The imperial vision of Halford Mackinder

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From 1899 to 1939, Halford Mackinder was active in imperial affairs. In 1899, the same year he climbed Mount Kenya, he set out the case for free trade. Rapidly he converted to imperial protectionism, left the Liberal Party and joined the Conservatives. Mackinder, along with his associates in the Conservative Party, Leo Amery and Lord Milner, promoted the cause of imperial unity and imperial preference in trade. During the period 1899–1903, Mackinder's evolving ideas about empire helped shape the Pivot paper, and he spelt out a prescription to avoid imperial decline: bind Britain and the Dominions into a League of Democracies with one fleet and one foreign policy, and encourage economic growth within the empire by a system of tariffs that promoted imperial trade. In Mackinder's parliamentary career (1910–22), his party was never in power and the Liberals retained free trade. Only after World War I, at the end of his parliamentary career, did Mackinder become active in imperial policy as chair of the Imperial Shipping Committee and the Imperial Economic Committee.

KEY WORDS: Kenya, Mackinder, free trade, tariff reform, Imperial Shipping Committee, Pivot paper

This paper examines the origins and evolution of Mackinder's imperial vision and suggests that a profound alteration in his views, particularly regarding the economics of imperialism, played a part in the formulation of the Pivot paper.

Early training

As an undergraduate at Oxford (1880–3), Halford Mackinder was trained in zoology by Henry Nottidge Moseley, Linacre Professor of Human and Comparative Anatomy. Moseley was part of the nineteenth century imperial, exploratory scientific tradition. He had served on the *Challenger* expedition (1873–6) as a zoologist, with subsidiary work in botany and ethnography (Moseley 1892). Moseley knew Charles Darwin (the *Beagle* expedition) and T.H. Huxley, who had collected scientific materials when on board HMS *Rattlesnake* (1846–50). Darwin advised Moseley, before he set off on *Challenger*, to make ethnographic observations, as traditional lifestyles were disappearing on contact with the modern world.

Moseley was appointed to the Linacre chair in 1881 and did much of his teaching at Oxford in the purpose built University Museum, on Parks Road, which was a storehouse of biological, geological, and anthropological materials. The Linacre Professor had an impact on Mackinder, imparting to him an understanding of physical geography and the global distribution of plants and animals. Moseley pressed the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to establish geography at Oxford and Cambridge and when, in 1887, a Readership in Geography was created at Oxford, Moseley insisted that the successful applicant had a scientific training. This helped to get Mackinder, with a first class degree in animal morphology, a second in history, and a research award in geology, appointed to the Readership.

Mackinder's experience of the exploratory-scientific tradition was enhanced by contact with officers of the RGS including Henry Bates – *Naturalist on the Amazons* (Bates 1863) – Douglas Freshfield, the Alpinist, Scott Keltie, a pioneer of geographic education, and Clements Markham, who had

explored in the Andes and brought back cincona plants, the bark of which produced quinine, used to treat malaria.

Mount Kenya

When Mackinder set off to climb Mount Kenya in 1899 he had been schooled in the British, imperial, scientific-exploratory tradition by Professor Moseley and the officers of the RGS. During his Victorian childhood, Mackinder read about Captain Cook's voyages and absorbed an understanding of the adventure of empire, its interests and competitors.

The motives for climbing Mount Kenya were not purely scientific. The 'desire to conquer Mount Kenya was a deliberate career move by a man seeking authority within the new discipline of geography in late Victorian Britain' (Ó Tuathail 1996, 76), reinforced by the fact that RGS financial support for Mackinder's Oxford Readership, and the School of Geography, might depend upon Mackinder proving himself as an explorer (Kearns 1997, 458). He was situating himself within the scientific exploratory foundations of the discipline, in order to establish credibility.

The imperial dimension of the Kenya expedition required that 'behind the duty of science lay the desire to control' (Kearns 1997, 455). In the opinion of Ó Tuathail, Mackinder wanted 'to penetrate and map the vast interiors of Africa' and the 'expedition to Mount Kenya was to write on this blank page' (1996, 76). Further Mackinder's 'eyes were sovereign, his authority guaranteed by his male body, his white skin, and his European learning' (1996, 81). Whether or not we accept Ó Tuathail's view, the overall situation is clear: the British government was establishing imperial control over Kenya, Uganda and the headwaters of the Nile. The Mount Kenya expedition was a part of the imperial expansion. Without British government funding of the Uganda railway, Mackinder's expedition would not have taken place when it did because, lacking the railway, he could not get to and from the mountain in the time available, if he were to fulfil his Oxford teaching commitments.

Mackinder planned the Mount Kenya expedition carefully and engaged the talents of many people. His wife's sister Hilda (née Ginsburg) was married to Sidney Hinde who had experience in African exploration and was employed by the British government as a colonial administrator in Kenya (Hinde 1897). The Hindes provided intelligence in the planning phase and by mid-1899 the Hindes were living at the Nairobi rail head camp, which served as the inland base of the expedition. Hilda and Sydney Hinde studied the Masai language (Hinde and Hinde 1901) and Hilda also made herself expert in the Kamba and Kikuyu languages (Hinde 1901 1904). Another Ginsburg relative, Campbell B. Hausberg, took on the logistic planning and served as camp master to the expedition. Hausberg was expert with a rifle and a camera. Many of his photographs, now housed at the School of Geography, Oxford, are frequently reproduced (Ó Tuathail 1996; Ryan 1997). Also in the Mount Kenya party were Edward Saunders, specimen collector, and Claude Camburn, taxidermist, both recommended by the Natural History Museum, London. An experienced alpine guide and a porter, César Ollier and Joseph Brocherel, were to make climbing the mountain possible. The expedition collected botanical and zoological specimens, surveyed the mountain, collected meteorological data, and made a photographic record of the region (Ryan 1997, 122).

Mackinder's party left England for Marsailles on 8 June 1899, travelled by ship through the Suez Canal to Zanzibar (28 June) and then on to Mombasa. Armed *askaris* (guards) and some porters were recruited at the coast and Mackinder sent most of the party inland on the Uganda railway to Nairobi. The railway, financed by the British government, was started in 1896 to link Mombasa to Lake Victoria. Eventually, steamboats were brought by the rail, in pieces, assembled on Lake Victoria, and provided passage to Uganda. The expedition was part of a larger geopolitical picture (Hyam 1999). Authorized by the Foreign Office and partially funded by the RGS, it would fill in spaces on the map and be a part of the 'capitalist vanguard' (Pratt 1992, 146). Although the expedition was mostly scientific, to help promote geography in universities, Mackinder would have understood the term capitalist vanguard. Mackinder, anticipating J.A. Hobson, believed that a function of imperial expansion was to provide outlets for British overseas investment (Kearns 1993; Mackinder 1900c; Semmel 1968, 157).

Mackinder, after administrative work in Mombasa, rejoined the expedition at Nairobi on 14 July. More porters were hired and the party set off for Mount Kenya on 28 July 1899. The expedition passed through well cultivated Kikuyu country. Some villages were friendly, others hostile, and two porters were killed in one incident. The mountain camps were established at 7200 and 10 300 ft. At 13 000 ft, just below the Lewis glacier, a stone hut was built to shelter the climbing parties. It took three attempts, but on 13 September the summit of Mount Kenya (17 058 ft) was reached. The feat was not repeated for 30 years. After the climb, more survey and photographic work was undertaken before the party returned, by a circuitous route, to Nairobi, to avoid traversing Kikuyu country again.

The scientific results of the expedition were reported in *The Geographical Journal* and the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* (Mackinder 1900a; Sharpe *et al.* 1900). Many new species were recorded and specimens deposited at Kew and in the Natural History Museum, but the results were not as rich as they might have been. Towards the end of the expedition some demoralized porters lightened loads by jettisoning specimen boxes. Punishments were administered, but specimens were lost.

It has been suggested that the book Mackinder wrote on Mount Kenya was not published at the time to avoid publicity of an expedition that had problems. This view does not hold up as Mackinder reported his results in scientific journals and at society meetings (Mackinder 1900b; Ryan 1997, 121). The failure of the book to appear until 1991, edited with an introduction by Michael Barbour, is probably due to the fact that Mackinder and his wife separated at the end of 1900. Bonnie Mackinder (née Ginsburg) helped Mackinder assemble and edit *The first ascent of Mount Kenya*. Mackinder was distraught at the separation and could not face the project after Bonnie left. She retained a copy of the typescript until after World War II when it eventually made its way to the School of Geography, Oxford (Blouet 1975, 4).

At the end of September 1899, Mackinder left the Mount Kenya expedition and hurried back to Oxford to lecture at the newly created School of Geography. He missed the start of term but lectured more frequently to complete his courses.

As Mackinder returned from Kenya to Oxford, events elsewhere in Africa altered his world view and vision of the empire. In October 1899 the Boers, fearing annexation, attacked towns in Cape Colony and besieged British garrisons. The South African War lasted from 1899 to 1902. Half a million British troops were involved, casualties were high, and the problems of supplying troops in South Africa brought into question the efficiency of the army and caused a rethinking of imperial defence. All this had an impact on Mackinder, and helped reshape his world view and imperial vision prior to the writing of the Pivot paper (Mackinder 1943).

Economic and strategic views

In 1899 Mackinder delivered a series of lectures to the Institute of Bankers on 'The great trade routes' (Mackinder 1900c) in which he supported the concept of free trade. He suggested that British manufacturers could not remain dominant in distant markets and would encounter increasing competition on the continent from Germany, but overall he was optimistic about Britain's economic future. The optimism of 1899 was rapidly replaced by fears that free-trade Britain would not be able to compete with the other great powers all of which had protective tariffs. This led Mackinder to convert from free trade to protectionism and to the concept of imperial unity. In September 1900, Mackinder contested, as a Liberal Imperialist, the Warwick and Leamington seat held by the Conservative Alfred Lyttleton. In his election address Mackinder set out his fears of the future:

> Little England . . . would soon be less safe when confronted by the military powers, the rapidly developing resources of whose vast territories would presently enable them to build great fleets. No other course is open to us than to bind Britain and her Colonies into a league of democracies defended by a united navy and an efficient army
>
> Mackinder 1900d

The idea that Britain was being outclassed by emerging larger states was developed further in *Britain and the British seas* (1902). Mackinder saw a new balance of power emerging involving five great world states: Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States. In competing with these empires, some based on the resources of half continents, Britain had to maintain a lead 'won under earlier conditions'. To do that Britain had to grow economically and, with the 'daughter nations' create a 'Navy of the Britains' (Mackinder 1902, 358).

Mackinder now questioned the concept of free trade. He did not think other leading powers would adopt free trade, for in a condition of universal free trade Britain would increase its existing lead (Mackinder 1902, 343). In 1903 he renounced free trade, left the Liberal Party, and advocated protectionism.

In the same year as the publication of *Britain and the British seas* (1902), Mackinder began to work at improving education about the empire within the empire. He was involved in the formation of the Colonial Office Visual Education Committee with the aim of producing illustrated lectures on Dominions and colonies that could be delivered by skilled lectures to improve knowledge of the empire in all its parts (Blouet 1975, 23–25; Cantor 1960; Ryan 1997, 186–213; Ó Tuathail 1996, 89–90). This work, which was intended to produce a sense of British imperial identity, culminated in the publication of *India. Eight lectures prepared for the Visual Instruction Committee of the Colonial Office* (Mackinder 1910). *India* was published in the year Mackinder entered Parliament and for several years after that he published little.

Tariff Reform

In November 1902, the Co-Efficients dining club was formed by the well-known socialists and members of the Fabian Society, Beatrice and Sydney Webb. The club dined on a monthly basis and discussed major issues including defence, imperial questions and national efficiency. The Webbs had a large circle of political acquaintants and the Co-Efficients included Sir Edward Grey, Lord Haldane, Leo Maxse, Bertrand Russell, H.G. Wells, and Leo Amery. Amery had been in South Africa in 1899–1900 and was writing a history of the war for *The Times*. Amery was associated with Alfred Milner, who was working to create a Union of South Africa and had powerful ideas on imperial unity. On return from South Africa in 1903, Milner resigned from the government because it would not adopt a preferential tariff for wheat coming into Britain from the empire.

However, the major catalyst for Mackinder's formal conversion to a system of tariffs favouring goods from the empire was Joseph Chamberlain. In May 1903, Chamberlain made a speech advocating Tariff Reform (protectionism) and imperial preference. Chamberlain's views largely coincided with Mackinder's position set out in *Britain and the British seas* (1902). With the encouragement of Amery, Mackinder resigned from the Liberal Party and joined the Conservative Party, although Chamberlain's Tariff Reform was not adopted as policy by the Conservatives. At the 1905 general election, the Liberals used the possible abandonment of free trade as an election issue, suggesting that Tariff Reform would increase food prices in Britain. The Liberals won in a landslide. The Conservatives were out of office until 1922, by which time Mackinder's parliamentary career (1910–22) was over and his chance of ministerial office gone.

Mackinder's imperial pessimism about the strength and effectiveness of the British empire reached a peak in 1903–4, as he wrote 'The geographical pivot of history' delivered to the Royal Geographical Society on 25 January 1904. The 'Columbian epoch', the age of sea power, was coming to an end (Mackinder 1904, 421) and the maritime empires were vulnerable. Landpower would reassert itself. The danger was that one power, or alliance of powers, would achieve control of the core of Euro-Asia. If Germany and Russia allied, the vast continental resources could be used for fleet building and the empire of the world would be in sight (Mackinder 1904, 436). Clearly this heartland empire would not be British. Further, in discussion following the reading of the Pivot paper, Mackinder suggested that the pivot region, integrated by railways, would cut itself off from economic interaction with the oceanic world (Mackinder 1904, 442–3). This prediction became partially true when Fascist Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics tried to create self-sufficient states and autarkic economies in the 1930s. Germany's attempts to unify the resources of the heartland failed in World War I and World War II, but the world wars, and the Cold War, can be seen as contests between the maritime powers intent on increasing trade versus continental powers determined to create closed economic and political systems.

In 1904, when still leading the Oxford School of Geography, Mackinder was appointed Director of the London School of Economics (LSE). Mackinder had lectured at the LSE from the beginning in 1895 and his experience as Principal of University College Reading (1892–1903) qualified him for the position (Blouet 1987a). But he could not run for Parliament in the election of 1905 for to do so would have disturbed LSE, an institution full of academics with strong political views. Mackinder did remain active in Milner's imperial unity group and in 1906 produced a short book, *Money-power and man-power: the underlying principles rather than the statistics of a Tariff Reform* (Mackinder 1906). The book argued that overseas investment involved the export of capital, manufacturing capacity, and skills from the United Kingdom. Policy should encourage investment in Britain to create a more efficient economy, higher living standards, and the continued ability to fund imperial defence. As Bernard Semmel comments, having displayed, in the Institute of Bankers lectures, an understanding of the principles of free trade, Mackinder now 'demonstrated a similar grasp of the rival neo-mercantile imperialism, and became one of its leading public advocates' (Semmel 1968, 157). Mackinder sent copies of *Money-power and man-power* to leading Conservatives. The book did not have an impact on party policy.

Parliamentary career

Alfred Milner wanted Mackinder in Parliament as a supporter of imperial unity. In 1908 Leo Amery acted as the go between. Milner and his associates agreed to pay Mackinder 850 pounds per annum for four years (MPs did not receive a small salary until 1911). Mackinder would resign the Directorship of LSE, retain his University of London Readership, and run for Parliament (Mackinder 1908a; Kendle 1967, 127).

At the end of the 1907–8 academic year, Mackinder boarded a Royal Navy warship and sailed for Canada to take part in the tercentenary celebrations of European settlement on the *St Lawrence*. Then he travelled across Canada making

speeches advocating preferential imperial trade and an empire composed of 'free and equal nations' that supported one imperial fleet (*Manitoba Free Press* 11 September 1908).

The idea of a preferential trade deal between Britain and Canada had merits (Parker 1982, 70–82). The US had high protective tariffs on imports and it was difficult for Canadian producers to penetrate the US market except with raw materials that were short in the US. On return to Britain, Mackinder addressed Canadian issues in a series of lectures to the Compatriots. Economic links between the UK and Canada should be strengthened to prevent Canada becoming 'a field, a forest, and a quarry for the US economy' (Mackinder 1908b). Interesting though these views were, they had no impact upon policy because the Liberal Party was in power and maintained free trade.

Early in 1909, Mackinder was adopted as the Conservative and Unionist candidate to fight a by-election at Hawick Burghs in Scotland, a safe Liberal seat. Mackinder received 2508 votes, but the Liberal, Sir John Barran, polled 3028. In the campaign Mackinder displayed his forceful style of public speaking and a powerful imperial message. Other Scottish constituencies wanted him as a candidate and in June 1909 he was adopted at Camlachie, in Glasgow (Blouet 1987b). Mackinder's campaign speeches, as reported in the *Glasgow Herald*, indicate that his basic imperial message had changed little since he stood as a Liberal Imperialist ten years earlier at Warwick and Leamington, but the message was more succinct. He wanted to see a group of nations, 'the Britains with one fleet . . . and one foreign policy' (*Glasgow Herald* 6 April 1909). He would abandon free trade in order to encourage investment in Britain to create more employment. The system of tariffs to be adopted would favour goods from the empire and when Britain had tariffs they could be used in negotiation with other countries to open up markets for British goods (*Glasgow Herald* 21 December 1909).

Mackinder was concerned about conditions in Glasgow, and Tariff Reform was linked to the need to promote economic growth both to support the Navy and to improve living standards. As Semmel has pointed out, many of the leading imperialists in the 20 years before World War I were social reformers (Semmel 1968, 158), and Mackinder was no exception. Mackinder's views on reform are partially set out in an article 'Man-power as a measure of national and imperial strength' (Mackinder 1905). Overall his imperial view was inclusive. He thought it wrong to see the empire consisting of the UK as the manufacturing centre and the colonies as the providers of foodstuffs and raw materials.

History should not be taught in an insular manner, the English should stop thinking of Moslems as pagans, and the empire should consist of different nationalities with equality between them (Mackinder 1907). Few of these idealistic themes were aired in the Glasgow election of January 1910 in which Mackinder was elected as the member for Camlachie. He retained the seat, in the second election of 1910, with a majority of 26 votes!

Once in Parliament, Mackinder made little immediate impact. The Liberals were in power and did not want Tariff Reform. To provide the funds an MP needed, Mackinder was involved in business ventures. The most ambitious enterprise was Electro-Bleach. Starting the company took much time on the part of Mackinder and his fellow directors. Electro-Bleach extracted brine from the Cheshire salt field and produced bleach for the paper and textile industries. The company made some money in World War I when the Ministry of Munitions ordered it to produce chlorine for the Western Front. The company quickly disappeared into what became ICI after the war.

During the war, Mackinder worked at recruiting in Scotland, helped establish the National Savings scheme, and became increasingly concerned with the form of the post-war world. His ideas on the new Europe were set out in *Democratic ideals and reality* (Mackinder 1919).

Imperial committees

Mackinder easily retained his seat in Parliament in the 1918 Khaki election, but his position in a Clydeside constituency was weakening. Mackinder had won Camlachie in 1910 because the left of centre vote was split between Liberals and Labour. After World War I, the Liberal vote shrank and the Labour Party consolidated its position. At the 1922 election, Mackinder was a senior and respected MP from Scotland, poised to be appointed to ministerial office (Barnes and Nicholson 1980, 300–1). The Conservatives won in 1922 but Mackinder lost Camlachie to the Labour Party candidate. Mackinder was out of Parliament and made no effort to return, refusing offers to contest Camlachie and other, safer seats. He wanted to promote economic exchanges within the empire. The Imperial Shipping Committee (ISC) was established in 1920 with Mackinder as chair, a position he held actively until 1939. The committee successfully advised on how shipping between territories in the empire could be improved and on legislation to bring shipping practices into conformity. During Mackinder's chairmanship, the ISC met 233 times and published 39 unanimous reports, largely authored by Mackinder. The achievements of the

ISC, which became the Commonwealth Shipping Committee in 1948, and functioned until 1963, were a product of 'Mackinder's tireless energy . . . and his visionary dedication to the imperial ideal' (Burley 1974, 212). Mackinder chaired the Imperial Economic Committee (IEC), established in 1925 by the President of the Board of Trade, Sydney Webb. The IEC advised on the marketing of empire commodities – meat, fish, fruit, timber, rubber, and tea – in Britain. During Mackinder's term (1925–31), the IEC produced 18 reports and raised awareness in Britain of Commonwealth sources of foodstuffs and raw materials. The work was overwhelmed by the depression, the near halving of world trade and the collapse of commodity prices.

Empire trade

In response to increased protectionism in other countries, Britain raised tariffs on imports in 1931 and, by the Ottawa agreements (1932), adopted a system of imperial preference for the Dominions which was extended to colonies in the following year. The raising of tariffs was a policy response to the Smoot Hawley (1930) legislation in the US, which increased tariffs on imported goods at a time when the US had favourable trade balances with every major trading partner except Japan! The trade deficit with Japan was more than compensated for by the large trade surplus the US enjoyed with the UK (Blouet 2001, 70).

In the early years of the twentieth century, were politicians such as Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Milner, Leo Amery, and Mackinder unrealistic in promoting the concept of a Commonwealth trade agreement? The short answer is yes.

Before World War I a system of imperial preference in trade was politically unattainable. However, Mackinder's view, as set out in *Britain and the British seas* (1902) and the 'geographical pivot' (1904) involved more than trade. He saw that conflict for control of the continent was coming which would alter trade patterns and force Britain to rely more heavily on the Commonwealth. In 1900 Britain's leading trade partners were, in rank order by value, the US, France, Germany, India and Australia. Trade with Germany was important and in that exchange Britain's deficit (the UK had a trade deficit with nearly all trade partners) was small compared with the adverse trade balance with the US, at a ratio of 7 to 1! (Mitchell 1998). However, Anglo-German antagonism was rising (Kennedy 1980) and in 'a culture of geopolitical panic in Europe' (Dodds forthcoming) the powers were carried to World War I by a 'Doomsday machine' (Kissinger 1994). During the war, British trade with the US and Commonwealth countries necessarily increased.

After the war, British trade with Europe did not rebound, as the USSR strove to build a self-contained economy, France encouraged self sufficiency, and Germany, after economic collapse in the 1920s, tried in the 1930s to trade as little as possible with European neighbours. By 1938 Britain's top trading partners were the US and Commonwealth countries. Germany and France were eight and ten on the list. The USSR was doing little international trade. Imperial preference had some influence on British patterns, but the trade policies of the US, the USSR, Germany, and France were designed to reduce international trade in the 1930s.

In the years after World War II, British commerce was dominated by trade with Commonwealth countries. This was the result that Mackinder had predicted in *Britain and the British seas* (1902). If Britain were to survive in great power struggles it would be with the help of the daughter nations. Even as Britain prepared a bid to join the EEC (European Economic Community, popularly known as the Common Market) in 1960, and adopt a common external tariff in favour of European trade, the leading trade partners, in rank order, were the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, and New Zealand.

The imperialism of the geographical pivot of history

The Pivot paper is a panoramic view of global imperialism. The 'Natural Seats of Power' (Mackinder 1904, Figure 5) lay 'in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia' (Mackinder 1904, 434) and the balance was moving from sea power to land power. The shadow of the pivot would fall across the world, weakening the British empire. Late in life in 'The round world and the winning of the peace' (Mackinder 1943), Mackinder revealed some of the forces that helped shape the Pivot paper. After remembering his boyhood fears of Russians and Prussians, he focused on the war in South Africa and the German naval build up. Further indicators of his mind set, at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be drawn from *Britain and the British seas* (1902), with its concern for Britain's adverse trade balance and his fear that the economy of Britain could not sustain a navy powerful enough to maintain the place of the empire in the world.

At the beginning of the century Mackinder saw the major states in an imperial competition and believed that the result would be the emergence of larger units struggling for dominance in international affairs (Kearns 2004, this issue). To meet these trends, Mackinder had become a political advocate of imperial unity to help make the British empire a more effective economic and strategic unit.

But on the January night of 1904, at the RGS, Mackinder delivered an academic paper. Towards

the end he told the audience 'I have spoken as a geographer' (Mackinder 1904, 437). He was not airing his political views. However, to any member of the Tariff Reform group, the Pivot paper carried a message: unite the imperial territories economically to provide the resources to allow Britain to compete in the emerging new world order and prevent the decline of the country in world affairs by creating an 'economically integrated empire' (Ó Tuathail 1992, 105). Mackinder may be transmitting another message. In the Pivot paper we are told that under Asiatic threat 'Europe achieved her civilization' and the formation of states (Mackinder 1904, 423). The threat from the heartland of Euro-Asia is about to reappear and Pascal Vernier (2004, this issue) suggests that Mackinder employed the external threat as a catalyst for imperial unity.

Summary

Halford Mackinder was a visionary who was unsuited to be a practical politician. His decision to join the Conservatives in 1903 was a mistake. When Mackinder's imperial vision was harnessed to policy issues it was by left of centre politicians like Lloyd George, who appointed Mackinder chair of ISC in 1920, and Sydney Webb, who put Sir Halford in charge of the IEC in 1925. *The Glasgow Herald* sensed Mackinder's strengths and weaknesses in an editorial of 8 June 1909. Mackinder had a clear imperial vision, but most of his ideas were not realizable. This proved to be the case, although for a few terrible years in World War II his perspective was on view. In September 1939, as Germany attacked Poland and Britain and France declared war in support of Poland, countries rushed to declare neutrality. Only Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa joined Britain in declaring war on Germany. Here was Mackinder's British League of Democracies with common defence and foreign policy aims standing against a power – Nazi Germany – that wished to control the heartland.

As Ó Tuathail (1996, 75–93) has suggested, Mackinder had many characteristics of the European, imperial, explorer, and naturalist of the late nineteenth century when he climbed Mount Kenya in 1899. Mackinder also embraced conventional economic theory regarding the British empire. Free trade would allow the economy to grow, British financial institutions would invest capital in developing areas to produce long-term income and prosperity. The ascent of Mount Kenya represented an imperial peak in Mackinder's life for as he came down from the mountain and travelled back to Britain, news of the South African war arrived. There was also tension in the Far East between the empires of Russia and Japan. The German empire was a force and Germany wanted to add sea power to land power (Mackinder 1943, 595). In 1898 a threat of war between Britain and France had developed at Fashoda on the Nile. In the Caribbean, the US had emerged as a force during the Spanish–American War. Empires were in conflict and competition. Mackinder looked into Britain's imperial future and the vision alarmed him. Britain, a relatively small country, was going to be outranked by states which controlled half continents. Sustaining the Royal Navy as a global force would become increasingly difficult economically, particularly if one power got control of the resources of Euro-Asia, 'The geographical pivot of history'. In the early years of the twentieth century Mackinder spelt out his prescription. Bind Britain and the Dominions into a League of Democracies with one fleet and one foreign policy. Encourage economic growth within the empire by a system of tariffs that promoted imperial trade (Mackinder 1900c 1902 1904 1906 1907).

During and after World War II many aspects of Mackinder's pivot scenario were on view. In 1942, one power – Germany – controlled mainland Europe and was thrusting into the pivot region via the Volga river. Britain and her Commonwealth allies, later joined by the US, were in a battle to retain control of Atlantic sea routes against fleets of Axis submarines. Early in 1943 the Wehrmacht was defeated at Stalingrad and pushed back into central Europe, but as one threat was suppressed the Soviet Union emerged, in the Cold War, as the force to be feared.

In the Cold War the British Foreign Office viewed the world from the perspective of Mackinder's pivot/heartland model. The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was of the view that the Soviets were determined to gain 'physical control of the whole World Island' (Parker 1982, 185). In response, Britain made closer ties with Western Europe via NATO and the EEC. In resisting the ideology of communism, Britain de-emphasized imperialism and accelerated decolonization (Hyam 1999, 44–5). The application to join Europe, and decolonization, was pressed by the administration of Prime Minister Macmillan (1957–63). At the time when policymakers in the US and the UK feared that the USSR might control the World Island, Mackinder's imperial vision was undermined by the perceived need to leave the empire behind and join the European Economic Community.

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