

British geopolitical theorist Halford Mackinder (1861-1947).

Abstract

Mackinder was fond of geography which he taught at several universities, and became the first principal of University of Extension College, which became the University of Reading. Later he was one of the founders of the famous London School of economics (LSE) and became its director. He wrote extensively on geography as a determinant of politics and history and was much concerned about the challenge that was posed to maritime powers by the development of railways and the prospects of the rise of massive land powers that would challenge the hegemony of Great Britain, being a maritime power. His thoughts express special concerns about the Trans-Siberian railways that linked for the first time Moscow to Vladivostok and made it possible to assert the potentials of Russia as a world power. His journey culminated in writing an extensive book about the geopolitics of Britain titled "*Britain and the British Seas*" which became a landmark in British literature.

In this book he clearly identified Britain with its empire and sees that the Navy has a vital role in upholding the hegemony of the British people.

Later he ventured into many British colonies trying to discover them and assess them from a geopolitical perspective. He joined Oxford University before he got appointed as the director of London School of Economics and Political Sciences.

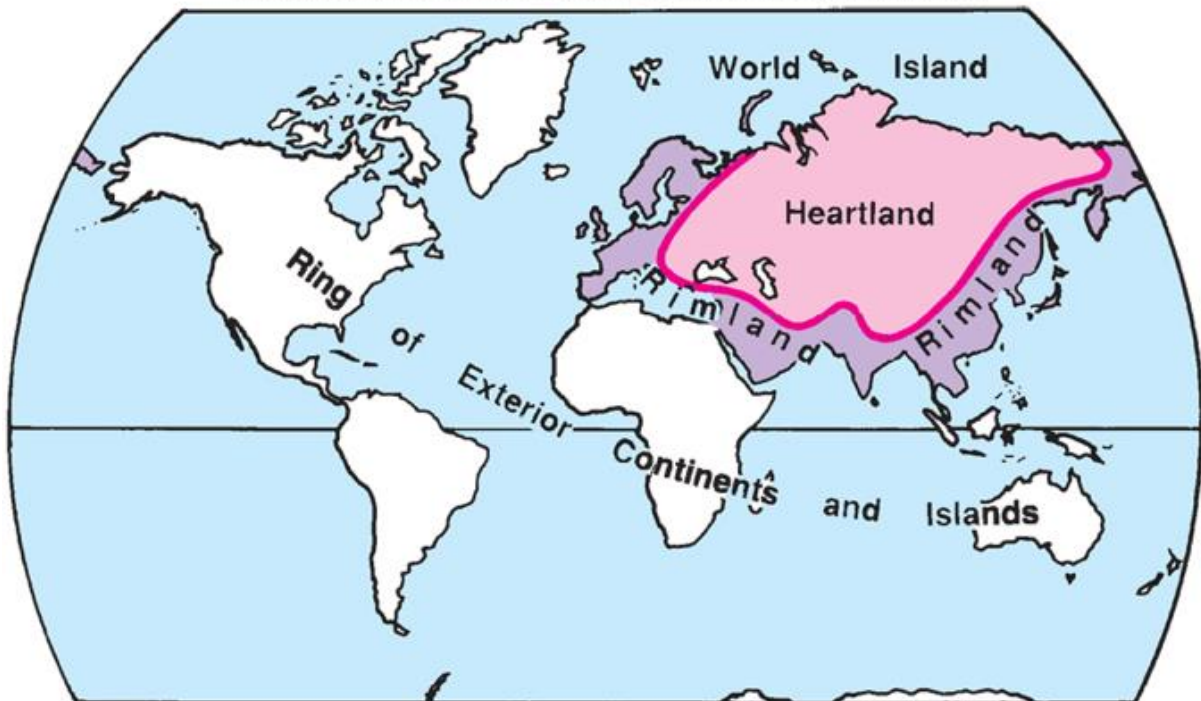
In 1910 he got elected to the parliament on the list of the conservative party during World War I he wrote a paper titled "*the geographical pivot of history*" in which he argued that interior Asia and East Europe are considered as the major land mass or Heartland that is the strategic Centre of Eurasia or "world island". Due to technological advance there was a decline of maritime powers with regards to land powers. That was why **"The role of Britain and the United States, was to preserve a balance between the powers contending for control of the heartland"**.

To stabilize a **unipolar world order** to the favor of maritime powers (the United Kingdom and by extension the United States), he urged the need to **separate Germany from Russia by buffer states in East Europe**.

He argued that "**the Pivot area**" was a region that **cannot be reached by the sea powers (Heartland)**. It is **surrounded** by an **inner crescent (Rimland)** that stretched from **Eastern**

Europe into Turkey and the Near East, Iran and Afghanistan, India, South East Asia and China and Eastern Manchuria which is part of East Russia.

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Hence, British politics aimed at **forbidding a Russian German alliance in order not to unite Eurasia**, because *"Whoever controlled East Europe could control the Pivot Area and whoever controlled the Pivot area could control Eurasia and whoever controlled Eurasia could control the world"*.

Later, **he insisted on creating an Atlantic community which got embodied later in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization "NATO", in order to check the rise of Eurasia.**

Though he wrote many books, his most influential work would be an article published in the early 1900 in which he argued that **human history has revolved around Eurasia and that whoever controlled Eurasia would control the world.**

The article was highly influential on British, American and even German Geo-Strategists and was enhanced by Mackinder over a period of four decades until the late 1940s.

In this article Mackinder considered that the period stretching between 1492 and 1904, which he called *"the Columbian Epoch"* was essentially a *"period of expansion of Europe against negligible resistance"*, whereas *"medieval Christendom"* was pent into a narrow region and threatened by *"external Barbarism"*.

Expressing **deep Eurocentric tendencies** he bluntly considered that ***the only history that counted was that of the Mediterranean and the European races, for it was among these***

racess that have originated the ideas which have rendered the inheritors of Greece and Rome dominant throughout the world".

Raising concerns about the **threat posed to Europe by Asia** he called on looking "upon Europe and **European history as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history**, for European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the **secular struggle against Asiatic invasion"**.

For him **European history was "the harvest of results produced by a cloud of ruthless and idealess horsemen sweeping over the un-impeding plains, a blow as it were, from the great Asiatic hammer striking freely through the vacant space- which is the plains of Eastern Europe"**.

He gave as an example the **Mongol invasions of the Middle Ages**, the crusades in the Levant helped **stir up a united Europe**, which also **served to advance Europe in the East against pressures from Asia**.

According to him, the result of **"the discovery of the cape road to India was to connect the West and East coastal navigation of Eurasia and in some way to neutralize the strategic advantage of the central position of the steppe nomads by pressing upon them in the rear"**.

This age of **European expansion was a continuation of the age old division of Europe between a Latinized Western part and a Greek Eastern part, the Americans and Western Europeans inheriting the Latin World, while the Russians inheriting the Greek World**.

The technological advance of the 19th century saw the development of steam power which revolutionized navigation, and railways which revolutionized land transportation.

He had special concerns about the development of transcontinental railways across Russia which "are transmuting the conditions of land power".

Notes

Mackinder Halford. J., Britain and The British Seas, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)

Mackinder Halford. J., The Geographical Pivot of History, the geographical journal, vol. 170, no 4, December