

# Geo-strategic View of Mackinder and Spykeman

## Part II (1+1+1 System) Geography Hons.

Paper: V

Module: IV

Topic: 4.3

### Geo-strategic View of Mackinder

Most outstanding British contribution to political geography perhaps came from the geographer-statesman, Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947). His heartland theory propounded in early twentieth century is still read with interest even today. His famous lecture entitled 'The Geographical Pivot of History' delivered before the Royal Geographical Society (Mackinder, 1904). In this paper he advanced the view that the Eurasian core which he named as 'Pivot Area' (later as Heartland in 1919) was

- inaccessible to sea power and
- possessed the vast capability of becoming the seat of a great world power which would be able to dominate the whole world.

#### The Heartland Theory

In 1919 Mackinder published his book 'Democratic Ideals and Reality', in which he formulated his heartland theory. Although Mackinder modified the areal spread of the pivot area in 1919 and again in 1943, the essential features of heartland concept remained unchanged throughout. His theory is stated in three lines:

“Who rules East Europe, commands the Heartland,  
Who rules the Heartland, commands the World Island,  
Who rules the World Island, commands the World”.

#### World's geopolitical organization

Mackinder conceived of one landmass which he called the world island, comprising of Europe, Asia and Africa in the midst of one World Ocean. He considered the British and Japanese islands as offshore islands and the two Americas and Australia, as outlying islands.

#### Proportion of coverage

	Area	Population
World island	$\frac{2}{3}$ proportion	$\frac{14}{16}$ proportion
Outlying islands	$\frac{1}{3}$ proportion	$\frac{2}{16}$ proportion

In the world island Mackinder pointed out to the existence of two significant areas - an entirely continental pivot-area or heartland and partly continental and partly oceanic area as the inner or marginal crescent. The world island was surrounded by a wholly oceanic outer or insular crescent made up of the land areas of North and South Americas, Australia and Africa, south of the Sahara (Fig.).

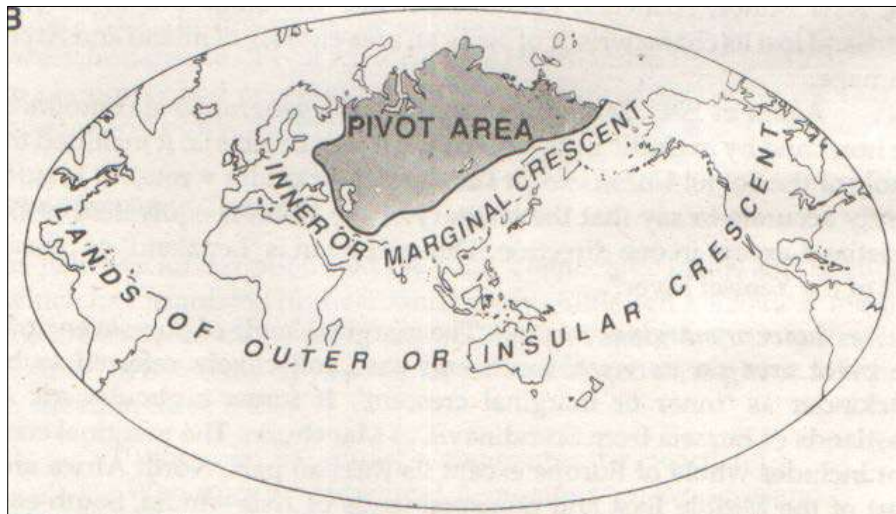


Fig. Mackinder's geopolitical organization of the world

### The Heartland

Mackinder defined the Heartland as a vast area in Eurasia, characterised by the Arctic and inland drainage. It stretched from the Volga river to eastern Siberia and from the Himalayas to the Arctic Ocean and covered about nine million square miles or more than twice the area of Europe. It largely drained into inland seas and lakes and into the Arctic ocean which is frozen almost throughout the year. It was, thus, inaccessible to ocean ships and to the sea power.

Politically, the pivot area in 1904 was entirely Russian in eastern Europe and largely Russian in Asia, because it also included western China, part of Mongolia, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Iran. The heartland of 1919 was, however, not the same as the pivot area of 1904, for the limit of the pivot area was extended westward to include all of European Russia. "It included the Baltic Sea, the navigable middle and lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet and Mongolia". Thus in 1919 heartland lost its characteristic of being an area entirely of inland and Arctic drainage.

Again in 1943, Mackinder modified the geographical contours of the heartland by excluding the easternmost part of Siberia. It included the whole of the Soviet Union except Lenaland.

### Inner or marginal crescent

The marginal lands of Eurasia encircle the pivot area on its west, south and east, collectively referred to by Mackinder as 'inner or marginal crescent'. It forms a circular arc of coastlands of Eurasia from Scandinavia to Manchuria. The marginal crescent includes whole of Europe except its Russian part, North Africa and most of the Middle East and monsoon-lands of Asia -India, South-east Asia and the Far East.

In contrast to the heartland, the inner crescent is an area of oceanic drainage and navigable rivers. It is therefore accessible to sea-power. Mackinder noted that in general the marginal crescent coincided with areas of four world religions - Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

### Outer or insular crescent

In Mackinder's geopolitical organisation of the world, beyond the inner crescent are located the world ocean and widely separated lands of the outer or insular crescent. It consisted largely of North and South Americas, and Australia, the British Isles, Japanese Islands, and Africa, south of the Sahara, which Mackinder called as the 'second heartland'.

## Importance of Heartland

Mackinder attached greater importance to the heartland than either to the inner or the outer crescent. According to him heartland was a vast area of Arctic and interior drainage, surrounded by physical barriers on all sides except on the west which provided it the essential security from outside attack.



Mackinder hoped that the heartland would soon be covered with a rail-road network which would replace the horse and camel as means of transport.

## The predictions

Mackinder believed that a great land power would emerge in the heartland and expand towards the marginal lands of Eurasia and from there to the rest of the world. In 1904 he did not anticipate that the fear of world domination would come from the pivot state, Russia, but visualized instead that Germany might attempt to control the heartland and become the ruler of world island and eventually of the world. He pointed out that it was through the north European plain that the heartland could be penetrated by any outside power.

But by 1943 he found it necessary to revise his original idea. In the Second World War both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. demonstrated their increasing military strength and political significance. This made Mackinder to realize that the threat of world domination might come from the pivot state itself, namely, the Soviet Union. Before that Germany had made unsuccessful attempts to invade and conquer Russia.

While Great Britain and her allies paid little or no attention to the heartland theory between the two world wars, Germany found in it an argument for its policy of expansion towards the east and its attack on, Russia in the early years of the World War II. It may be noted that on its publication in 1919 the heartland theory was ignored by all except a handful of people in the universities. But on its republication in 1944, it was read carefully by many people, especially in Britain and America, who offered a critical evaluation of the theory.

## Criticism

- I. Mackinder's predictions contained in his theory did not come true except that the former Soviet Union, the pivot State, exercised considerable influence over eastern Europe.
- II. He failed to take into consideration the role of changing technology and the significance of air power.
- III. He has been criticized for over-emphasizing the potentialities and defensibility of the heartland.
- IV. Mackinder's world map on the Mercator projection immensely exaggerated the area of the frozen Arctic Ocean and created a wrong impression that to the north of the heartland lays a large expanse of ice only.

## Present-day validity of Heartland theory

After the defeat of Germany in the Second World War, the former Soviet Union emerged as a great power in the world. She succeeded in controlling the whole of Eastern Europe by installing communist governments in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Poland. Since the former Soviet Union was the heartland state and East Europe went red, the first line of the theory, 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland', came to be true. The former Soviet Union ruled over East Europe by proxy and commanded the Heartland physically.

The position of the former Soviet Union after the Second World War was considerably weakened, because-

- I. Ideological change of East Europe which is manifest in the overthrowing of communist regimes one after the other
- II. Unification of both Germanies brightening the prospects of the rise of a super state in Europe
- III. Declaration of several republics of the Soviet Union as sovereign states
- IV. Other internal problems (economic etc.) the challenging position of the U.S.A. reduced the importance as well as chances of the former Soviet Union for world domination

Although Russia still controls the Heartland, she has lost her political grip over East Europe. Thus, the validity of even the first line of the theory is no more there.

*Note: the word 'strategy' refers to the art of using power, while the twin words 'geo strategy' together imply the art of using power in relation to the whole world. The 'geo strategic views' simply imply the geographical pattern related to global strategic ideas.*

## Geo- strategic View of Spykeman

Nicholas J. Spykeman was a professor of International Relations at the Yale University and the director of the Yale Institute of International Studies. The most outstanding contribution of the American scholar was his book, 'The Geography of the Peace', published in 1944, shortly after his death in 1943.

### **The Rimland theory**

Spykeman propounded the Rimland theory in opposition to the Heartland theory of Mackinder. Working from the same premises as Mackinder, Spykeman gave a very different interpretation of the relative importance of the Heartland vis-a-vis the surrounded tier, the Inner or Marginal Crescent, "partly continental and partly oceanic", which Spykeman renamed as the "Rimland".

Spykeman considered geographical features (topography, terrain, and climate) as important determinants in the foreign policy because of its emphasis on spatial variations. The theory says that the national power is the final determinant of the security of a state, while lasting peace is possible only through a collective security arrangement of either an armed league of nations or an international balance of power arrangement.

The theory approached the problem from the point of view of the USA. Saw the USA surrounded by Eurasia and Africa. Japan and England were seen as centres of military and economic power and separated by the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. According to him, the US strategy in case of war should be to avoid unification of the Old World powers against it. He saw the Soviet Union as the strongest land power and a unified Rimland as a menace to both Russia and USA.

## **Assumption**

Maritime mobility was the basis of the new type of geopolitical structure. Spykeman emphasized that “It is sea power which has made it possible to conceive of the Eurasian continent as a unit and it is sea power which governs the relationship between the Old and the New Worlds”. To him sea power appeared to be the key factor in global strategy.

## **Amendment to Heartland Theory**

Spykeman concluded that Mackinder’s reasoning suffered from several weaknesses as he over-emphasized the potentialities of the Heartland. Spykeman opined, the actual facts of Russian economy and geography offer no basis for the assumption that the Heartland is or will be in the very near future a world centre of communication, mobility and power potential. In his opinion, there were many reasons to support such view.

- I. In the first place, the distribution of world climate made it certain that unless revolutionary changes in agricultural technology took place, the centre of agrarian productivity shall continue to be located in Western Russia rather than in Central Siberia.
- II. In this region the actual extent of arable land was only a very small part of the total area.
- III. The essential bases for industrialization, at that time, also were mostly found to the west of Ural mountain.
- IV. Consequently, the heartland is not capable of supporting a large population from the produce of the land.
- V. He pointed out that much of the area of the Soviet Union, lying to the west of the Yenisei river and forming the heartland, was all wasteland.

He, therefore, asserted that the power potential of Eurasia lay not in the heartland but actually in the belt of states encircling the heartland on its west, south and east. This area Spykeman named as the ‘Rimland’ which coincided approximately with Mackinder’s ‘inner or marginal crescent’ (Fig.). The American scholar considered the heartland less important than the Rimland, which contained most of world’s population and resources.

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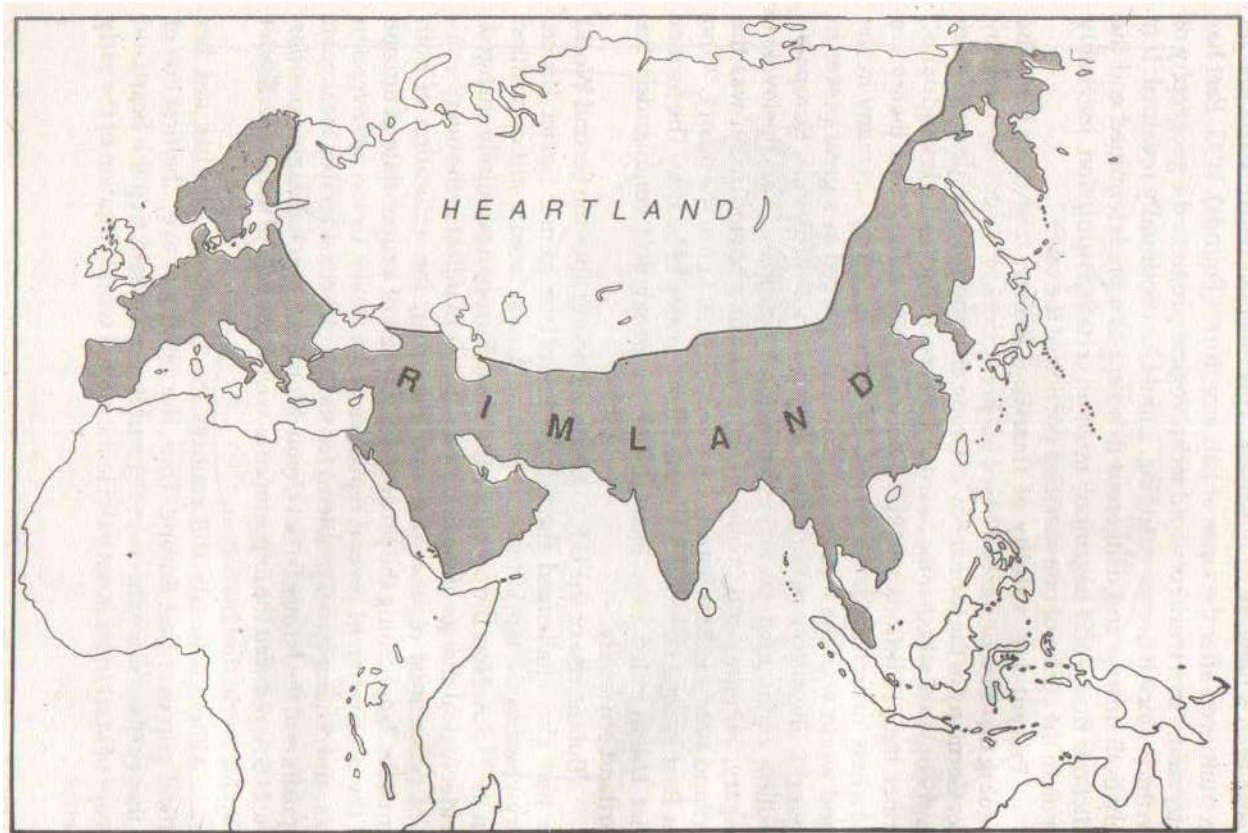


Fig.1: Spykeman's Rimland

### Prediction

He was convinced that the control of Eurasia and ultimately of the whole world was possible through controlling the Rimland. He, therefore, formulated his own theory, called the Rimland theory:

“Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia,  
Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world”.

It will be seen that Spykeman not only criticized the British geographer for his inaccurate heartland concept, but also suggested another strategy of world domination.

### Influence of Rimland theory

Writing at a time when the Second World War was still on, Spykeman advocated that the allied powers should base their future policy on preventing any consolidation of Rimland and the enemy. With the defeat of Germany in the Second World War and the emerge of the USSR as the sole master of the Heratland, Spykeman's prescription became the basis of the American “policy of containment” of the spread of communism in the coastal states of Asia.

Looking at the geo-political and geo-strategic importance of the Rimland, the United States had consistently tried to build a tier of defense against the Soviet Union. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Baghdad Pact subsequently known as the Central Territorial Organization (CENTO) and the South-East Asian Territorial Organization were made by USA to keep an eye on the defense of the Rimland and to prevent the Soviet influence in the warm waters of the Rimland. The containment of communism, in the opinion of Domino, was necessary because the fall of any single country in the Rimland to the Soviets would have inevitably led to defeat of American interests in the other adjacent countries.

## Criticism

- I. The Rimland theory has been criticized on the ground of advancement of war technology and nuclear limiting.
- II. No world power has so far been able to control all the countries of the Rimland. In fact the task is not only difficult but impossible.
- III. It has been criticized on the ground that Spykeman under-estimated the role of world community and that of the UNO.
- IV. At present, the international law does not permit any territorial expansion. In fact, state is no longer a living organism in the sense of
- V. Ratzel's Lebensraum. It is the time of economic imperialism and not that of political colonization.

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