

Heartland, Rimland, and the Grand Chessboard Deciphering the Great Power Politics in Central Asia

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Abstract

As the twenty-first century progresses, struggle for the control of Central Asia is growing, as rising China increases its economic and political clout while Russia is trying to regain its lost glory. The American presence in the region was considered as a threat not only by China, but also Russia who feared that the US is determined to carve out its sphere of influence at their expense. The recent withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan and Taliban re-taking Kabul further complicates the geopolitical calculations. China and Russia have been cooperating to ensure that the adjoining region, typically falling under Russian sphere of influence, may not become an American influenced area. Where China has emerged as one of the biggest trading partners of the Central Asian Republics, and Russia has signed several bilateral and multilateral security agreements to ensure its continued influence therein. Eurasia generally and Central Asia specifically, once again, is back to the limelight of great powers politics. This study traces the conceptual evolution of geopolitics, from Ratzel's Lebensraum, Kjellen's theory of state as an organism, to the Mahan conception of the sea power, among others. It discusses the collective geopolitical insights of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, and Zbigniew Brzezinski who focussed on the concepts of Heartland, Rimland, and Grand Chessboard, respectively, to decipher the geopolitics of Eurasia.

Keywords: Central Asia, Geopolitics, Lebensraum, Heartland, Rimland.

Introduction

The term Geopolitics is a portmanteau word – geo means earth or globe and politics essentially concerns itself with the struggle for power (Scholvin, 2016). In this sense, geopolitics deals with questions like how power is internationally distributed and how such distribution is influenced by power itself. The answers to these questions become difficult in a world where there is anarchy coupled with

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power being not in abundance. In such situations, survival demands enhancement of power. When every state pursues power, a semblance of equilibrium is established, that is, the balance of power. However, such a desired equilibrium rarely emerges in situations where the strong states attempt to dominate and achieve hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001) while the weak states form coalitions to collectively resist the powerful states. In case, if the coalition emerges strong enough to thwart the aggressor's designs then balance of power is being carefully taken advantage of (Morgenthau, 1948). In case the coalition fails to prevent the powerful state from achieving maximum influence, then aggressors are being provided the opportunity to achieve the desired influence at the expense of the rest. As a result, wars and conflicts are often seen as geopolitical games between those who want to preserve the status quo and those who want to change and ultimately overthrow it. This actually reflects the struggle among the great powers, who are considered as the ultimate managers of the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Geopolitics deals with the relationship between politics and geography on the global level where geography works as a lens to view and interpret international politics. Geography provides a visual medium via maps to make sense of the complex phenomena that transpire at the unit, state and systemic levels. Kennedy considers that geopolitics is the influence of geographical factors upon human actions (Kennedy, 2004). What is geopolitics, and how is this concept evolved? Who are the greatest geopolitical scholars and how have they contributed to our understanding of the world politics? And finally, what is the importance of the Central Asian region and how is the great power politics transpiring in this region? Qualitative content analysis as the methodological tool is utilised in order to answer the questions raised above.

Intellectual Roots of Modern Geopolitics

By the late nineteenth century, modern geopolitics started evolving, when the term entered into the European political discourse. German Friedrich Ratzel and Swedish Johan Kjellen played crucial role in developing this concept. Ratzel, influenced by Charles Darwin's work, came up with the idea of states as organic entities. Being a geographer, he considered that states expand their territories, encroaching upon others' in order to grow, while those who are not powerful

enough to expand are declining and decaying (Scholvin, 2016; Smith, 1980). He observed that growing population demands lots of resources and territory to sustain life. He coined the term “*Lebensraum*”, that is, living space – a strategic imperative for states in their struggle for survival of the fittest (Dodds, 2007, p. 28). “Ratzel defined *Lebensraum* as the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence. The exact boundaries of a species’ *Lebensraum* were relative to its members’ metabolic requirements and environment, and expanded as population grew” (Smith, 1980). Taking cue from other colonial states, such as Britain and France, he and his contemporaries considered that Germany needs to expand geographically (Abrahamsson, 2013, p. 40).

Swedish political scientist and politician Rudolf Kjellen popularised the concept of *Geopolitik*. Being a disciple of Ratzel, he strengthened the organic theory of state considering it to be a living organism that needs to grow. He noted, “Vital states, occupying a limited space, are governed by the categorical political imperative to enlarge their territory, through colonisation, annexation or conquest” (Kjellen, quoted by Abrahamsson, 2013, p. 40). Kjellen, unlike Ratzel, who was a professor only, operationalised and strengthened Ratzel’s ideas. The writings of Kjellen and Ratzel soon attracted wider attention among leading German academics and politicians. One among those was Karl Haushofer, who fought in First World War as a brigade commander. Haushofer would later retire from the German army and pursue a career in academia as professor of geography at Munich University. Around 1920s, Haushofer met Rudolf Hess, who later became Hitler’s deputy. It was through Hess that Haushofer met Hitler who at that time was imprisoned in Landsberg fortress. Haushofer’s briefings on geopolitics broadened Hitler’s knowledge of the world, particularly his grand vision of conquering ‘*Lebensraum*’ for German people (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012, p. 59). “In a sense we can say that in Kjellen interpretation, Ratzel’s ideas underwent an operationalization that could be mobilised by Haushofer” (Abrahamsson, 2013) ultimately leading to become one of the foundational principles of the Nazi party. Using the ideas developed by Ratzel, Kjellen, and Haushofer, Nazi Germany expanded in Central and Eastern Europe, considering it to be their right. Tunander, however, considered that Kjellen – who died in 1922 – himself was not a Nazi, nor he wished Germany to conquer Europe. He wished to have a union of states being held together by a

central authority – similar to present day NATO, but which must be having Germany as the central state, and not the United States or other great powers (Tunander, 2001).

Lebensraum and organic theory of state created a particular disdain for geopolitics among intellectuals who regarded it as intellectually poisonous to be avoided. Nonetheless, the Anglo-American school of geopolitics, unlike their German counterparts, was not based on ethnic or racial issues. They tried to ensure not to mix ideological ambitions based on racial grounds with geopolitical imperatives. Instead, they were driven much by physio-geographical realities as starting point for explaining world affairs such as changes and effects of topographical, locational, and morphological conditions. Moreover, the Anglo-American schools of geopolitics disdained biological conceptions of Social Darwinism as something that has nothing to do with explaining geopolitics. One among such scholars was the American Alfred Thayer Mahan who emphasised on the superiority of sea-power over land-power which he thought was the reason behind Great Britain's dominance and influence around the world (Mahan, 1918). He considered that it is the control of the Pacific and Indian Oceans which would allow the maritime powers to exert pressure around the 'Rimland' areas which are vital for world domination. Furthermore, the German naval build-up in the late 1890s is also attributed to Mahan's geopolitical thesis which threatened Britain's naval supremacy that ultimately led to WW1.

While precisising the development of geopolitics in different phases, Cohen notes;

“Its key founding theories were formulated by geographers—Ratzel's organic large state and Lebensraum, Kjellen's doctrine that political processes are geographically determined, Mackinder's 'Heartland' as locus for command of the world by Eurasian land power, and Mahan's theory of world dominance by Anglo-American sea power. The second stage, German Geopolitik, led by Haushofer, combined racist and geographical deterministic doctrines in a pseudo-science that served Nazi strategy for world conquest. Cold War geopolitics, the third stage, was bifurcated. State-centered 'political'

geopolitics promoted by, among others, Kissinger and Brzezinski, introduced doctrines of containment, domino theory, linkage, and linchpin states. ‘Geographical’ geopolitics developed theories with universal perspectives—geopolitical systems of hierarchical polycentrism, economic globalism, and environmental/social orders. In the fourth, post-Cold War stage, theories of new world order and chaos have been introduced. However, most geopolitics continues Cold War bifurcation. Western ‘political’ geopolitics advocates expansion into the Heartland from Eastern Europe and Central Asia to advance US world hegemony. ‘Geographical’ geopolitics refines theories of polycentric global equilibrium or critical analyses that challenge global power structures” (Cohen, 2001).

Mackinder’s Heartland

British geographer Halford Mackinder in 1904 professed for the strong land power around the pivot areas – unlike Mahan’s conception of strong naval power – in order to attain greatness (H. J. Mackinder, 1904). The area outside of the pivot is split into the ‘Inner Crescent’ consisting of Europe, Southern, Southwestern and Eastern Asia. The ‘Outer Crescent’ consists of Britain, South and North America, Southern Africa, Australasia, and Japan (H. J. Mackinder, 1904; Ismailov & Papava, 2010). Russia, being a land-power having occupied the pivot areas, seeks further expansion into the peripheral zones. Interestingly, within few weeks of publication of his paper, Japan attacked Russia and thus initiated a series of battles that is known as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. In August of that year, the Japanese naval forces attacked Port Arthur and subdued the Russians. The battle of Tsushima Straits turned out a disaster for Russia’s further encroachment and shattered the illusion of Russia being a formidable land-power that could not be defeated by a sea power (Editors, 2021).

Furthermore, the changing geopolitical environment after the war led Mackinder to revise his previous work and to add new insights with a new publication in 1919. He observed that three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe constituted almost a quarter of world’s landmass and called it “World Island” (Mackinder, 1942, pp. 22,

38, 41, 46). But the key to strategic domination was what he termed the “Heartland,” previously called the “Pivot Area”- a part of Eurasia around the Black and Baltic Sea, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and some parts of modern-day Russia. However, Mackinder’s updated version of 1919 points out the “Inner Crescent” which consists of Arabia, Western Europe, India, and East Asia that make up only one-fifth of the World-Island (Eurasia-African) landmass and houses four-fifth of its population (Mackinder, 1942, p. 60). Moreover, Mackinder freely admits that the “Inner Crescent” was the more powerful part of the World-Island. The period from 1500s to 1900s saw great advances in naval technology thus resulting in sophisticated ships helping those on the “Outer Crescent” to travel faster and farther compared to anything on land, thus giving them large strategic flexibility. This meant that the “Outer Crescent” could bypass defences, strike near areas and wreak havocs before land-powers could even respond. As a result, the powers on the “Inner Crescent” during that period had nothing to fear from land powers and could create their own empires. But even then, those on the “Inner Crescent” could not dominate the World-Island. After all, they had not even touched the ‘Heartland’ (H. J. Mackinder, 1904, p. 434).

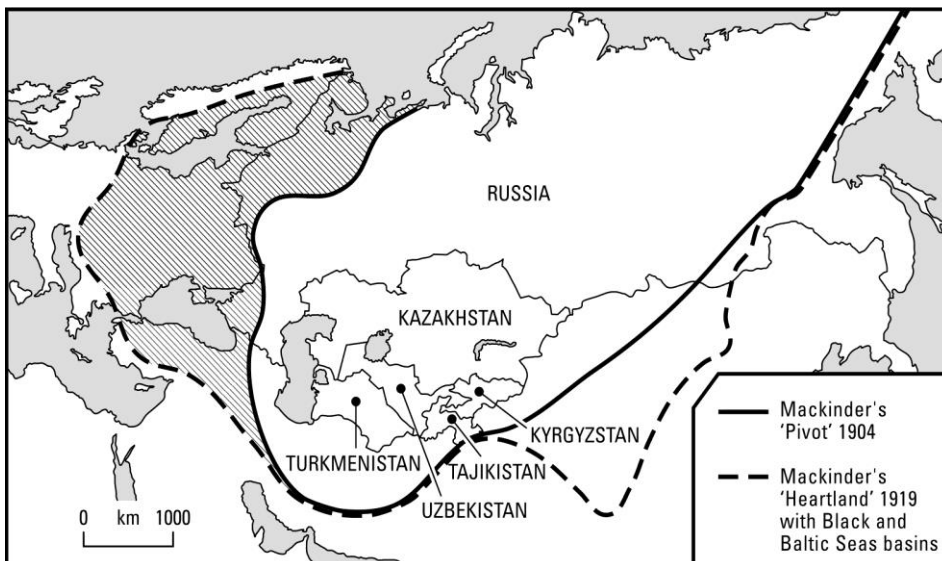


Figure 1: Mackinder’s Heartland (Source: https://www.cac-c.org/journal/2005/journal_eng/cac-04/02.megeng.shtml)

The 'Heartland' is known through its inaccessibility to naval forces. The region is separated from the ocean by the Arctic ice to the north, the Carpathians, Zargo, and Himalayan Mountain ranges, and the Arabian and Gobi deserts in between. Its rivers flow either into the inland seas or into the Arctic. Those at the "Inner Crescent," and "Outer Crescent" (H. J. Mackinder, 1904), therefore, had no path into the 'Heartland.' In geographical terms, the area of the heartland stretches from the Volga River in the west to the east of eastern Siberia, and then from the mountains of Himalayas in the south to the Arctic Sea in north. What made 'Heartland' a distinguished geographical point was the fact that Mackinder called it "the greatest natural fortress on earth" (Fettweis, 2000). But it too had an 'Achilles heel' which for Mackinder was its opening in the west somewhere between the Black and the Baltic Sea that exposed it to external attacks. This geographical loophole led him to his famous and golden triad of geopolitics: "*Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World*" (Mackinder, 1942).

The Heartland arid climate meant that settled agriculture was historically downplayed in favour of nomadism with their cavalry mobility. However, the 19th century Industrial Revolution outclassed horses and camel riding by steam engine (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012). This development prompted those on lands to build something of Heartland's equivalent to naval mobility. Mackinder envisions that under an industrial power, the Heartland only if overlaid with rail and road network will have the upper hand in terms of superior mobility and strategic flexibility over those on the Rimland areas (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012).

Spykman's Rimland

Mackinder's geographical contours did not go uncontested. American Professor, Nicholas J. Spykman in 1942, termed Mackinder's Inner Crescent as the "Rimland," situating on the continental periphery of Eurasia. He noted, "*Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world*" (Spykman, 1944, p. 43). Spykman argued that the maritime-oriented Rimland powers have the advantage of having open access to sea and wider exposure to the outside world. Therefore, the influence of land-oriented heartland power could be kept in check by the peripheral Rimlanders. The Heartland has traditionally

remained in the Russia's sphere of influence. But Hitler having controlled Eastern Europe failed to consolidate his position in the Heartland, as was predicted by Mackinder. This established credence for Spykman's Rimland theory.

The battle for the control of Rimland ultimately led to what Gaddis sarcastically referred as neither-so-hot nor-so-cold-Cold War (Gaddis, 2005). Any loss on the part of the United States and its allies in terms of power and influence in the strategic areas of Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East meant enhancing the relative power position of the Soviet Union on the Eurasia- African "World-Island." To prevent such a nightmarish scenario, the United States along with its West European allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949 with the objective to contain the Soviet Union – which already was in possession of both Eastern Europe and the Heartland (Sempa, 2002). Following the recommendations of George F. Kennan, President Truman committed to provide the much-needed material support required to contain the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union. The policy was to forge regional alliances, such as NATO, SEATO, and CENTO with economic and military assistance from the United States. These alliances were made with Rimland nations located on the Eurasian continent to withstand pressure from the Soviet controlled Heartland. Without containment, control of the Rimland would have given Soviet Union an overwhelming influence on the Eurasian-African "World-Island" as prescribed by Spykman (Sempa, 2002, p. 78). Greece, Turkey, Korea (1950-53), Indochina, and Afghanistan became the battlegrounds for the Cold War. It pitted maritime power on the "Outer Crescent" and the land power in the "Heartland" to test their strength for the control of the "Rimland."



Figure 2: Spykman's Rimland (Source: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/zhT8ATB--5g/maxresdefault.jpg>)

Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard

In late 1990s former National Security Advisor in the Carter Administration, Zbigniew Brzezinski laid out his vision for America's post-Cold War strategy. Brzezinski argues that for the sake of world stability, the United States needs to maintain its preponderant position in the international system and the key to this dominance lies in Eurasia. Accordingly, Eurasia, as it extends from Lisbon to Vladivostok, to a large extent will determine whether the United States remains preeminent on the world stage in the post-Cold War era or it declines. This gigantic continent is home to about 75% global population, produces about 60% of world's GNP and about three-fourth of the global energy is hidden beneath its soil, thus making it a grand chessboard upon which the game for world dominance is to be played (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1998).

Moreover, Brzezinski believes that the ability to manage various conflicting interests and powers in Eurasia is central to America's security and stability in the twenty-first century. For Brzezinski, the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War resulted in America's emergence as the sole superpower, surprisingly a non-

Eurasian one. Whereas Mearsheimer considers Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016, p. 71), Brzezinski regards Europe, East Asia and Central Asia as vital areas necessary to dominate the world (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1998).

The United States recognised that the management of resources is very important in the global distribution of power particularly in the region of, what Brzezinski calls, the global Balkans. Post-Cold War Balkan region in Europe was internally weak, torn by ethnic, religious, and territorial conflicts. However, unlike the Balkans in Europe, the Eurasian Balkans covers the area from the east of the Suez to the west of Xinjiang, to the south of Russia's border particularly the north of Kazakhstan and then all the way down to the Indian Ocean with population around 500 to 600 million people (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1998).

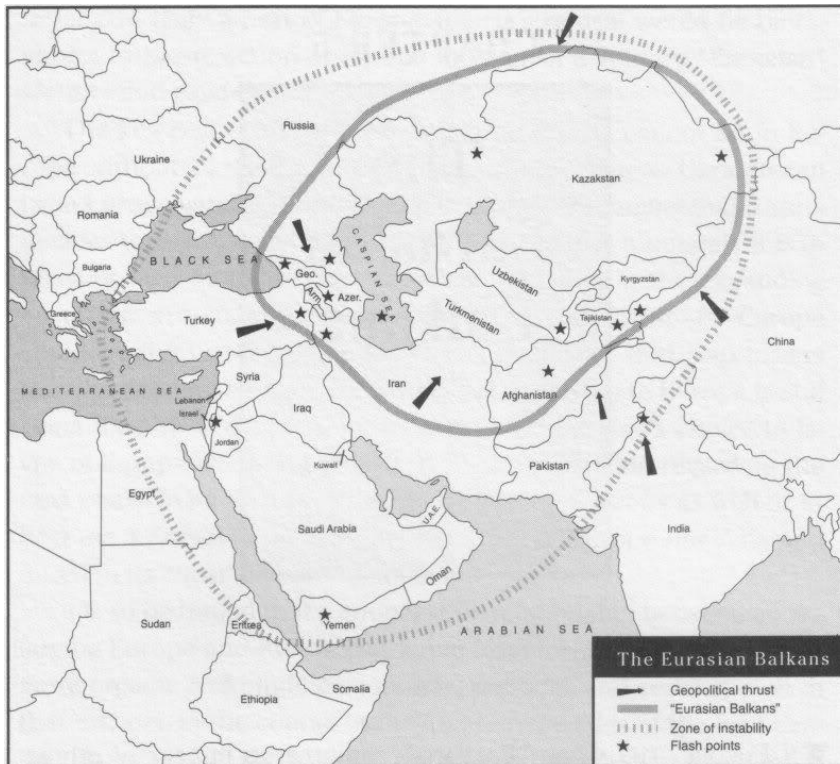


Figure 3: The Eurasian Balkans

Source: https://orientalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/EB_map.jpg

Brzezinski then further shrinks the area of the global Balkans and calls it the “Eurasian Balkans.” This area is the future energy hub containing immense reserve of oil and natural gas. These are located in the Caspian Sea basin and the adjacent Central Asian region. According to the estimates, these reserves contain more wealth than that of the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea. In order to protect American interests therein, the only viable option, Brzezinski prescribes for the US and its allies, is to make sure not to allow the two Eurasian giants (Sino-Russian bloc) to come together. Moreover, the Eurasian Balkans include five Central Asian republics and three states from the Caucasus region; Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the last country being Afghanistan (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1998). In this turbulent area, how these players prevent the eruptions of crises directly affecting them and how can they manage the resources will ultimately determine who the principal protagonist on the Eurasian – specially the Central Asian – chessboard is.

The Scramble for Central Asia

Twenty-first century globalisation processes have profoundly impacted the contours of geopolitics. Some scholars, such as Edward Luttwak, argue that geoeconomics have taken over geopolitics as a rational imperative for great powers (Luttwak, 1990). Others argue that the nuclear weapons, and sophisticated missiles delivery and defense systems have broadened the horizon of geopolitical insights and have pushed the statesmen to restructure their policies within a larger framework. The equation got further complicated in the wake of the tragic 9/11 attacks that prompted the United States to launch the war against terrorism. American invasion of Afghanistan (Mirza, Abbas, & Baneen, 2020) was interpreted as an extension of its Central Asian policy to challenge Russian and ultimately Chinese political, economic and military influence. This brought Central Asia from the periphery of international politics to the centre of geopolitics. With the linking together of countries through technological advancements, the condensation and shrinkage of geography has transpired thus resulting into establishment of connects between various crisis zones of the world. Conflicts of the South China Sea are now linked with the conflicts of the Persian Gulf and in Africa. This interconnectivity is being considered as a double-edged sword; it could be positive in many ways, but it could also be destabilising by making geopolitics more complex. Complexity ultimately leads to the instability and enhancement of the

geopolitical conflicts, as is happening in Eurasia, specifically in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Mackinder in his early writings went on to warn the British Empire of the possible domination of the heartland by a European or Asian power. In the 20th century, this challenge was expected in the form of a possible Russo-German alliance (the Nazi-Soviet alliance) to vie for regional and ultimately global hegemony. Cold War saw the re-emergence of competition between Soviet Union and the United States. Against this backdrop, the twenty-first is witnessing a repeat of the history in which newer powerful actors are competing for the control and/or influence of the Central Asian chessboard.

China Taking on the Central Asian Region

According to Mackinder, Central Asia is the pivot encompassing a broad area that he later called the Heartland being located on the Eurasian continent. The area borders Russia to the north and west, Iran and Afghanistan to the south, and China to the east. In its heydays, the region was a major part of the Silk Road and also at the heart of the vast Mongol Empire where it served as the crossroad between East and the West. The Heartland, being the admission ticket to the World-Island and thus the Eurasian landmass, if mobilized by means of transportation, the construction of railways for example, would be advantageous to land-powers as compared to maritime powers. Therefore, a mobilized Heartland “would permit the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empires of the world would be in sight” (Mackinder quoted by, Sharma, 2007).

Independence of the Central Asian republics caught China’s attention to increase its influence in the region. China started materialising its Central Asian vision in 1995, when the ‘Shanghai Five’ comprising of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan was introduced. This was later transformed into the ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organization’ in 2001. China and Russia are trying to make this organization a part of their efforts to limit the enhancing influence of the United States in the region. Ideas have been circulating at the policy level to make SCO an “eastern NATO” (Kim & Indeo, 2013, p. 276) – though a far-fetched dream materialising whom would be quite difficult because of the divergent interests of the member states.

Interestingly, China with its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) seeks to 'return to Eurasia by appealing to the historical 'Silk Road' to justify its presence (Frankopan, 2015, p. 184). The ancient Silk Road was designed for trade purpose to bridge China with Europe via Central Asia and the Middle East augmented by maritime routes. The BRI sponsors two main trade routes; the overland Silk Road Economic Belt across mainland Asia to Europe and to Africa, and the maritime Silk Road which is a shipping route through the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal up to the Mediterranean Sea (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). This strongly reinforces the fact that China, with the help of BRI, wants to revive its ancient Silk Road which interestingly has both the components of land and sea routes. Interestingly, it is believed that by 2049, China with the help of BRI will be in position of having control over Afro-Eurasia (Pillsbury, 2015, p. 179). These coupled with the rejuvenation of the ancient ideologies such as Tianxia system and Confucianism China is trying to expand its influence through most of the world (Mirza, Abbas, & Nizamani, 2020; Mirza & Khan, 2020)



Figure 4: New & Old Silk Road Routes

Source: <https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/001.jpg>

From the Chinese point of view, Central Asia is the region of immense importance to meet the growing domestic consumption of oil and gas, and most importantly for domestic security. China fears rising Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang

province bordering Central Asia. For China development of this region is the greatest geopolitical imperative of the time. This strategic position qualifies Central Asia to be regarded as “China’s Lebensraum” (Swanston, 2007, p. 583). Furthermore, China is developing land routes, mainly railroads, via Central Asia as an alternative to decrease its dependence of almost 80-90% of energy imports via the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea which are vulnerable to American influence (*International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)*, 2017). Thus, land routes are strategically more secure and flexible than sea lines. Notably, in Mackinder’s view, East Europe is regarded as the gateway to the heartland leading to control of the World-island and ultimately global hegemony. China in the last few years is increasingly affirming its role to strengthen its relations with European Union (EU) countries. The 16+1 format which is also known as China-CEEC (part of the BRI) was established in 2012 in Warsaw. China-Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) is a multilateral platform initiated by China to expand cooperation with 11 European states plus 5 Balkan states. Though, it was announced in the year 2012 (a year before BRI was launched) but was made part and parcel of BRI later (Budeanu, 2018, p. 2).

Response from Russia and the United States

The grand strategy encompasses not only China and Central Asia but also Eastern and Central Europe. Mackinder had elaborated it in his geopolitical analysis of the Heartland in the similar fashion. This not only undermines Russia in Central Asia and Europe but also in the Far East which might precipitate Russia to grow its influence in Asia. Russians used to call Europe particularly East Europe as an “Assault Corridor” –from where attempts were made first by Napoleon in the 19th century and then by Hitler during the Second World War to conquer Russia, but thanks to hard winter and Russian successful strategies, both fell short of achieving their dreams (Thomson, 1990). The Russians would then in times of eminent crisis say, “let the winter come” in much the same fashion as the saying goes in the famous ‘Game of Thrones’ series “winter is coming.”

Chinese initiatives are not undergoing without the watchful eyes of Russia who has a large historical influence in the Central Asian region and fears that Chinese involvement could risk its geopolitical and geostrategic interests in future. Such a prospect is indeed daunting not only for Russia but for the United States as well.

The United States is already engaged in a geopolitical battle with China for economic superiority and global dominance. The United States also doesn't like the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) because China's diversification of its trade routes would undermine the United States naval advantage. To counter the Chinese project, the United States has proposed an initiative called the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy which basically demands respect for sovereignty and independence, peaceful resolution of disputes, free and fair trade, and adherence to international rules/law (Valencia, 2018). This strategy brings some Asian and Africa countries aimed at fostering maritime connectivity in the Indian as well as the Pacific Ocean. It is also believed that this strategy would help revive the 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (QUAD) as a counter-balance to China's increasingly assertive role in the region particularly in the South China Sea (Mehta, 2019).

Conclusion

The study found that Mackinder's analysis of geopolitics, especially his conception of Eurasia and the control of the 'Heartland' as the key to world domination remains relevant in the twenty-first century geopolitical settings as it used to be in last century. There is a perspective that the modern means of communications, transportation, sophisticated missiles defense systems, and most importantly nuclear weapons enjoying delivery systems have rendered the idea of 'Heartland' being no longer invincible. However, Mackinder geopolitical views remained as relevant today as they used to be in the last century. He had left an interesting theoretical legacy in the realm of geopolitics for centuries to come. Eurasia, especially the Central Asia, contains one of the world's largest reserves of fossil fuels beneath its soil which are becoming a lifeline in a world where energy consumption is increasing day by day and where states are much more powerful and lethal as never before.

The 'Heartland' becomes even more important especially in the changing geopolitical scenario as Eurasia is replacing the Euro-Atlantic space in a world where power is increasingly diffusing and even has diffused to a certain level where no single state can claim the mantle of global leadership. Charles Kupchan calls such a world as "No One's World" (Kupchan, 2012) and Barry Buzan calls it "a world without superpowers" or "de-centered globalism" (Buzan & Lawson, 2015).

In such a world Central Asia has emerged as a grand chessboard where great powers are competing with the ultimate objective of gaining access to the natural resources curtailing others sphere of influence and enhancing one's own.

Moreover, it was Mackinder who inspired Nicholas J. Spykman to update his insights and come up with policy prescriptions (Spykman, 1944) which culminated in the formation of the famous 'Containment' policy that helped the United States in its fight against the 'Heartland' power (the Soviet Union) in the Cold War and that too from the peripheral 'Rimland' areas as identified by Spykman.

Mackinder lucidly argues that "every century has its own geographical perspectives" (Mackinder, 1942). The twenty-first century saw Brzezinski's contributions that played a significant role in shaping the U.S. Cold War and post-Cold War foreign policy. For Brzezinski, geopolitical dynamics no longer dictate states to be preoccupied with idea of controlling just a mere piece of land (Heartland) or regions as whole (Rimland) as prerequisite for world's preponderance. Instead, states should think of and move beyond regions and concentrate on controlling continents. Brzezinski then prescribes that the key to such preponderance lies in control of the whole of Eurasia – especially the Central Asian region – which he equates with a grand chessboard (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1998) on which the game for global dominance is unfolding.

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