

Revisiting the Pivot: The Influence of Heartland Theory in Great Power Politics

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Abstract: In a 1990 document for *National Security Strategy*, the first Bush Administration noted that “for most of the century, the United States has deemed it a vital interest to prevent any power or group of powers from dominating the Eurasian landmass.”¹ This statement is closely aligned to the geopolitical paradigm of Halford Mackinder’s “Heartland Theory,” which states that the power that controls Central Asia—the great pivot—would eventually emerge as the most powerful state in international politics. This paper reassesses the theory in the context of today’s foreign policy by examining U.S, Russian, China, and European Union policy towards Central Asia. The purpose of the paper is to analytically determine the extent to which the theory is still influential in contemporary world politics. The paper is thus formulated around a fundamental question: to what extent is the Heartland theory influential in the current foreign policy of the four great powers— U.S, E.U, Russia and China? The paper ends by concluding that there is substantial evidence of Mackinderian philosophy in the discourse of geopolitics in Central Asia.

¹ Fettweis J. C (2003). “Revisiting Mackinder and Angell: The Obsolescence of Great Power Politics.” *Comparative Strategy*, 22:109-129.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In 1904, British geographer Halford Mackinder reintroduced the concept of geopolitics to international politics via his Heartland Theory. In a thesis titled “The Geographical Pivot of History,” Mackinder theorized that: In the industrial age, the natural resources of Central Asia—‘the great pivot’—are so vast that it will serve as the geostrategic instrument for the state that controls it to become ‘the empire of the world.’²

Today, the Heartland consists of Russia, the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and is marked by the Caspian basin.³ After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the Central Asian states followed suit by declaring independence. These new republics constitute the modern core of the pivot area of Mackinder’s thesis and are therefore pivotal in any geo-strategic analysis concerning the Heartland. Russia is, and historically has been, the regional hegemon of the Heartland. However, that influence is being contested by the United States (U.S). That challenge is made explicit in a leaked 1992 Pentagon document:

Our first objective is to prevent the reemergence of a rival that poses a threat on the territory of the former Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration...and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power...Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.⁴

This paper reassesses the foreign policy of the U.S, the European Union (E.U), Russia, and China towards Central Asia by examining them in the context of Mackinder’s theory. In effect, the central formulation of the paper rests on this research question: to what extent is the Heartland theory influential in the current foreign policy of the four

² Mackinder, H. J. “The Geographical Pivot of History” in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Norton and Company. New York, U.S.A, 1962. 241.

³ See background section for an in-depth description of the Heartland map.

⁴ Olcott B. Martha (Summer 1998). “The Caspian’s False Promise.” *Foreign Policy*, No. 111. 94-113.

great powers— U.S, E.U, Russia and China? Consequently, the analysis takes an East vs. West approach, albeit the end of the Cold War. The premise is to find and understand the relevance of Mackinderian analysis in contemporary foreign policy discourse. Initially, the paper provides a brief background to the theory and the region. This is followed by a thorough review of the current literatures on foreign policy in Central Asia. Thirdly, it compares and contrasts the various literatures by analyzing their use of geostrategic concepts to explain foreign policy issues involving Central Asia. Ultimately, the conclusion of the paper states that Central Asia is significant in the foreign policies of the great powers because of its natural resources, the need to secure market access to those very resources, and its geo-strategic location in the “war on terror.” The Heartland theory is therefore influential to the extent that foreign policy towards the region is still formulated with a conscious outlook for geopolitical advantage.

II. BACKGROUND:

The Heartland Theory

Mackinder’s “Heartland Theory” dates back over a century. The theory engages geography in international politics both literally and figuratively. Literally, the theory centers on the concept of a “pivot area/Heartland,” a sizeable region in Eurasia over which regional political control by a given country will in turn determine that country’s supremacy over world politics. Figuratively, the theory presents a narrow and deterministic view of international politics as solely a function of geographical resources. The basic premise of the theory is as follows.

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
Who rules the heartland commands the World-island;
Who rules the World-island commands the World.⁵

⁵ Mackinder, H. J., 1962, 261.

Mackinder emphasizes ruling Eastern Europe as a locus whereby geostrategic access to the Heartland is better facilitated and augmented. A map of the area is presented below. As Mackinder designated, the pivot area extends throughout much of the Eurasian continent.



(“Geographic Pivot of History,” 1904)

The “Heartland Theory” is essentially geographical in its outlook, thus citing a critical geostrategic link between land control and political power, i.e. geopolitical power. Mackinder makes this connection in the presentation of his thesis, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” to the 1904 Royal Geographical Society meeting:

The actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on one the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organization of the competing peoples.⁶

Although Mackinder’s theory has received a great deal of criticism in the decades since its publication, this paper does not seek to address the theory from a critical viewpoint. Rather, the aim is to apply the theory in the context of the contemporary environment of international politics, with the hope of examining the importance of Central Asia in the geopolitics of great-powers. The analysis therefore revolves around the application of

⁶ Mackinder, H. J. 1904. “The Geographical Pivot of History.” *The Geographical Journal* 23: 421 – 437.

and the implications posed by Mackinderian geopolitical philosophy when formulating foreign policy towards Central Asia, the “pivot.”

Central Asia

The modern day “pivot area” examined here is Central Asia. The Central Asian region comprises five former Soviet republics, now independent states. The central five are: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Pictured in the map below, these five states encompass a broad expanse of land at the heart, in accordance with Mackinder’s theory, of the Eurasian continent.



(University of Texas, 2002)

This region has become significant in recent decades because of the emergence of these states in the post-Soviet era, having only recently gained independence in the early 1990s. Before gaining independence from the U.S.S.R, these states lacked political influence in regional politics and were coercively managed under Stalinist rule. After

independence, major powers like China, the E.U, Russia, and the U.S looked to the region with renewed interest, highlighting the wealth of its natural resources.⁷

Caspian energy reserves are considered some of the largest and therefore most valuable in the world. The estimates vary between 50 to 110 billion barrels of oil, and from 170 to 463 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.⁸ In essence, control over, access to, and market connection with the resources thereof are all considered advantageous in strategic foreign policy towards the region. However, as this paper examines, these foreign policy tactics are not nearly as easy to attain as they are to enumerate. The convergence of the major powers in the area has fueled competition and generated potential for conflict, thereby creating uncertainty in the political development of the countries.

III. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The analytical model upon which this paper is built assesses the extent to which the Heartland theory is influential in modern politics, specifically the foreign policy of the U.S, Russia, the E.U, and China towards Central Asia. The E.U is applied in the context of a single power because of its supranationalism and economic integration. Methodologically, the paper does not directly address the policies of the said countries but rather uses already available literatures of policy experts to research the countries' policies, test their relevance in context to Mackinderian philosophy, and to conclusively make a judgment based on the research question—to what extent is the Heartland theory influential/applicable—that formulates the premise of the paper. Accordingly, the paper uses Mackinder's thesis statement—who rules the Heartland commands the world—to

⁷ Kazemi, L. 2003. "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy, 1991 to the Present." *Journal of International Affairs* 56: 205 – 216.

⁸ Lutz C. Kleveman (2003). *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia*. Atlantic Monthly Press. New York. 3.

conduct an analysis that contextualizes the assertions of the literatures, assesses the relevance of the theory in contemporary politics, and examines the implications thereof for great power geopolitics. Although quantitative data are not produced here, the assessment of the theory's relevance is partly codified on the substantial consistency and frequency of Mackinderian philosophy in the analytical discourse of the literatures reviewed.

Inconsistencies in the method are to be expected for two reasons. One, it does not contextualize policy through a microcosmic study of a single country in the region, and as such lacks a specific case study. Two, it assumes that conflict is endemic between the great powers. For these reasons, critics can argue that the method is flawed because it is overly realist in its application. However, the East vs. West paradigm that underlies the analysis is applied because Mackinder called for Western (formerly England) control of the region against Russian interests. This entails that states are the rational actors at play and in turn assumes the presence of a Hobbesian world. In this respect, concepts of realism are important to any analysis because the theory is essentially a geopolitical realist's perception of the international order. The analysis is therefore organized by first conducting a comparative/contrast approach of U.S and Russian policies via each other. Secondly, it proceeds by doing the same for the respective policies of the E.U and China. Thirdly, it addresses the Heartland Theory's applicability in the contemporary environment of international politics. While not attempting to propose the Heartland theory as a general model for foreign policy towards Central Asia, the analysis does seek to suggest and/or establish some relationship between the predictions of the theory and current foreign policy relations.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, the paper reviews the various analyses of policy experts in order to grasp the current geopolitical context of the foreign policy of the great-powers toward the Central Asian region. As aforementioned, the paper groups the literatures on an East vs. West approach. As a result, the review rotates between the U.S and Russia, and China and the European Union, giving a thorough analysis of each of these countries' policies.

United States Policy

The literature on U.S foreign policy toward the Central Asian countries is voluminous but shares one common perception: that U.S involvement in the region has increased substantially since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. 9/11 is significant because it corresponds to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement that "the United States will remain interested in the long term security and stability of the region."⁹ This literature indicates the three broad concepts that polarize scholars' views on U.S foreign policy in Central Asia. Specifically, the literature on U.S. policy in the region contends that the policies are driven by geopolitical pluralism—establishing stable and independent democracies, military involvement and/or cooperation, and neoliberalism—free market economies. They incorporate those concepts within three broad perceptions of analysis:

1. U.S policy is geopolitical and is motivated by a geostrategic effort to contain terrorism and the rise of a regional hegemon like Russia or China.

⁹ Bacevich J. Andrew. "Bases of Debate: America in Central Asia: Steppes to Empire." National Interest Online (2002). <http://www.nationalinterest.org/General.aspx?>

2. U.S policy is guided by geo-economics in an effort to access the region's natural resources and decrease the political clout of Russia.¹⁰
3. Or that the former and the latter perceptions are both instrumental in U.S foreign policy making.

According to Stephen Blank's "The United States and Central Asia," U.S policy towards the region is framed by a pluralist approach aim at increasing the supply of energy to consumers; prevent any one state from monopolizing the energy supply; and do this by enhancing the democratic process, which would ultimately ease these processes.¹¹ This opinion is shared by Cohen's interpretation of the geo-economic importance of the region.¹² He warns of Sino-Russian cooperation and its potential to dominate the supply of the region's resources and in effect reduce U.S access. Such a partnership, he argues, can have serious political and economic implications for the U.S and its energy firms. In a testimony to the U.S Congress, he explicitly warns that "the challenge for the U.S is to keep conquerors [China, Russian and Iran] away from Central Asia."¹³ Another one of Blank's assertions is that pipeline politics is significant and that Russian policy is quintessentially monopolistic.¹⁴ Consequently, the U.S should forge military ties with regional leaders in order to secure those vital interests.¹⁵ Therefore, Blank is not only

¹⁰ Megoran, Nick. "The Influence of Halford Mackinder On Analysis of Uzbekistan" in *The Introductory Reader in Human Geography*, ed. By William G. Moseley, David A. Lenagran, and Kavita Pandit. Blackwell Publishing, 2007. 407.

¹¹ Blank J. Stephen. "United States and Central Asia" in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*. Brookings Institute Press, 2001. 133.

¹² Cohen, Ariel. "U.S Foreign Policy Interests and Human Rights in Central Asia." Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussianEurasiaandEurasia/Test>. July, 2001. 6.

¹³ Blank J. Stephen. "U.S Interests In Central Asia And The Challenges To Them." Strategic Studies Institute (March 2007). <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

forwarding his own point of view, but is overtly asserting such view as the pillar of U.S policy.

In “U.S Interests in Central Asia,” Cohen advises that the U.S advances its interests by promoting democratic institutions to facilitate Western market access to the region. In effect, he summarizes U.S interests in three words: security, energy, and democracy.¹⁶ He is supportive of TRACECA (Transportation Corridor Europe-Central Asia) program, a trade route devised by the E.U.¹⁷ Cohen’s assertions are empirically held by Nichol’s Congressional report, “Central Asia’s Security,” which documents the European effort and the lingering poverty of the region.¹⁸ He claims that the poverty could exacerbate socioeconomic tensions and create security problems for development. Nichol makes no explicit argument in his report but implicitly maintains that U.S interests include fostering democratization, free markets and trade, and assisting the development of oil and other resources.¹⁹ In spite of not promoting any set of policies, Nichol does suggest that U.S interests are long-term and faces complications with Russia’s regional hegemony.

Critics argue that the region’s energy resources may not enhance U.S energy security and that U.S objectives should be contingent only on the longevity of the war on terror.²⁰ Another critical argument comes from Christopher Fettweis’ critique of geostrategists like Cohen. He contends that such views disregard the contemporary environment of international politics, which is void of great-power conflicts and therefore renders

¹⁶ Cohen, Ariel. November 15, 2006. 1.

¹⁷ Cohen, Ariel. July, 2001. 6-10.

¹⁸ Nichol, Jim. CRS Report for Congress: Central Asia’s Security: Issues and Implications for U.S Interests. April, 2007. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid. 1.

²⁰ Hess, Michael. “Central Asia: Mackinder Revisited?” Vol. III, No. 1, March 04. 101.

Fisher, Uri. U.S Post-Cold War Foreign Policy in Central Asia: Offensive and Defensive Realism Considered. p 20-21.

Mackinderian geopolitics obsolete. In essence, there is no need for a balance between East and West in the system. Fettweis argues that the global economy will ensure U.S access to the region's energy supplies. The argument implies that Central Asian states will realize that the U.S, by virtue of its economic status and large market share in the consumption of energy, is important for the region's energy development.

In sum, analysts contend that U.S policy is coated on a geo-strategic effort to spread democracy to enhance market access to natural resources. What is not overtly emphasized, however, is the establishment of U.S presence through NATO and military personnel. However, the currently available work positions this as an excuse to further U.S interests via the argument of a war on terror. Yet, Fettweis and critics argue that the engagement is only temporary, Mackinderian geopolitics is not in fact influential, and the global economy already ensures U.S' market access.

Russian Policy

The literatures on Russian policy assume that Russia is trying to reassert its political and economic influence in what it sees as its “backyard”—specifically labeling its policy towards the region as “near-abroad.”²¹ However, analysts caution that Russian policy is not monostylous but rather bifurcated in its perspectives to include dynamics of state and domestic influences.

Peter Rutland, in his “Paradigms for Russian Policy in the Caspian Region,” argues that Russian policy towards Central Asia is driven by contradictory pressures—to cooperate with and to oppose U.S penetration into the region. Cooperation is advocated by those favoring policy paradigms of free market and pluralism. However, inter-

²¹ Jonson, Lena. “Russia and Central Asia” in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, Ed. by Roy Allison and Lena Jonson. Brookings Institution Press. 95.

institutional rivalry is marked by political elites' concern for preserving economic monopoly over Russia, the region, and the expulsion of U.S influence. In addition, there are those that argue for a policy paradigm that strangles the GUUAM (Georgian-Ukraine-Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Moldova) axis economically, thereby exerting influence over the region and lessening U.S involvement.²² Rutland argues that because of these conflictive paradigms, no single model can explain the grand pursuit of Russian policy. The policies are not integrated but rather divided among different domestic political and economic agencies. Russia is therefore "confused" in its policy objectives towards the region. However, he maintains that the simplest approach to Russian policy reveals that Russia has deployed political, military, and economic tools to advance its interests. Economic coercion and arguments for security demonstrates the scope of Russian policy as neoimperialist.²³ According to Rutland, domestic economic actors influence the policy process more than the military because of an interest to maintaining energy monopoly; but there is also a consensus to advance Russian interests in opposition to U.S efforts to penetrate the region, thereby making Russian policy in the region ambiguous.²⁴ It reveres the economic prospects of the region but often impedes its development for want of retaining imperialistic dominance from the past.

Rutland's perspective on the imperialistic endeavors of Russian policy is reflected in Lena Jonson's "Russia and Central Asia." The article holds that Russia's policy "can be understood in the context of its efforts to prevent outsiders from gaining influence in

²² Rutland, Peter. "Paradigms for Russian Policy in the Caspian Region" in *Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. By Robert Ebel and Rajan Menon. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC. 2000. p 163.

²³ *Ibid.*, 171-173.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169-171.

the Central Asian states.”²⁵ This stems from Russia’s concerns that its regional political, economic, and social interests are being challenged by the West, the U.S specifically.²⁶ Moreover, Russian elites argue that “Western policy constitutes a challenge to Russia” aimed at weakening its influence in what it regards a strategically important region.²⁷ According to Jonson’s accounts, this is reflexive of the stance that Russian policy is modeled—strengthening its regional power to deny engagement by external powers. In spite of this, she maintains that Russia uses geography as an aid to its statecraft, engaging China as strategic power to counter U.S influence.²⁸ Jonson cites a decrease in Russian influence as the fundamental concern of its aggression. Russian policy hopes to prevent a power vacuum that would enable increase U.S engagement. A concern that she asserts is legitimate due to the waning influence of Russia to convince the states to join its security umbrella. Despite the CIS’s (Commonwealth of Independent States) Treaty on CTS, the states still cooperate with NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) and have been reluctant to integrate forces with Russia until recently—a reluctance it blames on NATO’s eastward expansion.²⁹ Overall, Jonson claims that Russian influence is declining in the face of Western challenge. The inability to build consensus around its national interests is exacerbated by its limited capacity to help in regional socio-economic development.³⁰

Contrary to Jonson’s claim, Tajik analyst Sergei Gretskey argues that “Central Asia’s destiny is in the hands of Moscow.”³¹ Yet, he is careful to assess the extent to

²⁵ Jonson, Lena (2001). “Russia and Central Asia” in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, Ed. By Roy Allison and Lena Jonson. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press. p 114.

²⁶Ibid., 98.

²⁷Ibid., 115.

²⁸Ibid., 115.

²⁹Ibid., 109.

³⁰Ibid., 119-120.

³¹ Gretskey, Sergei (1997). “Russia’s Policy Towards Central Asia.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Moscow Center. Moscow. 21-22.

which Russia will be successful in implementing its policy of integration; the means are there but the end is contingent to the region's cooperation—which he recognizes is reluctant at best. Equally important is the international community's perception of Russia's role in the region. Overall, he sees Russian policy as disguised under security concerns. The main motive though, is to reduce competition over natural resources.³²

In summary, Rutland and Jonson characterize Russian policy as not overly unified but nonetheless ingrained in a consensus towards Western aggress and the reinstating of Russian dominance. Rutland, more than others, argues that the domestic actors at play impact the state's policy at an equal if not unprecedented level to the state. However, while Jonson views Russian influence as declining, Gretskey sees the region's fate as still dependent on Russia but only to the extent of the integrative impact of Russian policy.

Chinese Policy

China's foreign policy toward Central Asia is best understood through the studies of three distinct political scientists, Ramakant Dwivedi, Konstantin Syroezhkin, and Guangcheng Xing, each with separate yet equally valuable perspectives on the nature of the current foreign policy in the region.

Ramakant Dwivedi's article, "China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times," addresses China's foreign policy interests, mainly citing concerns over border safety and economic initiatives regarding oil access. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Dwivedi notes that China's interests in the Central Asian region were heightened, in part due to conflict in the region over independence sought by the Uyghurs, a cultural group living in China's Xingjian province as well as in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

³² Ibid., 8-9.

Aside from concerns over this “peripheral security” matter Dwivedi also identifies China’s post-Soviet intentions for economic control and oil access in the region. These intentions are, indeed, visible in the actions taken by the China National Petroleum Corporation, the CNPC, which has been proactive in signing various agreements with countries, such as Uzbekistan. For the most part, these agreements facilitate exploration and potential further road construction that would enable advancements in infrastructure for oil extraction to serve China’s ever emerging industrial needs.³³

Konstantin Syroezhkin’s article, “Central Asia Between the Gravitational Poles of Russia and China,” focuses on the role of Russia and China as regional powers closely connected both geographically and economically with the five Central Asian countries. The article rightly emphasizes the presence of a “geopolitical vacuum” in Central Asia directly following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. With this geopolitical vacuum in mind, Syroezhkin explains the favorable conditions available to the Chinese government as the Central Asian states have opened themselves to international trade. Surprising as it may seem, Syroezhkin also notes that the presence of major political powers in the area, particularly Russia and the United States, has been particularly beneficial to China, as the two countries have provided valuable protection from the encroaching influences of Turkey and Iran, respectively. Implicit in this is the contention that China’s relative protection from the encroachment of the two countries is attributable to its interest in stability in the Xinjiang province, which is predominantly Muslim.

Overall, Syroezhkin simplifies the Chinese foreign policy as a non-confrontational one. He sees this in the government’s intentions to maintain relatively

³³ Dwivedi, R. 2006. China’s Central Asia Policy in Recent Times. *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4: 139 – 159.

independent strategy rather than confronting the other major political powers in the region. China's goals include seizing the "opportunities to expand trade and economic contracts with Central Asia," limit Turkish and fundamentalist influence, and maintain stable political power in the region as a whole.³⁴

Guangcheng Xing's "China and Central Asia" identifies five crucial components to China's relations with Central Asia, mainly detailing the way in which the region is perceived strategically; as a crucial asset to foreign policy, an important link between "East and West," a source of bilateral relations, an asset to stability for the Xinjiang province, and a potential basis for a recreation of the "Silk Road" economic relations with the region.

With regard to Central Asia as a link between "East and West," Xing offers a geographically deterministic perspective on the "landlocked" significance of Central Asian states. This link is significant, as Xing highlights not only the resource-laden value that Central Asia offers to China but also how China's political "opening" offers further strategic opportunities to the Central Asian governments themselves. In essence, Xing argues that a control over the region, able to foster peace and stability, will be critical to the welfare of the region in the future.³⁵

European Union Policy

A report authored by the International Crisis Group poses a fundamental question regarding Central Asia: Why Should Central Asia Matter to the E.U.?³⁶ The report outlines specific reasons that indicate that there are strategic goals imbedded in the E.U.'s

³⁴ Rumer, Boris Z. *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002.

³⁵ Allison, Roy and Jonson, Lena, eds. 2001. *Central Asian Security: The New International Context.* Washington, D.C.: Royal Institute of International Affairs.

³⁶ International Crisis Group. *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?* *International Crisis Group: Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide* 2006.

policy towards the region. Mainly, the analysis emphasizes the E.U's "growing vulnerability" with regard to energy dependency. Therefore Central Asia's oil and natural gas reserves are targets for the oil-oriented foreign policy of the European Union, seeking to diversify its suppliers of energy.

In addition to outlining the E.U's oil interests, the detailed report also provides a background on the "political dialogue"—the diplomatic end to E.U's foreign policy—in the area. In 2005, the E.U appointed "special representative" liaisons to the region, citing political unrest as a fundamental concern. An already existing Commission office, created in 1994 to manage "on-the-ground" relations with the region, preceded the liaisons.

Murat Lamulin's "Central Asia and the European Union" offers a lengthy account of the E.U's presence in Central Asia. Lamulin highlights the strategic tactics that would be most useful to the E.U., namely the need for a unity among the member states on a singular foreign policy, their current economic interests in the "Caspian Region," the existing competition with NATO, and the E.U's growing influence as a "geopolitical force" in Central Asia. Lamulin emphasizes the E.U's growing institutionalization as facilitator to the expansion of its foreign policy, thus paradigmatic in its structural approach to the region.³⁷

Made clear by the article's title, "The European Union and Democracy Promotion in Bad Neighborhoods: The Case of Central Asia," Alexander Warkotsch focuses on the E.U.'s goals for "cooperation" in the Central Asian region.³⁸ Similar to the diplomacy

³⁷ Included in: Rumer, Boris Z. *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002.

³⁸ Warkotsch, A. "The European Union and Democracy Promotion in Bad Neighborhoods: The Case of Central Asia." *European Foreign Affairs Review* 11: 509 – 525.

referenced in the report published by the International Crisis Group, Warkotsch notes the employment of the European Commission, to whatever ends it may be used, as evidence of the E.U's diplomatic intentions in the region.

In reality, however, Warkotsch emphasizes that the E.U's democratization policy is highly rhetorical yet "remains low on delivery." In a section of his article devoted to "Explaining the Rhetoric-Policy Gap," Warkotsch discusses a number of reasons why the E.U's multilevel structure, that is broad membership, creates a near impossibility for consistency in reaching an exact foreign policy goal. If and when member-states do not conceptualize "democratization" as an aspect of their own national role or national interest, the policy loses a great deal of efficacy.

Additionally, Warkotsch identifies a pattern of the employment of "democratization" diplomacy in a region. Regarding the economics process, he notes that countries that have strong trade relations with the E.U. are engaged in "only a weak political dialogue." It is clear, therefore, that the application of this policy is inherently inconsistent and provides an ineffective foreign policy strategy.

VI. ANALYSIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR GREAT POWER POLITICS

United States vs. Russia

First and foremost, if surveyed through the concept of geostrategy, there is in geopolitics the endemic power of two influential levels: that of the domestic and the state. The two consolidate their powers to influence the respective policies of the U.S and Russia. Therefore, although geo-strategy implies borders, it is not wholly immune to domestic participation. Consider for example, the extensive push for geopolitical pluralism by U.S engagement in the region. Any effort to open market access to the U.S

presupposes that natural resources are targeted for the exploitation of multinational energy companies. Equally apparent, is the fact that Russia wants to have pipelines be transported through its territory. Assuming that even state-owned Russian energy companies are acting on behalf of market interests, they constrain the state's behavior. This is contentiously complicated by critics who hold that Mackinderian analysis is obsolete because it assumes conflict in a system where there is none. Empirically, such critique is unfounded because a variety of literatures repeatedly cites the geostrategic importance for U.S security in fighting terrorism and preventing Russian dominance over oil production and transportation. Similarly, the analyses attest to the fact that Russia builds regional alliances with Iran and China to stabilize its hegemony and prevent external influence from the U.S. According to the Oil & Gas Journal, in the post-Cold War political "struggle between Russia and the West conflict may [be determined] by who controls the oil reserves in Eurasia (emphasis added)."³⁹

Moreover, if taken to political value, the declarative statement of the first Bush Administration that "the United States has deemed it a vital interest to prevent any power or group from dominating the Eurasian landmass" demonstrates that the obsolescence of Mackinderian theory is irrelevant.⁴⁰ The American fear is not irrational considering that Russian officials cited similar concerns by stating that "Western policy constitutes a challenge for Russia's" regional dominance.⁴¹ An in-depth analysis of the perceptive role of U.S leadership on national interests would further disprove the claim of the irrelevance of the theory. Consider, for example, Vice-President Richard Cheney's

³⁹ Quote from study by the Heritage Foundation (1996) in "Key Issue: Control of Central Asia Oil Reserves." *Oil & Gas Journal*. PennWell Publishing Company. 104.

⁴⁰ Fettweis, Christopher J. (2003). 22:109-129.

⁴¹ Jonson, Lena. (2001) 115-116.

statement that “I cannot think of a time when we have had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian;” or former secretary of energy Bill Richardson’s evaluation that “we’re trying to move these newly independent countries toward the West. We would like to see them reliant on Western commercial and political interests rather than going [Russia’s] way. This is about America’s energy security, which depends on diversifying our sources of oil and gas worldwide (emphasis added).”⁴² These leaders not only present the national role conception of the U.S but possibly that of the domestic—Cheney served as CEO of the oil supply corporation, Halliburton.

What currently exists between the U.S and Russia is the conflict of energy security. Conflict therefore is not inevitable or a phenomenon only restricted to armed conflicts. The growth of consumerism combined with the economization of international affairs, and a relentless pursuit for raw materials almost guarantees the expectation of what analysis Philippe Le Billon terms “resource wars.”⁴³ The market interests of the two states are colliding and alliances and band-wagoning are at play on both sides. To elaborate, the U.S stance is considerably offensive in that it utilizes the GUUAM as a strategic alliance and promotes democracy to balance market favor on its side. In effect, it tries to maximize its economic power through different political outlets in order to lessen the sphere of Russian influence. Whereas, Russia’s policy views this as hostile and attempts to strengthen its hold in a ‘near-abroad’ policy that sees the region as its backyard, i.e. Russia employs a defensive strategy.

⁴² Lutz C. Kleveman (2003). 4-6.

⁴³ Billon, Philippe Le (2006). “The Geopolitics Of Resource Wars: Resource Dependence, Governance And Violence,” in *The Geopolitics Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. by Gearoid O Tuathail. Routledge. New York. 204.

One should not easily conclude that this fact pertains to a zero-sum game, all the more complicated because realists would contend so. However, Russia advances its interests through organizations like the SCO with China, the CIS, and the CST to further its national interests through international institutions. Its political clout over those institutions legitimizes its actions. Likewise, the U.S implements NATO's PfP program in the region and uses the G7+2 axis to forward its counterbalance of Russia. Great power geopolitics is therefore disguised under the cloak of international institutions. The regional countries also gain from the economic and military incentives offered by the powers. Only in the case of Russia may it be considered exclusively zero-sum; its control of pipeline routes automatically means lesser access for Western markets and higher prices as well as the underdevelopment of resources. In the end, no matter how one looks at it, it is arguable that liberalism is the mean whereby these rational actors, the U.S and Russia, reaches their mean, asserting the greatest political clout over Central Asia.

The geostrategic importance of the region has real implications for both powers and encompasses more than simple control of the Eurasian landmass. The clear objectives for Russia are to maintain a geopolitical hold on a region that analysts identify as naturally rich in resources. The U.S, being the largest consumer of those resources, wants to maximize its market share, minimize that of Russia, and use the region for closer proximity to the hostile Middle East. The Heartland theory falls short of grasping the context of that influence. Does it have to be grandiose in scheme? In other words, how is it applicable considering that neither power fully controls the region? Those questions are not yet answerable in scope but the theory applies nonetheless.

To put it into perspective, the literature shows that each power views Eurasia as influential. Russia resents U.S cooperation with the GUUAM and the U.S enjoys the fruits of that labor; something akin to an advantage in Mackinder's view. However, in light of Mackinder's notion of "the actual balance at any given time," the literatures show that Russia has the political power by way of its geographic proximity. Economically, it already controls many export routes for the shipment of natural gas and oil to western markets. Ineluctably, the U.S effort is likely to remain what it is now: promoting a market economy for the diversification of energy supply, whereby Russian monopoly will be broken.

European Union vs. China

In the competition between international powers for control over Central Asia, many forces pull and push. As major-power countries expend time, diplomacy, and capital in the area, patterns of foreign policy emerge. In particular, distinct patterns of foreign policy are visible in contrast between China and the European Union. It becomes clear from the literature reviewed in this paper that China has assumed an entirely different role in its participation, whether economic or diplomatic, in Central Asia. Specifically, China has assumed a role of regional stabilizer, seeking security for its own borders while simultaneously laying down a future for stable and secure regional trade.⁴⁴ The E.U., on the other hand, has less of an immediate need to create regional stability, as its member countries experience no geographic threat from conflict in the area. Instead, the E.U., for the most part, has concentrated on loftier goals of democratization while

⁴⁴ Pham, J. P. 2006. Beijing's Great Game: Understanding Chinese Strategy in Central Eurasia. *American Foreign Policy Interests* 28: 53 – 67.

desperately seeking an in-road, whether literally or figuratively, to a reliable access of oil supply for a future of expanding oil needs.

To examine the realities behind China's strategies of diplomacy and oil access in Central Asia, it is essential to look to the specifics of its diplomatic relations with Central Asian governments and the essence of its planned economic activity for oil extraction. J. Richard Walsh accurately summarizes the nature of China's regional presence in his article, "China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia," stating, "The emergence of the Central Asian republics...gives China the opportunity to reassert traditional regional interests."⁴⁵

With regard to oil extraction, China's regional policies are evident in the planning for a Kazakhstan-China pipeline. In its nature, this is a clear regional development, as the capability of a pipeline is available to China only because of the presence of already existing infrastructure in the area, contributable mainly to the extensive Kazakhstan-China border. Even more important than the geographical explanation of this development is the manner in which China's involvement is inclusive of Kazakhstan's interests. Dru C. Gladney emphasizes this in his article, "China's Interest in Central Asia: Energy and Ethnic Security." Gladney considers Kazakhstan's goals of establishing a pipeline as part of a primary concern to diversify its distributional capacities beyond Russian control, which in return would help increase its access to foreign currency reserves.⁴⁶ China's regional role is therefore crucial in this instance because its

⁴⁵ Walsh, J. R. 1993. "China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia." *Asian Survey*, 33: 272 – 284.

⁴⁶ Gladney, Dru C. (2000) in Ebel and Menon. 218-220.

independent policy seeks to bypass Russia by forging direct cooperation with the Central Asian countries, a strategy that is far less realistic for a non-regional power.⁴⁷

Whereas China's foreign policy has centered on regional issues of security and oil needs, the E.U. has instead focused its efforts on the premise of democratic intervention. The promotion of democracy will likely aim to foster more stable political economies in the region as this process will in return promise better attainment to market access. Democracy oriented tactics are most obvious in the goals for cooperation that the E.U. is implementing in the region. It logically follows that goals for democracy must be preceded by more general goals for regional stability. Alexander Warkotsch illuminates these goals in his article, "The European Union and Democracy Promotion," which effectively details the "three pillars" of cooperation advanced by the E.U. toward Central Asia. Primarily, cooperation is visible in the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA), signed with each of the Central Asian republics, establishing guidelines for legal cooperation. A second pillar put forth by Warkotsch is an organizational program known as the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS). TACIS serves to provide support integrated programs at the regional and national level, while simultaneously implementing a "poverty reduction scheme" in specified areas. Lastly, Warkotsch discusses programs that fall under the category of "general development aid," meaning broad humanitarian aid assistance that were not originally catered to the Central Asian republics.⁴⁸

While the implementation of these programs does not, as Warkotsch concludes, effectively create a democratized state, they are nonetheless indicative of the extent to

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Warkotsch, 2006, 516.

which the E.U.'s goals in the region are aimed at creating stability. The significance of this point is not to reiterate the E.U.'s foreign policy goals but rather to present a contrast to the strategic goals of the Chinese government. While China, as a power of the "East," is able to assert "regional interests" directly, the European Union, as a power of the more distant "West," must instead implement broad agreements and individual programs in the hopes of meeting regional goals.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that there is indicative evidence to suggest that the theory is conducive—in the context of competitiveness over resources and geostrategy—to explaining the attitudinal and behavioral conducts, as well as the geopolitical and strategic factors that together characterize the geopolitics of Central Asia. Consequently, the Central Asian region, replete with oil and natural gas resources, is indeed a target for foreign policy that follows Halford J. Mackinder's model of the Heartland Theory. Whether the world-powers are indeed cognizant of the geopolitical significance of their policies is difficult to verify. However, regardless of the intentions, the geopolitical framework of these ambitious policy strategies remains entrenched in Mackinderian philosophy. Using Mackinder's 'Geographical Pivot' thesis as analogous to contemporary policy regarding Central Asia, this paper has shown that the literature around U.S, Russia, E.U, and China deals greatly with Mackinderian geostrategy in their foreign policy discourse and as such reveals that the Heartland theory is still influential in their foreign policy outlook.

Through the evaluation of the many literatures thereof and the analysis of the competitive policies of each of the great powers, it becomes apparent that the Heartland concept is valid in today's foreign policy and policy analyses. Each power strives for control of or access to the region's resources. For China, the primary goal is to maintain regional stability, both as a means for border security but additionally as an assurance of stable economic relations. For the European Union, the main goal is to gain economic access while simultaneously promoting the democratization of those countries that are politically unstable.

The Central Asian region is as pivotally important today as Mackinder has prescribed. But the extent to which the theory is visible in foreign policy towards the region is a matter of degrees. Central Asia has not yet fully succumbed to Russian influence but is greatly influenced by Russian strategy for dominance. Russia still has considerable leverage in determining pipeline routes and is the primary source for imported natural gas in most European states. The U.S and the E.U on the other hand are building up alliances with regional countries in order to maximize their economic power and political influence. Thus, the degree to which Central Asian energy resources are made accessible or are closed to the U.S and the European states is of increasing importance in the foreign policies of those powers.⁴⁹ In the end, it is clear that Mackinder's Heartland theory, whether acknowledged directly or in principle, is quintessential to the understanding of foreign policy relations in contemporary Central Asia.

⁴⁹ For a similar observation, see Blank J. Stephen's "U.S Interests In Central Asia and the Challenges To Them (March 2007).

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