calls 'transatlantic realism': the idea that the Western Powers can create a belt of independent states between Germany and Russia to prevent a German-Russian alliance and thus block the emergence of a superpower Eurasia. To the left of Gadzhiev is Gennady Zyuganov, head of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Zyuganov has built a political platform of beams and planks from the old ideology of Marxist-Leninism. But where the old Soviet Communists rejected geopolitical approaches, Zyuganov and the CPRF describes Russia's position in the world in Mackinder's terms. Zyuganov's book from 1997, *The Geography of Victory: Fundamentals of Russian Geopolitics*, provides a broad overview of geopolitical theory in general and of Mackinder's Heartland thesis in particular.[65]

Far out on the right wing of Russia's political spectrum is Aleksandr Dugin. He is a leading proponent of Russian nationalism, a politician, a publicist, and a political advisor to members of the Russian Duma. He co-authored a textbook in international politics in 1997 with Nicolay Klokotov, a member of the Russian general staff. The book, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, offers among other things the first Russian translations of some of Mackinder's classical texts. This book, which may still be in use at Russia's military academies, claims that it is necessary to defend the Russian Heartland from Atlantic dominance. It portrays the great struggle between Russia and the Atlantic powers as a manifestation of the balance of power between sea power and land power, a notion that was central to Mackinder's theories. Dugin and Klokotov see this balance as a key element in the cold war – when the United States was a great, liberal, capitalist sea power and the USSR was a large, authoritarian, socialist land power. When Russian land power controlled the Eurasian Heartland, thanks to its dominating smaller satellites in Eastern Europe, it was on the ascendancy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is important that Russia's Western neighbours do not slide in under the influence of the Western sea powers, argues Dugin. Russia needs to retain control over countries like Ukraine and keep the Heartland united. This view dovetails nicely with that of President Vladimir Putin.

Mackinder in today's world

Dugin stretches Mackinder's arguments far. He extends it so far that he casts doubt on whether Mackinder's theories may actually apply fruitfully to the relationship between Russia and the Atlantic powers. When that doubt is pursued, several factors emerge that weaken not only Dugin's argument but also that of Halford Mackinder.

Failing assumptions

The first factor concerns the development of air power. Several authors have pointed out that the advent of aircraft revolutionised strategic relations. It altered the premise

of Mackinder's discussion of the relationship between land power and sea power.[66] The addition of nuclear rockets made the cold-war balance qualitatively different from the balance that Mackinder (and, later, Dugin and Klokotov) described and discussed. The difference is captured by strategists who distinguish between the old notion of a balance of power and the new of a 'balance of terror'. The latter is associated with a much greater cost in the event of war – a cost that was open ended, that would outstrip any prospective war gain, and that would therefore contain a much greater incentive to avoid war.

Also, the advent of air power destroyed the point which lies at the core of Mackinder's Heartland theses: viz., that the Heartland is invulnerable. In the age of air power, it no longer is. Airplanes and missiles can project enormous destructive power towards the Eurasian Heartland. Air power can reduce important infrastructure to rubble in minutes and make large areas uninhabitable for centuries.

This point is brought doubly home by the fact that the superpower balance of terror supported itself on nuclear missiles deployed on strategic submarines in the Arctic. Not only can these missiles reach Heartland targets in a matter of minutes, the presence of submarines in the Arctic also indicates that Mackinder's Heartland thesis hinges on a dubious geographical assumption concerning a protective barrier of massive ice. Mackinder and other British geographers of his time might have imagined that the Arctic was covered by massive glaciers and that Russia was inaccessible from the north. But other people had different views. From the Russian perspective the Arctic ice constituted a seasonal but not a permanent barrier.[67]

The areas in northern Russia are, in fact, not so isolated by glaciers and ice barriers as Mackinder suggests.[68] The Northeast Passage was known (and used) around 1900 when Mackinder developed his Heartland thesis. Explorers had long sailed along the northern coast of the Siberia. Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen sailed up the river Yenisei in the autumn 1913 and was struck by the hectic construction activity along its banks. Nansen wrote a book about the trip.[69] He included photographs of the people who lived along its ice-free rivers and seas. He drew maps which traced trade routes from the inner regions of Siberia to the markets of Western Europe, showing how the easiest routes follow big rivers, like the Yenisei, and then turn westwards through the Kara Sea past the Kola peninsula and down along the Norwegian coast towards continental Europe. Siberia is a rich land, writes Nansen; it possesses many natural resources, including oil.[70]

Since Mackinder's and Nansen's times, the Arctic ice cap has steadily melted, and Mackinder's assumption that the Eurasian Heartland is protected by a compact ice barrier has foundered with it. Indeed, as the world's climate is changing, the reduction of the Arctic ice cap is making the interior of Siberia steadily more accessible from the north. Russian geopoliticans are divided on the implications. Some of them are worried because global warming is making the Russian Heartland more accessible. Others welcome global warming. Permafrost and glaciers are melting, releasing steadily more water into the rivers which flow northwards into the sea. More water makes them navigable during longer periods of the year. The Ob, Yenisei, Lena, and Kolyma, four great rivers in a network of interconnected waterways throughout the vast regions of northern Russia, flow into the Kara Sea, the Laptev Sea, and the East Siberian Sea. Because global warming makes these rivers navigable several months a year, Mackinder's Heartland can not only be reached, but also exploited for its rich natural resources. Large ships can supply growing settlements with construction materials. When they arrive, they bring food and capital. When they leave, they are

loaded with local resources for sale in warmer climes, such as timber and ore. In the future they will also transport fossil fuels, like oil and gas. This new access to the Arctic is opening up the area for industrial activities and transport routes. It is also changing the strategic significance of the region – for Russians, Europeans, and Americans alike.[71]

Major changes and permanent points

Much water has run into the sea since Mackinder's time. Many changes have taken place in the world over the last century or so. One of the most conspicuous changes has been the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Another has been the remarkable growth of the United States and its dominance in world affairs, including its dominance of Great Britain. A third change is the decline of Britain and the dissolution of the British Empire. This reduced Great Britain as a world-class power. It also abolished empire as a social formation in international politics. Decolonisation in turn produced a steep increase in the number of states in the world – most of them non-Western – and a far more complex international system.

A final change has been the growth of some of these non-Western states into Great Powers in their own right. The most significant of these powers is China, which has become a major player just east of Mackinder's Heartland.[72] During recent years the Heartland has been affected by three geopolitical initiatives. One between China and the European Union, another between the EU and Russia, and a third between Russia and China. The latter initiative may be the most important. For, as Xian argues, 'China needs Mackinder's heartland to reduce the enormous strategic pressure from the eastern Pacific.'[73] The rapprochement between China and Russia has resolved conflicts and reduced tensions in the region – tensions that have existed since long before Mackinder's time. Can a continued Sino-Russian rapprochement give China access to the Heartland from the east? Mackinder considered the possibility briefly. If this were the case, China might conceivably build 'for a quarter of humanity a new civilization, neither quite Eastern nor quite Western', he noted.[74]

Conclusions

Geography shapes human society, argued Mackinder in his 1887 lecture to the RGS. No geopolitical tradition was built on this claim alone. For it was neither new nor particularly controversial; its basic idea may be traced as far back as Aristotle[75], and it was expressed by other scholars at the time – like James Bryce in Britain and Friedrich Ratzel in Germany.[76]

In 1904, Mackinder made a more specific argument: viz., that geography influences the behaviour of states and affects historical events. This was a more original contribution. But, again, the basic idea was hardly new; it can be traced further back – at least to Enlightenment authors like baron Montesquieu and Immanuel Kant, and, later, Alexander von Humboldt.[77] Similar arguments were presented by Mackinder's contemporaries – by Ellen Semple and Isaiah Bowman in the United States and by Rudolf Kjellén in Sweden.[78]

But Mackinder's 1904 lecture also introduced the Heartland thesis. This thesis, which he elaborated in 1919, was unprecedented. If an argument were to be made that Mackinder originated a geopolitical tradition on his own, it must rest upon his

original proposition that the central region in Eurasia is of greater strategic importance than other regions on earth.

However, his Heartland thesis did not sustain any research programme with momentum enough to qualify as a tradition. It was discussed but largely brushed aside by students of geography and politics alike. But if Mackinder's Heartland thesis has been considered weak, his more general claims have been seen as stronger: it has been generally accepted that geography affects state behaviour when it is assisted by factors such as innovation, and that technological as well as organisational innovation may alter both the capabilities of states as well as the outlooks of nations. Such general arguments were accepted quickly by students of geography. Students of politics have been more reserved. Immediately after the First World War, the fledgling community of IR scholars paid scant attention to them. During the 1930s, they considered them more readily. *Democratic Ideas and Reality* emerged as a relevant text in Western countries, each using it according to national needs and local perspectives. In Germany and in the United States it confirmed the strategic importance of central and eastern Europe. In Great Britain it helped academics define the new 'science of international politics' in terms of an ontological contest between Realism and Idealism.

Mackinder affected others, not only in Germany, but in the Anglo-American world as well. In some cases it was scholarly and constructive, as when Edward Carr relied on Mackinder to define the scholarly field of IR as involving a contest between Realism and Idealism.[79] In other cases the influence was popular and harmful, as when US magazines like *Newsweek* and *Reader's Digest* presented Mackinder's Heartland thesis as a key to Haushofer's and Hitler's thinking.[80] Such presentations tainted the Heartland thesis with the brush of Fascism and stunted its post-war evolution as a serious approach in IR.

Mackinder was also affected by others. This is not readily apparent from his own writings, for he was not generous with his scholarly references. Thus, it is up to his readers to trace the sources that influenced him, reconstruct his academic context, and assess the intertextual properties. Stephen Kern is undoubtedly correct when he claims that Mackinder articulated in Britain basic ideas of Political Geography that appeared simultaneously in other countries as well, driven by forces that these countries had in common, such as new technologies of communications, increasing commerce, and new forms of finance.[81] In his 1887 lecture, Mackinder cited only one source: the British jurist and political scientist James Bryce, who had made a lecture with a similar message to the RGS the previous year.[82]

If Mackinder stood on the shoulders of others, as Kern suggests, questions may be raised about the origins of the tradition to which he belonged, as well as about how we can recognise a new tradition when we see it or determine in hindsight when an extant tradition began. The fate of Mackinder's Heartland thesis raise questions in turn about the evolution of scholarly traditions and their eventual closure. When the Heartland thesis was seized by German geographers and grafted onto the expansionist National Socialist programme of the German *Reich*, it boosted its popularity in Germany in the short term. However it also reduced its appeal in other countries and impeded its evolution over the longer haul.

Only in recent years has Mackinder's theories been discussed more fully in IR. One reason for this increasing interest is the collapse of the Soviet Empire. With the collapse of the USSR, whose Communist rulers denied any scholarly value to geopolitical analyses, several states emerged as sovereign entities in the region that

Mackinder referred to as the Heartland. Scholars and activists there quickly turned to Mackinder for terms and theories which could help them understand and assess their new situation.[83]

Another reason for the increasing interest in Mackinder in IR is the rise of disciplinary history after the end of the cold war. Several scholars have re-read influential IR classics, assessed them in context and, over time, built a better understanding of the origins and evolution of IR as a scholarly discipline.[84]

A third reason for the increasing interest in Mackinder is the decline of classic Realism. Influential Realists have tended to denigrate Political Geography and geopolitics. When Hans Morgenthau swept geopolitics aside as unscholarly and unsound, it is reasonable to assume that he associated it with Haushofer and German *Geopolitik*, and also that it challenged the individualist anthropology of classic Realism with a more systemic alternative.[85] Structural Realism, then, which holds that state behaviour is the outcome of location in the international system, should be more accepting of Mackinder's systemic views. Structural Realism, however, cultivates theoretical simplicity and analytical parsimony; it will find Mackinder's approach too complex. Neo-classical Realism, on the other hand, will find Mackinder's approach far more congenial. It will recognise Mackinder's major point as similar to its own – i.e. that position the international system will affect state behaviour. It will also recognise that system position in itself has little predictive power and that it needs to be complemented by factors internal to the individual states in question: technology, knowledge, historical recollections, collective identities, national culture, perceptions of the decision-making elite, and so on.

A fourth reason for the rising interest in Mackinder is that his terms and theories are relevant for discussions of twenty-first-century issues. One of these issues concerns natural resources – water, oil, and earth – which are important components of national power. Other issues concern mass migration, communication, and transport across vast geographical spaces – all central to Mackinder's discussions.

Finally, there is the point that Mackinder levied at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 – the point that lies at the very core of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: viz., the warning against being seduced by the rhetoric of good intentions. Although the world has changed greatly since this book first saw the light of day, the contemporary world is still replete with examples which illustrate his larger point – from the humanitarian interventions of the early 1990s, via the state-building ambitions around the turn of the millennium to the visions of democracy that have accompanied the Arab Spring.

Few cases show Mackinder's relevance better than the conference held in Bonn in December 2001 which legitimised Western intervention in Afghanistan with a grandiloquent rhetoric of human rights and development that defined absurd goals about a new Afghan state to be run on Western principles of popular sovereignty. A dozen years of costly war shows the continued relevance of Mackinder's warning against indulging in wishful thinking and defying geographic realities.[86]

Notes

1. K. Dodds and D. Atkinson (eds), *Geopolitical Traditions* (London, 2000).
2. The three following texts of Halford Mackinder will weigh heavily here: 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, iii (1887); 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal*, xxiii (1904), 421–37; *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London, 1919).
3. Mackinder, 'On the Scope and Methods'.

4. See H.J. Mackinder and M.E. Sadler, *University Extension. Has it a Future*? (London, 1890). In 1926 the college would become the University of Reading.
5. B.W. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder. A Biography* (College Station, 1987).
6. See e.g., H.J. Mackinder, 'A Journey to the Summit of Mount Kenya, British East Africa', *The Geographical Journal*, xv (1900), 453–76.
7. H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London, 1902). Its maps and comprehensive geomorphology of the British Isles was praised as a particularly important contribution. Mackinder later made a similar study of the Rhine Valley, in H.J. Mackinder, *The Rhine: Its Valley and History* (New York, 1908).
8. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*, 146ff.
9. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot', 422.
10. Ibid., 431.
11. Idem.
12. Ibid., 422.
13. Ibid., 430.
14. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot', 434.
15. Idem.
16. Idem.
17. Ibid., 436.
18. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*, 153f.
19. G. Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford, 2009), 201ff. See also B.W. Blouet, 'Sir Halford Mackinder as British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919–1920', *Geographical Journal*, cxlii (1976), 228–36.
20. The Peace Conference opened in Paris on 18 January 1919. Mackinder read the opening speeches but they did not give him much tangible information to go on. The Conference's second plenary meeting took place in Paris on 25 January. Mackinder managed to write a quick comment to this meeting before he sent the manuscript off to his publisher. This comment was inserted in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* as a brief epilogue.
21. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 203. The book was republished in 2007 (London, 2007). However, page references in this article are to the original edition, which is easily accessible on the net: https://archive.org/details/democraticideals00mackiala
22. Ibid., 1.
23. Idem.
24. Ibid., 143.
25. Ibid., 4.
26. Ibid., 220f.
27. Ibid., 9ff.
28. Ibid., 6ff.
29. Ibid., 38.
30. Ibid., 48. Mackinder mentions neither Ratzel nor Mahan. Mackinder's argument differs from that presented by Ratzel's *Das Meer als Quelle der Völkergrösse* (Munich, 1900). Alfred T. Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1805* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1980 [1890]). See S. Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America* (Chicago, 2001).
31. Ibid., 77ff.
32. Ibid., 141.
33. Ibid., 126.
34. Ibid., 389f.
35. H.J. Mackinder, 'The Great Trade Routes', *Journal of the Institute of Bankers*, xxi (1900), 267.
36. Ibid., 151f.
37. Mackinder was not alone in arguing along such lines. This idea would also inform radical theories of imperialism. It would make theorists like Nicolai Bukharin and Vladimir I. Lenin infer that imperialist expansion would from now on be a major cause of war. See e.g. T.L. Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory* (Manchester, 1997), 220f.
38. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 194.
39. Ibid., 11f.

40. Ibid., 22f. It is a remarkable discussion, half a century before the modern concept of structure was established in the social sciences. For a discussion of the emergence of the structuralist perspective, see J.W. Moses and T.L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing* (London, 2012), 194ff.
41. See L.M. Ashworth, 'Realism and the Spirit of 1919: Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Reality of the League of Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, xvii (2010), 279–301.
42. Ibid., 243ff. Mackinder's discussion is vague. Does he predict the rise of totalitarian regimes in Soviet Russia and Germany? This is the view in Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*, 170.
43. H.J. Mackinder, 'The Round World and the Winning of the Peace', *Foreign Affairs*, xxi (1943), 595–605.
44. Ibid., 604.
45. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*, 170f.
46. F.J. Teggart, 'Mackinder's "Democratic Ideals and Reality"', *American Historical Review*, xxv (1920), 258.
47. President Wilson's vision of peace is most famously expressed in his 'Fourteen Points Speech' of January 1918. See presentation in A.C. Walworth, *Woodrow Wilson* (Baltimore, 1969), ii. 148ff. See also summary and discussion in Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory*, 206.
48. E.H. Carr, *The Twenty-Years' Crisis* (New York, 2001 [1939]), 14f.
49. Ibid., 18f.
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