Sir Halford Mackinder's democratic ideals and reality: A centennial appreciation

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Sir Halford Mackinder's *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: A Centennial Appreciation

By Geoffrey Sloan

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Abstract: *Sir Halford Mackinder's seminal contribution to classical geopolitics, Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction, was published a century ago. The book was written to influence the British delegation to the peace conference that was beginning in Versailles. Scant evidence suggests that he succeeded in this aim. However, with the Second World War, and the United States' participation in the conflict, Mackinder's ideas found critical acclaim. This centennial appreciation contends that many of the concepts he coined have relevance for today. Crucially, he identified two enduring features of democratic regimes that both explain and warn. First, in times of peace and prosperity, democracies refuse to think strategically until compelled to do so. Second, political elites in these countries divorce their normative ideals for a rules-based international order from the existing and emerging geopolitical realities.*

T he year 2019 marks the centenary of Sir Halford Mackinder's important monograph *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*.[1] It was written in less than three months between December in 1918 and February 1919[2] in the aftermath of his penultimate general election campaign in the Glasgow constituency of Camlachie[3] and the Versailles Peace Conference that opened in Paris on January 18, 1919. Mackinder's book had two audiences: the primary one, the British delegation to the Peace Conference; and a secondary one, the politically aware British public. His two-fold aim was to trace the historical, geostrategic roots of World War I and then advance geopolitical proposals designed to underpin a European reconstruction.

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[1] The work was published by Constable in London and, almost simultaneously, by Henry Holt in New York.

[2] Torbjorn L Knutsen, "Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, and the Heartland Thesis," *The International History Review,* vol 36, no. 5, 2014, p. 835. On p. 855, Knutsen gives an insight to the compressed timelines Mackinder was working toward.

[3] Mackinder won reelection as a Coalition Unionist with a majority of 6,453 votes.

Mackinder continued working on his volume right up until the moment he submitted it to the publisher, writing a postscript that included an appendix in which he reprised the thesis of his book in the context of the Paris Peace Conference. The postscript conveyed a flavor of campaign experience, in particular his encounters with the supporters of the opposition Socialist candidate, "young men with a burning faith in their eyes, though often without the full power of expressing their arguments—were at almost every meeting, boldly defensive of the Russian Bolsheviks."[4]

For Halford Mackinder, the dominance of the Russian Bolsheviks in the Eurasian "heartland" was an event of extraordinary significance for international relations. According to Mackinder's biographer, Brian Blouet, "He analyzed the weakness of the post–war world and argued that power was being centralized by large states. Mass political movements were emerging, but populations would be manipulated by ruthless organizers controlling state machinery."[5]

In his appendix, Mackinder highlighted how, at the Peace Conference's second plenary meeting on January 25, 1919, the unequal representation of the Great and Small Powers was determined. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau "pointed out that at the cessation of hostilities, the Great Powers had twelve million men on the field of hostilities; that they might have decided the future of the world on their own initiative; but that, inspired by their new ideals, they had invited the Smaller Powers to cooperate with them."[6] Mackinder insisted that international order still rested upon force, notwithstanding the juridical assumption of equality between sovereign states, whether great or small.

Mackinder reminded his readers of a harsh truth: even at the Peace Conference, the allied powers insisted that the realities of force and power trumped the newly articulated ideals in the international arena, ideals that suggested a formal equality among nations and promoted institutions designed to advance their collective security, i.e., the proposed League of Nations.[7]

The key reason for the enduring significance of Mackinder's work derives from his presupposition that "Democracy must reckon with Reality."[8] Mackinder understood two essential features of democratic regimes: first, that during times of

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[4] H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (New York: Henry Holt, 1942), p. 202.

[5] Brian Blouet, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 35 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 650.

[6] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* pp. 207-208.

[7] Mackinder's geopolitical advice—according to one modern "critical" commentator—found no traction in Paris. See, Gerry Kearns in J. Agnew, K, Mitchell and G. Toal, eds., "Imperial Geopolitics," *A Companion to Political Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), pp. 176-177. "Mackinder was not involved in the post war settlement of the political boundaries of Europe. Other geographers were. The place of Paul Vidal de la Blanche (1845-1918) in the French delegations and of Isaiah Bowman (1878-1950) in that of the United States was not extended to Mackinder by the British Government. His blood and soil racism was dominant neither in the USA nor in Great Britain. The official ideology of the war effort was more liberal."

[8] This is taken from the final sentence of the book. Mackinder, D*emocratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 208.

peace and plenty, "Democracy refuses to think strategically unless and until compelled to do so for purposes of defense"[9]; second, political elites in democracies often articulated their normative ideals for a rules-based international order divorced from the existing and emerging geopolitical and geostrategic realities.

Mackinder's geopolitical ideas represent a dualism between those concepts that are historically situated and unique to the 1918-1919 period and others that still have relevance a hundred years later. His thought can be understood in light of two perspectives—substantive ones that emphasize trans-historical considerations and those of a contemporaneous nature.

Mackinder: A British Polymath

Mackinder's concepts were a product of careers forged both within and beyond the academy. He founded the School of Geography at Oxford in 1899, set up the University College of Reading in 1892 (which became the University of Reading in 1926), and was named the second Director of the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1903.

Beyond these notable organizational achievements in academia, he was also responsible for establishing, on behalf of the War Office, a course for Army logistics officers[10] at the LSE which ran, with the exception of the war years, from 1909 to 1932. The course design underscored his understanding of logistics and its role in projecting military power to specific geographical locations. The curriculum encouraged and facilitated acquiring pertinent information and developing the imagination. Army officers were then expected to apply both to the logistical and geostrategic challenges of their profession.

In addition to his academic career, Mackinder contributed greatly to British public service. Lord Curzon, then British Foreign Secretary, appointed him as British High Commissioner to South Russia (i.e., the anti-Bolshevik forces) in 1919. He served in the House of Commons as a Scottish Unionist MP for the Camlachie constituency in Glasgow between 1910 and 1922; he was Chairman of the Imperial Shipping Committee, and member of both the Privy Council and the Royal Commission on Food Prices.[11]

He recognized that his career had not been one of linear progression. He wrote, "There is another kind of career I will describe as erratic and such a career has been mine, a long succession of adventures and resignations. I do not admit to having been a rolling stone, because I have generally known where I was going—but I have certainly gathered no moss."[12] Mackinder's experiences in higher education,

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[9] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 23.
[10] See G.R. Sloan, "Haldane's Mackindergarten: A Radical Experiment in British Military Education," *War in History*, vol 19, no 2, 2012, pp. 322-352.
[11] W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 51-52.
[12] H J Mackinder, "Dinner Speech, Imperial Economic Committee 13th May 1931," Mackinder Papers, School of Geography, Oxford University.

military education, politics, public service, exploration, diplomacy, and policy formulation provided him with a series of experiences from which he deployed diverse perspectives to evaluate the interplay of politics—both domestic and international—and geographical realities.

Methodological Innovations and Intellectual Antecedents

Although Mackinder never used the term "geopolitics," we can discern the constituent elements of classical geopolitics throughout his work. Geopolitics was and remains a synthesis of three disciplines: geography, history, and strategy. The geographic element takes into account human factors: ethnic settlement patterns and conflict; and physical factors such as the location of resources and goods that are required for war, e.g. oil, minerals, and foodstuffs. The historical component acknowledges trajectories, cycles, and disruptions in the arenas of politics, economics, social relationships, technological innovation, and international affairs. Finally, the strategic element provides an assessment of goals, means, and likely consequences of actions by one's own state, its allies and adversaries, all undertaken during a conflict, potential or actual.

Strategic thought was essential whenever a policymaker sought to alter the political, economic, and/or military terrain in favor of his nation-state by deploying force, engaging in intelligence and diplomacy, and securing new alliances. The history of previous conflicts, the terrain over which conflicts take place, the tactics adversaries deployed, and the location, culture, and capabilities of any enemy—all factored into the formulation of a grand strategy on which foreign policy should be based.[13]

Mackinder also can be credited with developing what he called a "new geography." He viewed the discipline of geography as more than a mere compilation of facts associated with isolated locations. According to Blouet, his epistemological innovation amounted to "a unifying methodology based on a search for causal relations [which was] to be achieved by defining geography as the science of the interaction between society and the environment. Thus united, geography was to bridge the gap between the science and the humanities. He rejected environmental determinism."[14] Furthermore, Mackinder's new geography pivoted on the use of particularizing and generalizing strategies of inquiry,[15] not merely emphasizing

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[13] This synthesis has not been without its critics; "Classical geopolitics is a form of geopolitical discourse that seeks to repress its own politics and geography, imaging itself as beyond politics and above situated geographies in a transcendent Olympian realm of surveillance and judgment." Quoted in P. Kelly, "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," *Geopolitics,* vol. 11, no. 1, p. 37. See, also, G. OTuathail and S. Dalby, eds., *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[14] Brian Blouet, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 35 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 649.

[15] See, John R. Hall and Robert Bierstedt, "Toynbee and Sociology," in *Power and Progress* (New York: McGraw–Hill Inc., 1974), pp. 73-86.

specific locations and events, but also vigorously deployed comparative methodologies through time and across space. [16]

Mackinder developed an inductive approach that underscored the probability of his conclusions. This reasoning was open to further questions by the means of recognizing new, relevant evidence,[17] such as the importance of "manpower"—a term he coined[18]—mobilized by continental-sized states and the deleterious potential of what he termed the social "organizers," who might exploit the misery of those citizens whose economic prospects were blighted by prolonged unemployment. Mackinder, posed a pivotal question: "Are we not frequently in danger of founding policy on a consideration of the means of life rather than of life itself? I propose asking you to turn for a while from thought of values, and even of wealth itself, to the output of human energy for which wealth affords but part of the fuel."[19]

He identified two divergent approaches to this problem: the first was an abstract, theoretical discussion of the sources of human energy and an assessment of the economic and political conditions in which human energy is realized; the second was an examination of the British empire and other empires with principles developed "on the way."

There was also a progressive dimension to Mackinder's understanding of manpower that continues to apply to the issues of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Western democracies. He wrote:

[16] Scholars have either attacked Mackinder for offering up false predictions or integrated his geopolitical assessments into other, non-spatial schools of international relations. For instance, S. Pelizza in *The Geopolitics of International Reconstruction: Halford Mackinder and Eastern Europe*, 1919-1920, *The International Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, p. 191 argued that "modern scholars and statesmen should be wary of seeking Mackinder's geopolitical guidance on current international affairs because contrary to conventional wisdom, history did not always prove him right. It also proved him spectacularly wrong, especially on Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the First World War." International Relations theorists have located Mackinder in the wider framework of the literature of that subject [i.e., Mackinder] "used his understanding of geopolitics to support the League of Nations as a means of transcending the awful realities of a world based on *realpolitik*. In this sense he shares with Carr and Morgenthau a desire to find an alternative to the grim logic of power." 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,* vol. 17, no. 2, 2010 pp. 279-301.

[17] There is a close congruence in Mackinder's approach to the ontology of classical geopolitics as described by P. Kelly in "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," *Geopolitics*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2006, p. 26: "The classical modernist ontological perspective finds reality 'out there' and distinct from the observer, thus making an objective approach possible, and its epistemological stance favors the empirical, logical, and intuitive formulations of facts into theory based on probability."

[18] See, H.J. Mackinder, "Man–power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," *The National Review*, vol. 45, 1905, pp. 136-143.

[19] Mackinder, "Man–power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," p. 136.

> The idea of the minimum wage, at the root of both trade–unionism and socialism, is inspired by the idea of economizing man-power. Every great irregularity of employment, whether due to foreign competition, trade disputes, shortage of raw materials, or failure of employers, involves terrible wreckage of the capital fixed in humanity; in other words a 'scrapping' of manpower.[20]

His vision of a new political economy for Great Britain and its empire encompassed more than just a demand for a minimum wage: "Mackinder wanted to improve British 'manpower' through protectionism, better working class housing and education, and a minimum wage . . . He lambasted laissez-faire policy for letting London suck the life out of the country."[21]

He claimed, in short, that the strength of a nation lay in "its workers, its thinkers, its fighters, and its mothers." In emphasizing how to enhance the manpower of Britain and the British empire, Mackinder was attempting to find a way to guarantee that the empire would maintain its relative power position vis-à-vis the new territorial and technologically sophisticated powers, such as Germany, the United States, and even Russia, the first two of which were overtaking Great Britain in industrial productivity and the third, which had the potential to do so provided the Eurasian steppes were fully covered by a railway network that could readily access mineral and agricultural resources.

His concern in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* for the growth of a territorial power resting on the resources of the Eurasian steppes had an historical antecedent in his 1904 paper titled "The Geographical Pivot of History."[22] Mackinder's book "applied the 1904 concept of the pivot area to the compelling circumstances of a real crisis, but only Mackinder could see that the situation remained critical."[23]

The "pivot area" (of 1904) of the Eurasian steppes was relabeled the heartland in 1919. According to the strict geographic definition of the heartland, the Eurasian steppe area under consideration was inaccessible to maritime commerce and sea power. He amended this strict geographic definition by offering a broader, strategic definition that comported with the military events of World War I and its aftermath. Based on his concept of the heartland, he made several bold predictions that set him apart from the accepted consensus of the day, most controversially that the conflict that had just ended in 1918 was little more than a pyrrhic victory, one that had not resolved the key political and strategic relationship between Germany (and the Germanic diaspora through eastern Europe) and Russia (and the Slavic peoples), which had fought over access to the heartland.

Mackinder's Perspective

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[20] Mackinder, "Man–power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength," p. 142.

[21] P. Tinline, "How to Rule the World," *New Statesman*, vol. 148, Feb. 1-7, 2019, p. 48.

[22] See, H.J. Mackinder, The Geographical Pivot of History, *The Geographical Journal,* vol. 23, no. 4 (April 1904)

[23] W.H. Parker, *Mackinder Geography as an aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 164.

The title of the first chapter in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* is "Perspective." Mackinder's perspective was a global one, with localities compared and juxtaposed in the context of a worldwide scale of analysis. The First World War was compared and contrasted with other great wars of history; it was characterized as "a cataract in the stream of history."s[24] Mackinder wondered why great wars occur about every hundred years. They are the "outcome, direct or indirect, of the unequal growth of nations, and that unequal growth is not wholly due to the greater genius and energy of some nations as compared with others; in large measure it is the result of the uneven distribution of fertility and strategical opportunity upon the face of the globe. In other words, there is in nature no such thing as equality of opportunity for the nations."[25]

The challenge for the future was to grade the "stream bed of future history as that there shall be no more cataracts." If war was to be prevented in the future, there had to be a recognition of certain geographical realities, and states had to be willing to engage with the challenges these realities brought forth. He rejected the Darwinian theory that assumed "those forms of organization should survive which adapted themselves best to their natural environment." In claiming that human victory consists of rising above this fatalism, Mackinder was not skeptical about democracy's ideals; instead, he sought to reconcile those ideals with geopolitical realities.

The challenge was clearly stated "how we may best adjust our ideals of freedom to these lasting realities of our earthly home."[26] This led to an examination, in the second chapter, of the tendencies of human nature and how they manifested themselves in political and social organizations.

For Mackinder, humans are creatures of habit. When arrayed according to the precepts of the "division and coordination of labor," men create societies, political organizations, economic corporations, religious institutions, etc.—which in the modern era typically engage in specialization of function, coordination through markets, and interaction via habitual activities. Should mundane difficulties arise through the everyday division of labor, humans attempt to overcome their difficulties through coping.

Societies have what Mackinder termed "momentum," an engineering concept including not only mass and velocity, but also directionality. Geopolitical analysis thus depends, in no small measure, on an appreciation of population size, speed of change through technological and organizational innovation, coupled with the strategic capabilities and the intentions of leadership.

Mackinder characterized the managers of society, the "Going Concern," as two categories of organizers. The first was an administrator whose function was "to keep the running social machine in repair." Mackinder argued that they are not really "begetters" of new organs of political organization; instead, their reforms were

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[24] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 1.
[25] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 2.
[26] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 4.

carried out incrementally and bureaucratically. He called the second type of organizer a "creator of social mechanism," the essential features of which emerged as a consequence of the French and Bolshevik revolutions.

While democratic idealism may prompt a revolution, Mackinder claimed that idealism does not flourish in the midst of revolutions. The revolutionary organizer was a realist, whose actions were grounded in the ways, means, and foreseeable and desired consequences. The reordering of manpower was one of his tools in reordering society to serve the purposes of the state. This kind of organizer was ultimately antithetical to the values of democracy. "The thought of the organizer is essentially strategical, whereas that of the true democrat is ethical. The organizer is thinking how to use men; but the democrat is thinking of the rights of man, which rights are so many rocks in the way of the organizer."[27] Mackinder would shortly witness firsthand the Bolshevik reorganization of Russian society as the British representative to the White Russians in south Russia.

Two years after *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was published, Mackinder articulated in greater detail the new dangers that had emerged in the aftermath of World War I. "We had not only spanned the oceans and continents, reduced the time of communication, but we had also increased in the most wonderful way the power of retailing personality, whether through the newspaper or by film, with the result that a man at the other side of the world might speak or make grimaces to a million on this side. The power of organizers had increased, so that it was the prime danger to humanity."[28] In a practical sense, through the efficacy of transport and communication, the creators of social mechanisms henceforth cast a universal gaze on the world.[29] Mackinder implied that reorganizing this or that nation-state would henceforth be a jumping off point for regional, even global restructuring.

Mackinder then articulated two contentious propositions about the nature of democratic and autocratic states. First, democracies have an ambivalent relationship with strategic thinking; second, their idealism often propels them to intervene abroad. According to Mackinder, "Democracy refuses to think strategically unless and until compelled to do so for purposes of defense. That, of course, does not prevent democracy from declaring war for an ideal, as was seen during the French revolution. One of the inconsistencies of our pacifists today is that they often urge intervention in the affairs of other nations."[30] Such a combination—intervention motivated by ideals but devoid of thinking systematically about means, ends, ways, and consequences—is not without risk.

He ended this chapter on social momentum on *how* he was going to understand the realities of international politics that would have a practical utility that impelled action. To accomplish this goal, he divided the world into sea powers and land powers, thereby suggesting that the societies that occupy these two

[27] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* pp. 15-16.

[28] *The Times*, July 11, 1921, quoted in W.H. Parker, *Mackinder Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ,1987), pp. 82-83.

[29] I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Andreas Beneke for this insight.

[30] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 23.

fundamentally different environments have divergent social momentum and strategic interests.

Sea Power versus Land Power

In the subsequent chapters 3 and 4, Mackinder developed a dichotomy of sea power and land power. This dichotomy was based on the fact that sea powers historically had relied on buoyancy and, prior to the mechanization of sea transport, wind power in order to project force; whereas land powers had projected force via overland travel. There is a congruence between Mackinder and Thucydides, who emphasized the adversarial relationship between the two.

In developing this aspect of geopolitical thought, Mackinder broke new intellectual ground by describing how the relationship between these two approaches had changed over time, not merely in the case of one confrontation, e.g. between Athens and Sparta, but from the history of the ancient Mediterranean to World War I. Furthermore, the new sociological and economic dimensions he had identified (i.e., going concerns, social momentum, markets, etc.) required a synthetic interpretation, which he developed using history, geography, and strategy.

Mackinder's interpretation assumed that the practical implications of the geographic reality of the unity of the oceans had not been understood until the beginning of the twentieth century. Why was this? He believed that the influence of geography on human activities depended not merely on the physical facts of geography, but also required men to imagine the reality of oceanic unity. Both objective facts and subjective appreciations mattered for a full geopolitical assessment the strategic interactions of a particular historical epoch.

He claimed that "each century has its own geographical perspective" and that the geographical perspective of the twentieth century would likely differ from that of previous and future periods. His understanding of the geographic perspective operating at the beginning of the twentieth century was peerless. "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. The known does not fade any longer through the half-known into the unknown."[31] Every "deed of humanity" would be "echoed and re-echoed" around the globe. This realization enabled Mackinder to explain the rapid horizontal escalation of World War I into a truly global conflict. He wrote, "That, in the ultimate analysis, is why every considerable state was bound to be drawn into the recent war, if it lasted, as it did last long enough."[32]

In this closed global system, the relative efficiency of states and economic organizations became a more important prerequisite for the effective exercise of power than territorial conquest. Seapowers, for example, now had the potential to project military power ashore on an unprecedented scale.

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[31] Mackinder, D*emocratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 29.
[32] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 30.

Another dimension that had underpinned the war of 1914-1919 and gave it global consequences was a process of diffusion of the industrial revolution based on the utilization of coal and iron. This process unfolded in a unique manner for each state. England, a maritime power, and France and Germany, land powers, underwent industrialization in divergent socio-economic contexts. For instance, the former advanced a laissez-faire economic position, whereas the Germans adopted mercantilism. The growth in the Eurasian railway network, Mackinder believed, was leading to an inland extension of a pre-existing global maritime market.

With the development of railway transport, strategic thinkers could imagine extending the geographical scope of conflict by mobilizing men and materiel on an unprecedented scale. Policymakers could now plan to project military power to locations that would have been unthinkable in the nineteenth century. For the first time, global dominance was imagined as a realistic strategic objective.

Mackinder articulated the enduring principles of the relationship between sea power and land power by developing several case studies that took account of unique geographical patterns of political history. The first examined the "square of water between Europe and Asia"—the Aegean Sea—in which the island of Crete was the "largest and most fruitful" of the Aegean islands. Whether or not Crete was "first base of sea-power" was of less importance to Mackinder than the fact that "the man–power of the sea must be nourished by land fertility somewhere, and other things being equal— such as security of the home and energy of the people—that power will control the sea which is based on the greater resources."[33] Accordingly, Mackinder argued that the manpower devoted to the projection of force overseas depended on having a productive and secure territorial base.

However, such bases were vulnerable to the depredations of, or conquest by, neighboring land powers. After having assessed the strategy of the failed Persian attempt to conquer the Hellenic Aegean world and the classic case of land versus sea power conflict between Sparta and Athens, Mackinder focused on the efforts of the Macedonians, who having conquered the Greek Peninsular, proceeded to march

> into Asia, and through Syria into Egypt, and on the way destroying Tyre of the Phoenicians. Thus they made a "closed sea" of the Eastern Mediterranean by depriving both the Greeks and the Phoenicians of their bases. That done, the Macedonian King Alexander could advance light-heartedly into Upper Asia.[34]

The Macedonians thus altered the operation of the ancient Mediterranean by disrupting the maritime competition between the Greeks and the Phoenicians, each of which had attempted to advance a commercial network by sending forth colonists. Mackinder derived his second timeless principle from this case. "[W]ithout the protection of a navy commerce moved securely over a water-way because all the shores were held by one and the same land power."[35]

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[33] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 34.
[34] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 35.
[35] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 37.

Mackinder's second case study was the entire Mediterranean. A consequence of Rome's conquest of Carthage during the Third Punic War meant that Rome turned the Western Mediterranean into a "closed sea" since all of its shores were now held by one land-power. After the Battle of Actium, Rome extended its control over the eastern Mediterranean.[36]

Thus, for the next five centuries, the Roman Empire remained at its core a land empire: "No fleet was needed, save a few police vessels, to maintain as complete a command of the arterial sea-way of the Mediterranean."[37] The implication of this analysis is that a closed sea had the surprising consequence of reducing the need for a war fleet in those waters, freeing resources for other potential theaters of maritime conflict should the need arise.

Mackinder was not a geographic determinist. These geographical patterns were mutable depending on successful political or military action. In describing the forces that led to subsequent change, he noted how the Norsemen raided over the North Sea, through the English Channel and the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. Forward bases were established in the islands of the British archipelago and Sicily. Simultaneously, the Saracens of Arabia captured Egypt and Syria and conquered the southern shores of the Mediterranean. They annexed parts of Sicily and Spain for their overseas bases and proceeded to build fleets.

Consequently, the competition between land and sea power may at different times produce varying outcomes. During the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean was a "closed sea" in which commerce was protected via the exercise of land power along its entire littoral. Yet, while Christian Europe and Islam fought for maritime dominance in the Mediterranean, it was no longer "closed." In the words of one commentator, Mackinder was creating "a conceptually robust geopolitical model for theorizing about the relationships between material contexts and security–political arrangements."[38]

In his third case study, Mackinder focused on the maritime tradition of Great Britain. Britain's position shifted from being located in Europe's "peninsular mainland" during the Middle Ages, to the point where Britain was able to envelope and contain the peninsula mainland by means of the strategic deployment of its sea power. This development reached its apogee after the defeat of the French and their Spanish allies at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Mackinder argued that the constituent elements of British sea power were its geographical configuration, agricultural fertility, and manpower. From the Norman Conquest to the beginning of the industrial revolution, these factors had a specific geographical context: "One fertile plain between the mountains of the west and

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[36] This battle took place in 31 BC off the western coast of Greece. The Roman leader Octavius Caesar defeated a combined fleet of Mark Antony and the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra. One of the consequences of this battle was the annexation of Egypt as a Roman province.

[37] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 39.

[38] Daniel Deudney, "Geopolitics as Theory: Historical Security Materialism," *European Journal of International Relations,* vol. 6, no.1, 2000 p. 80.

north and the narrow seas to the east and south, a people of farmers, a single king, a single parliament, a tidal river, a single great city for central market and port."[39]

The technological and organizational characteristics of British sea power may have changed over the centuries, but Britain's insular position allowed intervention in European military conflicts in a fashion and at a timing of its own choosing. The productive and secure home base along the Thames River valley, supplemented in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by other locations in the British Isles,[40] was the *sine qua non* of Britain's ability to sustain itself as a major maritime power.

The Great War

Mackinder then applied his analytical framework to the course of the Great War, dividing the conflict into two phases: the first from 1914 to 1917 and the second from 1917 to the end of the war. During the first phase, the war fought in the old style with the Royal and French Navies taking "command of the ocean" and enveloping the European peninsula land theater of the war. From this position, Great Britain projected and sustained an expeditionary force[41] into France and provisioned France with vital raw materials. Russia provided a second front, one that distracted Imperial Germany from directing all of its land-based efforts against France and sea forces against the British fleet in the North Sea.

What was absent from Mackinder's analysis was an appreciation of the disruptive effect of the U-boat, a new technology that threatened the supply routes crossing the North Atlantic from Canada and the United States. Furthermore, he neglected to mention that the defeat of this threat had been brought about by the introduction of oceanic convoys as an element of coherent anti–submarine warfare tactics, and with the entry of the United States into the war.[42]

According to Mackinder, America's entry into the war combined with Imperial Russia's withdrawal from the conflict in 1917 changed the war aims and "world strategy" of the conflict. By the end of World War I, sea power had laid siege to land power and the strategic objective was unambiguously to make the world a safer place for democracies. Mackinder interpreted the war as having ultimately been a conflict between "Islanders" and "Continentals."

To further substantiate this claim, Mackinder predicted that North America would come to be understood in a geopolitical sense not as a continent, but as an island. He thought that the American political class would no longer think of itself as standing apart from European and even Asian or African affairs, particularly as naval power had come to envelop what Mackinder perceived to be a World Island of the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. He assumed that the imperatives of World War I would bring about a revolution in the imagination and policies of the American elite; he failed to appreciate the interwar American desire for a revival of

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[39] Mackinder, D*emocratic Ideals and Reality,* p.. 54.

[40] For example, the Clyde and Sunderland and Liverpool being important for shipbuilding.

[41] The British Expeditionary Force.

[42] S.R. Dunn, Bayley's *War: The Battle of the Western Approaches in the First World War* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2018).

the isolationism the North Atlantic had originally inspired. What the First World War failed to achieve, the Second World War brought home to the American elite with a vengeance: the United States, as the unambiguous superpower in the post-World War II era, could no longer ignore events occurring across the World Island. The emblematic event that confirmed Mackinder's post-World War I assumption was the founding of North Atlantic Treaty Organizations (NATO) in 1949.

Chief among those events was the emergence of the potential threat to maritime power emanating from the continental power occupying the Eurasian heartland. To understand the landsman's point of view, he suggested "brigading" geographic details into general categories of strategic significance. His departure point was the inaccessible coast of northern Russia. There, three of the largest rivers in the world, the Lena, Yenisei, and Ob, flowed northwards through Siberia into the Arctic. South of Siberia, he identified other regions in which rivers drained into inland lakes, the most prominent of which were the Caspian and Aral Seas. The crucial strategic point was that the whole area was inaccessible to oceanic navigation and had been dominated by horse-riding nomads who had frequently attacked and laid waste to Eastern Europe.

However, with the opening up of this area by railways and aviation, a revolution in geopolitics was occurring. Specifically, these changes in transport and travel would, according to Mackinder, potentially provide the power occupying this vast stretch of territory access to resources and a concomitant expansion in manpower, the material sinews of national power.

It was in this chapter on the landsman's perspective that Mackinder coined the concept of the heartland, which represented a revised version of Mackinder's 1904 conceptualization of the geographic "pivot." Torjorn Knutsen has suggested that it represented an expanded version of "the pivot of 1904."[43] As a consequence of World War I, Mackinder came to appreciate that his original formulation did not account for the territorial ambitions of those powers engaged in that conflict. He amended his formulation to encompass strategic intentions and actions of the combatants on the eastern front:

> The heartland for the purposes of strategical thinking includes the Baltic Sea, the navigable Middle and Lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet and Mongolia. Within it therefore were Brandenburg-Prussia, and Austria Hungary, as well as Russia—a vast triple base of manpower, which was lacking to the horse-riders of history. The heartland 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.[44]

The strategic delineation of the heartland is of paramount importance as it reflects Mackinder's appreciation of how an alliance of powers occupying the Eurasian steppes interacted with the key regions on its periphery.

Mackinder deemed two smaller regions on the heartland's periphery of demographic importance, describing them as the "most important in the globe." The first region was the Mediterranean and the European peninsula and off-shore islands. The second was the southern and eastern coastlands of Asia. In 1919, their combined population was 800 million people. Mackinder then advanced the following geopolitical proposition: "four fifths of the population of the Great Continent, the World Island, live in two regions which together measure only one fifth of its area."[45] Two key factors pertained to both of these regions: their rivers were navigable from the ocean and climatic conditions allowed these regions to sustain large populations. These were the "regions of the plowmen and shipmen."

For Mackinder, the heartland had a greater connectivity with Europe and Arabia than with China or India. He believed that a power or an alliance of powers occupying the heartland might secure sufficient resources to construct a fleet that would effectively control the Baltic and Black Seas,[46] turning these seas into closed bodies of water, and to provide secure bases from which to contest the control of the high seas. Thus, new transport and weapons technology could expand the geographical scope of the heartland. Given the speed of technological change, he articulated an insightful strategic analysis:

> Today armies have at their disposal not only the trans-continental railway, but also the motor car. They have, too, the aeroplane, which is of a boomerang nature, a weapon of land-power as against sea-power. . . . In short, a great military power in possession of the heartland, and of Arabia, could take easy possession of the crossways of the world at Suez. Sea power would have found it very difficult to hold the Canal if a fleet of submarines had been based from the beginning of the war on the Black Sea.[47]

Mackinder's proposals for reconstructing Europe after World War I advocated keeping Russia contained in the heartland and to limit the power of Germany to expand territorially into the heartland.

Mackinder recognized that the conflict between Great Britain and Imperial Germany was the most recent manifestation of the recurring contest between naval and land-based powers in European history. The proximate cause for World War I, according to Mackinder, was the ethnic competition and conflict between the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe and the Germans who migrated into those regions and settled in their midst. Thus, a post-war territorial settlement would have to address

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[45] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 83.
[46] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 109.
[47] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 111.

the "fundamental antagonism between the Germans, who wished to be Masters in East Europe, and the Slavs, who refused to submit to them."[48]

Reconstruction: Domestic and International

In the concluding chapters of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Mackinder discussed how the ideals of democracy might be squared with geopolitical realities. Some recommendations were too idealistic (e.g., the suggestion that nation-states forgo economic policies that might lead to unbalanced national economic growth). This suggestion applied to both laissez-faire and mercantilist economies. He identified the intense rivalry between regimes promoting market-centric versus state-centric approaches to economic development in the years leading up to the First World War. This was a trans-historical problem for which he had no practical solution. A similar failure can be discerned in his response to the threat of socialists advancing a manifesto of the proletariat as a class and capitalists advancing the special interests of producers gaining control of the state.

He argued that equality among nations can only be achieved "from within as well as from without." In short, domestic politics had to be conducted with an understanding of its effect on foreign policy. This contention had several implications, the most important of which was that nations must, if they were to survive, be based on local communities within them. He cited the old English idea of the House of Commons: "the House of Communities—shires and burghs—would be the modern translation"[49]

Mackinder saw the real challenge as the need to prevent "class and interest" from cutting across localities. How was this to be done? He asserted that since "organization based on local communities is essential to the stable and therefore peaceable life of nations, then those local communities must have as complete and balanced a life of their own as is compatible with the life of the nation itself."[50]

Only by altering these going concerns—economic, social, and political domestic institutions of nation-states—might peace be assured.

Mackinder summarized his fears for the post-war world by coining a geopolitical catechism that would become the most controversial and remembered aspect of the whole book:

> When our statesmen are in conversation with the defeated enemy, some airy cherub should whisper to them from time to time this saying:
>
> > Who rules East Europe controls the heartland:
> > Who rules the heartland commands the World-Island:

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[48] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 124.
[49] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 184.
[50] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 186.

Who rules the World-Island commands the World. [51]

How to forestall this eventuality was central to his proposed reconstruction of Europe. Mackinder understood that the peace talks would advance a new democratic ideal. The creation of the League of Nations that, by advancing collective security arrangements among juridically equal and sovereign states, would bring about a European-wide peace. This new ideal had seized the imagination of many. It became, in effect, an ideological force to be reckoned with, just as the slogan "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" had previously motivated so many during the French Revolution and the goal of national autonomy had during the revolutions of 1848. To give the proposed League a reasonable chance of success, Mackinder recommended the division of Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire into smaller, more compact nation-states, each of which would become its own going concern.
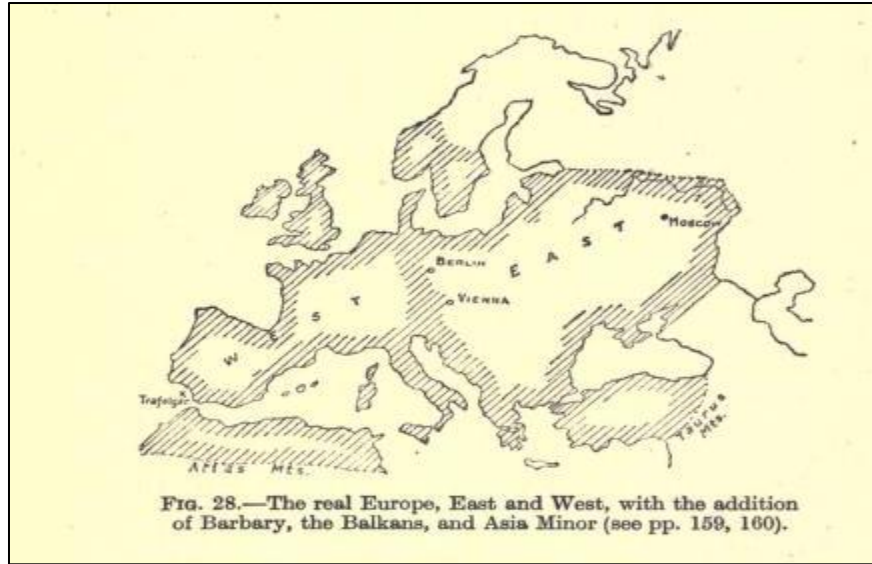
He claimed that "there should be a tier of independent States between Germany and Russia."[52] These newly independent states would be populated by ethnic groups that had been submerged within the territories of Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary. Mackinder's map displayed a tier of states stretching from the Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic Sea in north to the Adriatic Sea, encompassing some of the European nations that had won their independence from the Ottoman Empire—another ally of the defeated Central Powers.

> Between the Baltic and the Mediterrainean you have these seven non-German peoples, each on the scale of a European State of the second rank—the Poles, the Bohemians (Czechs and Slovaks), the Hungarians (Magyars), the South Slavs (Serbians, Croatians and Slovenes), the Rumanians, the Bulgarians, and the Greeks.[53]

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[51] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 150.
[52] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 158.
[53] Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p 159.

FIG. 28.—The real Europe, East and West, with the addition of Barbary, the Balkans, and Asia Minor (see pp. 159, 160).

The map depicting the borders of this "Middle Tier of States" was crudely drawn, and he conceded that it was merely illustrative of the means by which the separation of Germany from Russia might be achieved. Mackinder regarded this separation as a necessity.

He produced a demographic analysis of these proposed states in order to demonstrate that, once organized as independent entities, they were a force with which to be reckoned—provided several conditions were met. First, they needed to be economically integrated via a rail system from the Baltic to the Adriatic; second, they must remain vigilant in defense of their interest in remaining free from German and Russian political depredations and economic penetration; and, third, the Western powers, the United Kingdom and France, should extend an alliance to these countries to insure their continued independence and security.

Once allied with the Western maritime powers, these new nation-states would help restore the balance of power and provide a foundation for the operations of a League of Nations. In effect, this tier of new states would operate as a buffer between a Germany seeking one day in the future to revive its expansionary project and the Soviet Union, which might want to spread its revolution to the lands along its borders.

Collective security, the new normative democratic ideal, was in Mackinder's estimation a poor basis for securing peace unless firmly established on geopolitical realities. The first requirement was to establish the buffer states separating Germany from the Soviet Union. These new "going concerns" would secure their own interests by remaining autonomous political entities, divorced from their more powerful neighbors and allied with the Western maritime powers. He sought to weave together the three foundations of a modern international order: collective security through a League of Nations, the ideal of national self-determination as

described by President Woodrow Wilson, and the traditional means of off-shore maritime naval power, by which the United Kingdom had secured peace on the continent of Europe by rebalancing power as necessitated by changing circumstance. However, the Treaty of Versailles—that dismantled Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and established a tier of independent states—had less to do with Mackinder's recommendations than with the immediate desire by the victors to punish the vanquished. Nevertheless, this buffer area between Germany and the Russian Federation continues to exercise the geopolitical imagination in the twenty-first century. Mackinder wrote to address the immediate crisis of his time, but his categories of analysis and method of thought has an enduring significance.

Retrospect and Prospect

Many scholars and policymakers today acknowledge the extraordinary contribution that Mackinder made to geographic methods and geopolitical understanding. He is one of the giants on whose shoulders subsequent geopolitical thinkers during the twentieth century stood.[54] The 1904 essay, "The Geographic Pivot," and the 1919 book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, provided a vantage point from which to envision local and regional developments in a worldwide context. In recognizing the threat that a territorially consolidated heartland posed for maritime powers, Mackinder placed in bold relief the geopolitical imperatives to counter the territorial ambitions of Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union. It took two global conflicts and the Cold War to prevent Mackinder's prediction: the consolidation of the world-island under the control of a heartland power.

A polymath, such as Mackinder, attracted critics—especially ideologically motivated ones. One academic has claimed that Mackinder was not sufficiently liberal to be included at Versailles as a geographic expert for the British delegation;[55] another charged that Mackinder did not free himself from his own ideological biases, thus his claim to having a "transcendent Olympian … judgment" was suspect.[56] A third critic argued that Mackinder's predictions were simply wrong;[57] a fourth insisted that modern modes of communication, such as the internet, had negated geography as a factor in international relations;[58] a fifth has noted that one of Mackinder's

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[54] For a history of this expression, see, R.K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York: Harcourt, 1985).
[55] G. Kearns in "Imperial Geopolitics," in J. Agnew, K. Mitchell and G. Toal, eds., *A Companion to Political Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), pp. 176-177.
[56] P. Kelly, *A Critique of Critical Geopolitics in Geopolitics,* vol. 11, no. 1, 2006 p. 37. See, also, G. OTuathail and S. Dalby, eds., *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 1998); G. Kerns, *Halford Mackinder and the Geographical Pivot of History*, vol. 170, no. 4, Dec. 2004, p. 342; and C. Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 24.
[57] S. Pelizza in "The Geopolitics of International Reconstruction; "Halford Mackinder and Eastern Europe, 1919-1920," *The International Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, p. 191.
[58] See, C.J. Fetweiss, Sir Halford Mackinder, geopolitics ,and policymaking in the 21st century, Parameters, vol 30,no 2(Summer 20000 pp58-71.

historical observations has been undermined by subsequent research;[59] and the British Conservative Politician Leo Amery claimed that *Democratic Ideals and Reality* had no policy impact in Britain or the United States. Amery wrote, "Mackinder's views attracted little attention in the Anglo-Saxon world where they were treated as fanciful exercises of the academic imagination, but they were studied closely in Germany and formed the basis of General Haushofer's *Geopolitik*."[60]

What is of paramount importance for our understanding of international relations is this: geopolitical thinkers in the West, Russia and the People's Republic of China agree on the relevance of Mackinder's thought. They recognize its utility for forestalling or advancing their respective national geopolitical projects.[61] China, in conjunction with Russia, is currently promoting mercantilist policies designed to parry the Western producers of high-tech products while challenging the principle of freedom of navigation in international waterways. These are necessary for the supply of the island allies of the United States off the coast of East Asia. This anti-Western stance aims to change the geopolitical reality through the construction of a number of "amphibian ports"[62] as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the aim of which is to create a new network of strategic and political power. Those who believed that the efficacy of Mackinder's predictions had been vanquished finally with the fall of the Berlin Wall could not have accounted for these subsequent developments. Michael Howard, formerly Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, wrote, "Far from the geopolitical fantasies of Halford Mackinder and his disciples being proved valid, with the Heartland of the World Island pressing out to control the Rimlands, we are seeing instead the communities of the Rimland increasingly penetrating and transforming the stagnant Heartland."[63]

In the twenty-first century, neither Russia nor China must worry about the heartland ambitions of others as had been the case before Richard Nixon's policy change towards China. The emerging Sino-Russian alliance challenges the security of the West with the reemergence of the heartland as more geographically extensive and more logistically integrated in an unprecedented manner. As noted earlier,

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[59] K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on The Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945), p. 23.

[60] L.S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 229.

[61] For how one Chinese scholar reinterprets Mackinder and applies his mode of geopolitical thinking to China, see, Zhixing Zhang, "China Takes An Expansionist View of Geopolitics," *Forbes*, Oct. 31, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2017/10/31/china-takes-an-expansionist-view-of-geopolitics/#60dfc5ce6a52. I am in debt to Rodger Baker of Stratfor for this citation. And for Russia, Charles Clover, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1999-03-01/dreams-eurasian-heartland-reemergence-geopolitics.

[62] "They are a confluence of sea, pipeline and land and air transport facilities." See, G.R. Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2017), pp. 210-212.

[63] M. Howard, "A Farewell to Arms," *International Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 3, 1989, p. 412.

Mackinder claimed that each century has its own geographical perspective. The twenty-first century is clearly developing a new geographical perspective. This perspective will alter Mackinder's conception of the heartland and its relevance to international politics.

One potential geographic change is associated with the progression of climate change. A key dimension in Mackinder's definition and delineation of the Eurasian heartland was its landlocked quality due to climatic factors. Some scientists have claimed that this may come to an end as the Arctic ice cap melts and the north east passage around Russia's northern coast opens to shipping for at least for part of the year. Should this occur, the Eurasian heartland is no longer technically a "heartland" as Mackinder defined the term. The Federal Russian Navy may be able to project its power into this region to enforce its claims to the untapped resources on the Arctic floor.

The buildup of Russian naval forces in the Arctic, while unforeseen and unforeseeable by Mackinder in 1919, presents a potential threat to Canada and the United States. However, the Russians might discover that defending against the United States across the Arctic might well strain their finances as they simultaneously attempt to project military power overland to the periphery of Eurasia. Russia would then be faced with the dilemma that Imperial Germany never resolved: on the one hand, to divert men and resources from the army to build a fleet capable of contesting British dominance on the high seas, or, on the other, to concede the oceans and maritime commerce to the British to emerge victorious on land against Russia and France. In highlighting this dilemma for Imperial Germany, during World War I, Mackinder invites the use of this historical analogy to Russia—a land power that might also decide to go to sea.

In 1919, Mackinder appreciated the willingness of the victorious powers to rely on new ideals such as collective security while discounting the geopolitical realities. Many idealists in the Western democracies believed that the League of Nations was the means by which peace might be secured. Mackinder's admonition in his appendix still holds pertinence in the twenty-first century: "The rule of the world still rests upon force, notwithstanding the juridical assumption of equality between sovereign States, great or small." The three realities of international relations—national self-determination as a bulwark to empire, collective security through international institutions, and the balance of power—remain significant features of international relations today.

In the post-1945 period, the United Nations General Assembly became the institution for recognizing movements of national self-determination. The greater powers are represented on the Security Council, each having a veto over the UN's actions. The membership of the Security Council may be reconstituted to reflect the relative shift in economic and military power from the Western powers to emerging states such as India.

Finally, no centennial appreciation would be complete without an acknowledgment of Mackinder's impact on United States foreign policy. It has been a long time coming. However, he understood the trajectory through which an observable reality fused with an ideal to become policy: "As so often happens, those who have labored, and apparently labored for long without result, find suddenly that

their work was far from being without result. They had sown the seed, but it took a storm of rain for the germination and growth of the young plant to crop."[64]

Phil Tinline, a BBC journalist, has argued that "the storm of rain," as far as Mackinder was concerned, was the advent of the Cold War: "As America tried to decide how to face a freshly hostile USSR, East Coast academics drew on Mackinder's work and policymakers listened. Through Princeton's Edward Mead Earle, his ideas reached George Kennan, architect of proposals to "contain" the Soviet Union."[65] Henry Kissinger has argued that Mackinder's pertinence extends into the post–Cold War era: "Russia, regardless of who governs it, sits astride the territory that Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical heartland and is heir to one of the most potent imperial traditions."[66]

In summary, after one hundred years, Sir Halford Mackinder's ideas continue to have explanatory power: Robert Hughes and Jess Heley from Aberystwyth University have argued: "The practice of global politics has not changed sufficiently for Mackinder's ideas to be discarded as an analytical tool for exploring contemporary geopolitics"[67] Most importantly, he identified, long before anyone else, the existence of a closed political system in which the struggle for relative efficiency would become of defining importance.

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[64] H.J. Mackinder, "Presidential address to the Geographical Association, 1916," *The Geography Teacher 1916*, p. 6.

[65] P. Tinline, "How to rule the world," *New Statesman*, vol. 148, Feb. 1-7, 2019, pp. 48-51.

[66] Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 814.

[67] R.G. Hughes & J. Heley, "Between Man and Nature: The Enduring Wisdom of Sir Halford Mackinder," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol 38. No. 6, 2015, p. 927.