

## Imperialism and the Heartland

Halford Mackinder's (1861-1947) engagement with contemporary Central Asia may be traced through his educational and his diplomatic work. In each case, the significance of the influence of Central Asia upon the rest of the world is conceptualized in terms of the importance of the Heartland.<sup>1</sup> In each case also, the issue of imperialism is central and, in particular, the tension between colonial and liberal versions of imperialism. Under imperialism, I include all the ways that the sovereignty of one state is compromised by the actions of another state.<sup>2</sup> Colonial imperialists urge interference in the interests of the imperial power itself whereas liberal imperialists refer instead to the needs of the subjects of the foreign state. Both versions of imperialism justify abrogating the rights of self-determination that have been claimed as a basic element of a system of states at least since the 1648 treaty of Westphalia.<sup>3</sup> ~~In education and diplomacy alike, the Heartland is conceptualized as an invitation to imperialism and this is clear both in both the theory and practice of Mackinder's Geopolitics.~~

The focus of this chapter is thus twofold. Firstly, it explores how Central Asia and the Caucasus were understood and explained to children in a generally-overlooked but important section of Mackinder's corpus, his school geography textbooks. Secondly, it explores how Mackinder put his geopolitics into practice in his only known visit to the region, as British High Commissioner to South Russia between late in 1919 and 1920. Mackinder was sent to mastermind British intervention in the south Russian theatre of the civil war that followed the Bolshevik revolution. In education and diplomacy alike, the Heartland is conceptualized as an invitation to imperialism and this is clear both in both the theory and practice of Mackinder's Geopolitics.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the Heartland having been set out above in the Introduction and in the chapter by Brian Blouet, I will dispense with yet another explication here. [SN: note to Nick for final edits, integrate this into the overall book text]

<sup>2</sup> Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ch.1.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Croxton, 'The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the origins of sovereignty', *International History Review*, 21:3 (1999), pp. 569-91.

### *Teaching Central Asia*

Mackinder believed that Geography was a practical subject for an imperial people. School-children, he suggested, should begin their understanding of their world through the study of Geography, which he hoped to see 'the chief outlook subject in our school curriculum,' educating the citizens of the many parts of the British Empire to sympathise with one another and to understand 'Imperial problems [...], not only from the point of view of the Homeland, but also of the Empire.'<sup>4</sup> The world was getting smaller and '[t]he conquest of space by speed has in our time reduced the relative significance of near and easily apprehended things,' so that future citizens would need global and not merely local orientation.<sup>5</sup> The guiding principle of an imperial education must be to train young people to see the world, 'the scene of their life's action,' as 'a theatre for British activity.'<sup>6</sup> In the discussion following this address to an Imperial Education Conference, the educationalist Henry Holman (1859-1919) challenged Mackinder on the psychological grounds that young children were not able to understand the concept of community and on the moral grounds that he 'protested against the mixing up of imperialism with geography,' and was sure there was no more an 'imperial geography than there is imperial astronomy or imperial chemistry.'<sup>7</sup> Mackinder's fellow geographer, Lionel Lyde (1863-1947), was less critical, thinking only that Mackinder 'might especially have emphasised the supreme value here of the right teaching of geography, because we are an imperial democracy. His belief was that it was the sea which bred democracy, and that, whatever our personal views might be, we were at heart essentially democrats because we were islanders.'<sup>8</sup> Mackinder replied to Holman that 'he did not identify "Imperial" with the word "Imperialist." His object was

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<sup>4</sup> Halford Mackinder, 'The teaching of Geography from an imperial point of view, and the use which could and should be made of visual instruction,' in 'Report of the Imperial Education Conference, 1911,' *British Parliamentary Papers* 1911 [Cd. 5666] xviii.1, pp.52-57, p.56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>7</sup> 'Summary of the discussion,' in 'Report of the Imperial Education Conference, 1911,' *British Parliamentary Papers* 1911 [Cd. 5666] xviii.1, pp.65-76, p.74.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

not to propagate any particular view of the Empire, but to render possible a real and level conception of the Empire according to any theory [...].<sup>9</sup>

With British schoolchildren in mind, Mackinder's intention was to 'equip the young citizen of a free country, which is also one of the Great Powers of the globe, with a knowledge of the chief contrasts of the political and commercial world.'<sup>10</sup> In his textbook on global physical geography, the contrast between land and sea power was developed through a set of chapters on the land of the shipmen on one hand and the lands of the camelmen and the horsemen on the other. Looking at Eurasia, Mackinder described sa 'long belt of civilized lands besides the ocean shores.'<sup>11</sup> In contrast the interior of Eurasia was characterized by 'difficulty of access' and 'sterility,' and as a consequence 'such people as had their home in these parts were very much detached from the civilized world.'<sup>12</sup> Mackinder identified these drylands as the home of the camelmen and the steppelands to the north as the home of the horsemen. The western end of this region includes European Russia and the lowlands to the south that reach down to the border of Iran, 'the widest lowland in the world, as large as all Europe.'<sup>13</sup> Historically, the steppes, according to Mackinder, were suited only to pastoralism and in these regions a culture developed resting upon '[r]iding in great hordes, eating up the pasture of a region and then pushing forward to new pastures, like a flock of locusts stripping the country,' and even moving beyond their own ecumene 'to fall upon the dispersed communities of the desert oases, or at times, [...] to attack and conquer the agricultural communities of Europe, Iran, India, or China.'<sup>14</sup> In India and China, in order to resist the raids, 'agricultural peoples' found it 'necessary to separate a special class or caste of soldiers, and such professional soldiers became the instruments of despotic rulers.'<sup>15</sup> These raids forced the peoples of Europe to band

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.74-5.

<sup>10</sup> Mackinder, *The Nations of the Modern World: An Elementary Study in Geography* fourth edition (London: George Philip and Son, 1915 [1911]), p.v.

<sup>11</sup> Mackinder, *Distant Lands: An Elementary Study in Geography* fifth edition (London: George Philip and Son, 1913 [1910]), p.73.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.72-3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.91.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.93.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp.101-2.

together against the horsemen, '[s]o in history again and again have the hammer blows of war welded alien peoples together' and it was, suggested Mackinder, raids of this kind that probably 'disturbed the heathen German tribes in their forest settlements, and driving them forward caused some, Angles and Saxons, to take their boats and to find new homes on the shores of Britain.'<sup>16</sup>

But in taking to their boats, these peoples, according to Mackinder, introduced a new type of civilization, '[o]ne other type of man [...] whose way of life tends to freedom and enterprise.'<sup>17</sup> The sea, he assured his young readers, is a 'wider' plain than the steppe or desert, waves are 'more unruly than the horse or the camel,' and to face rocks and tempest requires more courage than when confronting wild beasts and sandstorms, '[s]o the man who goes down to the great sea has become in the end master of the world.'<sup>18</sup> The shipmen began at the 'shores of Europe' but whereas the mild Mediterranean 'was for mere children in sea craft,' the real shipmen developed 'on the stormy western and northern coasts of Europe.'<sup>19</sup>

For Mackinder, then, the facts of physical geography shaped the world into the lands of the nomadic raiders and those of the despotic states that had developed in order to resist them. He suggested that there was one exception to this, and that was those lucky societies where the adventure of the sea drew them away from competition with land power so that they might instead prosper through commerce and exploration. The most fortunate of these sea powers was the one whose island position afforded it the greatest protection from continental entanglements. Indeed, the first of Mackinder's school textbooks, addressed to the British schoolchild, was about *Our Own Islands* and it began by asking his young charges to reflect upon the many ways 'our island home is fortunate,' chief among which was the protection offered by its encircling seas that had given its peoples 'the great blessings of peace and freedom at home.'<sup>20</sup> In what was intended at the time of its publication, to be the last book in his series for schoolchildren, *The Nations of the Modern World*, Mackinder took this rather static picture of political geography

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.102-3.

<sup>20</sup> Mackinder, *Our Own Islands: An Elementary Study in Geography, Part I* fourth edition (London: George Philip and Son, 1910 [1906]), pp.5, 3.

as based upon the facts of physical geography and he animated it with what he saw as the dynamic forces of his day. He was consciously addressing the context in which Europe was drifting towards war and it led him to explicate a particular reading of the risks posed by the heartland. Within Europe, Mackinder saw essentially two forces at work. The first was the diffusion of democratic ideas from the west, and the second was the gradual implosion of the despotic empires (Turkish, Austrian, and Russian) in the east. The empires acted to restrain the emergence of independent democratic states thus in the middle of the nineteenth century, while Germany and Italy, animated by democratic ideas 'from the west, from England and France,' tried to establish freedom after the revolutions of 1848, yet their leaders 'lacked practical experience' and were unable to organize their states 'to meet with adequate force the despotism of the Eastern Powers,' and thus Russia and Austria choked off these early democratic experiments.<sup>21</sup>

Mackinder described nineteenth-century British foreign policy as dictated by the twin concerns of preventing France or Russia dominating Europe and he was clear that it was 'British sea power' that kept Russia from 'her main object, the control of Constantinople.'<sup>22</sup> By keeping Russia out of the Mediterranean with the Crimean War of 1854-6, Britain had 'secured out passage through the Mediterranean to Egypt' and once the Suez Canal was cut, this also meant that Britain had secured its access through the Mediterranean to India.<sup>23</sup> The situation for Britain could deteriorate and on the eve of First World War, Mackinder told his young readers that the 'most wonderful change has now been effected in Russia by the construction of railways.'<sup>24</sup> The new railways opened up and integrated a resource base of global significance. The 'Trans-Siberian Railway crosses vast open Steppes, similar to the prairies of North America, and as capable of rich cultivation of wheat.'<sup>25</sup> From 1877 Russia constructed a railway system from the Caspian Sea eastwards through Turkmenistan and then into Uzbekistan reaching Samarqand by 1888. At this stage, George Curzon (1859-1925) travelled on the new line and concluded that even these early stages of the railway allowed 'the absolute and final russification of the middle zone of

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<sup>21</sup> Mackinder, *Nations of the Modern World*, p.104.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.219.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221.

Central Asia.’<sup>26</sup> It also enabled Russia to bring main force against the border of Afghanistan and thus exert military pressure upon India and Great Britain. Given that Russia was also ‘the sworn and open enemy of British trade’ the colonial policy of Russia in Central Asia would deny Britain markets and resources.<sup>27</sup>

By 1906 this Central Asian Railway had been extended through Tashkent and to connect with the Trans-Siberian railway at Orenburg. In addition to the strategic benefits of projecting Russian power into Central Asia, Mackinder suggested that the railway ‘made available [in](#) Moscow and its neighbourhood the supplies of raw cotton grown in the oases of Khiva and Bokhara.’<sup>28</sup> To which, thanks to the intersecting railways, could be added the wheat from the steppes, the ‘coal under the Russian plain south of Moscow, and also in Poland,[... the g]old and other metals [...] in the Ural Mountains and in the Altai Mountains of Asia[, ...] [p]etroleum in almost unlimited quantities [from ...] beyond the Caucasus Range at Baku, [and ...] vast forests for the supply of timber in the north [...]’. Thus Russia contains within her own empire all the resources and raw materials for industrial progress.’<sup>29</sup>

The lesson was clearly set down. Central Asia added much to Russia’s industrial and strategic capacity. Russia’s interest in the region was colonial, as expressed in its railway policy, and the inevitable consequence of its colonial adventure would be to weaken the British Empire. As Mackinder summarised the position on the eve of the First World War, Russia was a ‘giant imprisoned, not merely [by](#) ignorance but also in a geographical sense,’ because ‘[s]he has no access to open warm waters.’ Any modernization of the Russian state if accompanied by ambitions towards the Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean would, at least for Mackinder, [be-signalsignal](#) that the landed bear had gathered its strength, had gathered up the resources of Central Asia, and was [now](#) preparing to put to sea against the whales of global sea power. In this context, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 [posed-presented](#) a [threat-danger](#) best nipped in the bud even if this meant Britain intervening in the internal affairs of a foreign state, even if this meant using British power colonially against a country that posed no immediate threat. The geographical logic was implacable.

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<sup>26</sup> George Curzon, ‘The Transcaspian Railway,’ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 11:5 (1889), pp.273-95, p.291.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>28</sup> Mackinder, *Nations of the Modern World*, p.221.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.221-3.

### *Colonial interests in the Heartland*

The rise of Bolshevik power refocussed much British strategic thinking on the importance of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Siberia. After-~~With~~ the revolution of October 1917, the Russian Empire imploded and in February 1918 the formerly Russian territories of Eastern Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia seceded as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic, although by May they had separated from each other as separate republics. Russia also lost territory to Germany for Lenin determined that the survival of the new Bolshevik government required that Russia withdraw from the First World War and in December 1917 Russia declared an armistice with Germany. By by which in March 1918, with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk March 1918, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been negotiated whereby in return for peace, Russia ceded vast territories to Germany, ~~vast territories and~~ Germany could now redirect troops towards the western front in France. The US Ambassador to Russia, David Rowland Francis (1850-1927), drew the lesson that 'the demoralization of the Russian army by the Bolsheviks [cost] hundreds of thousands of lives of French and British and American soldiers [...].'<sup>30</sup> Within the US State Department, Russia abandoning its allies by leaving the war was among the most important considerations of the anti-Bolsheviks, such as the Russian specialist, Bernard Miles, who urged in a memorandum of January 1918 that 'it seems to me quite impossible to recognize as *de facto* authorities a Government which includes among its extreme views a repudiation of all foreign obligations.'<sup>31</sup> The British pressed anxiously for intervention in Russia. This would be to continue fighting upon the territory of a state that had negotiated its own peace and claimed the right to self-determination. Four sets of reasons were urged: to re-open an Eastern front, to displace the new socialist government in Russia, to control the use of local resources, and to protect the overland route to India.

In January 1918, Alfred Milner (1854-1925) told the other four members of the War Cabinet that there were four hearths of anti-Bolshevik opposition and that while the

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<sup>30</sup> David Rowland Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy, April, 1916-November, 1918*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, p.225.

<sup>31</sup> Eugene P. Trani, 'Woodrow Wilson and the decision to intervene in Russia: a reconsideration', *Journal of Modern History*, 48:3 (1976), pp. 440-461, p. 450.

counter-revolutionaries might be, 'for geographical and other reasons, incapable of forming an effective coalition, they have at least this in common, that they are opposed to the Bolsheviks and are striving, amid the general chaos, to "keep their own end up" and to resist dictation from the temporary holders of power in Petrograd and the North.'<sup>32</sup> The British sent arms to some of these groups, particularly to the remnants of the old Tsarist army fighting under the leadership of Anton Denikin (1872-1947). A British Mission to South Russia was charged with organizing the delivery of this materiel. In addition, a British force was sent into North Russia, to Archangel and Murmansk, to engage the Germans on what was formerly Russian soil in order to prevent, as the War Cabinet's annual report for 1918 put it, the Germans moving east towards the 'vast resources of Western Siberia which were necessary to them if they were to continue the war; and at the same time to threaten the Germans with a revival of fighting on their Eastern Front in order to compel them to transfer troops back again from the West to the East.'<sup>33</sup>

At a Cabinet meeting of June 1918, Milner, speaking as Secretary of State for War to the larger Imperial War Cabinet, regarded 'the Siberian grain stocks as more or less a decisive factor, [as] whoever gets control of them can feed the Russians.'<sup>34</sup> In July 1918 the English director of a copper mine in the Caucasus wrote to British Naval Intelligence after his return to England from Russia, where his mine had been taken over by the Turkish allies of Germany in March. The aim of the Germans and Turks was, [he wrote](#), to drive the Bolsheviks northwards out of the Caucasus and thus secure 'a vast territory, rich in food' together with rich supplies of copper, essential for making munitions, and, although the Bolsheviks had a well organized army, the British could not support them because this new government was 'in favour of, and indeed putting into practice, the confiscation of property.'<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>32</sup> Alfred Milner, 'The new embryo governments in South Russia' (9 Jan. 1918), National Archives, Kew UK, Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/38, G.T. 3275, ff. 297-310, f. 297.

<sup>33</sup> 'The War Cabinet. Report for the Year 1918', CAB 24/94, C.P. 219, ff. 243-427, f. 288(v).

<sup>34</sup> 'Shorthand notes of the nineteenth meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet' (20 Jun. 1918), CAB 23/43, I.W.C. 19, ff. 56-64, f. 61(r).

<sup>35</sup> Rosslyn Wemyss, 'Conditions in Russia. Admiralty memorandum for the War Cabinet' (31 Aug. 1918), CAB 24/61, G.T. 5466, ff. 210-218, ff. 212-213 (quoting James Colquhoun).



mining engineer suggested that the British should occupy Siberia, move a force down from North Russia along the Volga and into the Caucasus, and recognize that they must rely upon British troops alone because the Russian soldier had been demoralized by 'low grade and selfish socialism which he has been taught by the German emissaries and particularly by the Russian Jews,' who indeed 'should be expelled from the country, as they are secret breeders of discontent, besides having a very low standard of morals.'<sup>36</sup>

The Turkish army ejecting the Russians from Baku, an oil port on the Caspian, worried the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (1863-1945), very little since, as he told the War Cabinet, he thought it 'would be better for us for the Turks to hold Baku, as it was not probable they would ever be dangerous to our interests in the East, whilst, on the other hand, Russia, if in the future she became regenerated, might be so.'<sup>37</sup> Others were less sanguine about Turkish and, more pointedly, German interference in the East. The War Cabinet appointed an Eastern Committee, chaired by Curzon, to advise on the war in the East and it reported in July 1918 that German and Turkish 'efforts are directed towards Trans-Caspia and Turkestan, that they are proceeding [...] with a view to disturbing Afghanistan and threatening India.'<sup>38</sup> To reinforce its view the Committee appended a recent telegram on '[s]pheres of control' from Frederic Thesiger (1868-1933), the Viceroy of India, warning of trouble in the 'glacis' of India, posed by the 'Turco-German menace' in the Caspian, which would 'react unfavourably throughout the Middle East, especially on Afghanistan, which is the pivot of the problem.'<sup>39</sup>

These arguments for interventions on Russian territory against Germany and Turkey paid no attention to the neutrality claimed by Russia. Because Russia was unable to expel or resist Germany, it was treated, not as an ex-ally, but, rather, as a new belligerent in the War. Yet, these justifications went far beyond prosecuting the war and evinced an appetite for using the war to develop strategic and material interests for the peace to follow. Again, the interests of the people of Russia and its Caucasian and Central Asian territories barely registered in discussion. These colonial considerations became even more

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., f. 218.

<sup>37</sup> 'Minutes of a meeting of the War Cabinet' (24 June 1918), CAB 23/6, W.C. 435, ff. 190-192, f. 191(v).

<sup>38</sup> 'War Cabinet. Eastern Committee. The war in the east' (5 Jul. 1918), CAB 24/57, E.C. 718, ff. 206-207, f. 206(r).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., f. 207(v).

evident with the armistice of November 1918. In Britain, the case for effectively joining one of the parties in the civil war within Russia was made by Curzon and, most vigorously, by Winston Churchill (1874-1965) who were sustained by advocates from 'military and diplomatic circles which were most keenly conscious of the Russian defection in the war, and from financial and commercial circles which held assets and interests in Russia.'<sup>40</sup> From January 1919, Churchill was Secretary of State for War and under his direction, the British shipped to Denikin a good share of the munitions that the end of the war rendered surplus to current needs, and during much of 1919 the demobilization of the British soldiers stationed in north Russia went as slowly as the threat of mutiny would allow.

Resources continued to be a primary interest. The Cabinet appointed a Petroleum Executive, which looked upon the Russian Civil War as an opportunity to wrest from the Bolsheviks as much as possible of the oilfields of the Caspian Basin. A report of November 1919 noted an agreement between Britain and France giving the latter a quarter share in the oilfields in the area, reserving to the British the remainder, and confirming the British monopoly in the Persian oilfields. This was negotiated in Paris to pre-empt the French coming to any other arrangement that might have rested upon 'American assistance' and thus have reserved to US companies a share of the field.<sup>41</sup> The oil would be drilled and exported in the main by the Anglo-Dutch company, Shell, and an export tax would be imposed which could 'create a credit for Denikin's Government which might be used to pay their debt to the British Government.'<sup>42</sup> In return, then, for surplus munitions, the British would get paid in oil, producing profits for a British company and reducing dependence upon US oil thereby easing the balance of trade deficit with the United States.

The strategic argument about Central Asia's importance as a the-route to India also remained. In a report of October 1919 on the work of the British Mission in South Russia, Henry Holman (1869-1949), the soldier in command, remarked upon Leon Trotsky's 'hankering after Eastern adventures,' and that he was turning Bolshevik attention towards Dagestan and Afghanistan in a strategy 'aimed exclusively at the British

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<sup>40</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923. Volume 3*. London: Macmillan, 1953, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> 'Petroleum Executive. Memorandum for the Cabinet' (11 Nov. 1919), CAB 24/93, C.P. 115, ff. 60-80, f. 63(r).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 71(r).

position in the East. As [Trotsky] has said, the road to London lies through Kabul and Delhi,' and this mischief would, Holman suggested, encourage 'such upheavals in India as may seriously hinder the orderly development of Indian affairs,' so that, in countering the Bolsheviks in South Russia, Denikin was 'now fighting battles on our behalf.'<sup>43</sup>

### *Liberal interests in the Heartland*

These colonialist arguments in favor of intervention were occasionally supplemented by others of a more liberal character. Characterizing communism as tyranny allowed some to align domestic and foreign policies along an anti-socialist axis. Churchill was adamant that Britain could not 'remain indifferent to the general aspect of Bolshevism[, for] Bolshevism is not a policy; it is a disease. It is not a creed; it is a pestilence.'<sup>44</sup> The disease had to be stopped before it spread further and no people could be allowed to choose such a system, any such choice could only ever be a deluded and dangerous one. The existence of Bolshevism in any country was prima facie grounds for intervention to rescue that unhappy people. This case for intervention was set out in *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*, a remarkable piece of propaganda, a government digest of some of the reports it had received from Russia. Few of these reports were independently verified and they were chosen to support the conclusion that the Bolshevik regime was a disgraceful affront to civilized mores and that it must not be allowed to stand. This biased dossier was produced by the War Office under Churchill's direction.

The first set of justifications was international. Self-determination could be set aside because the Bolshevik revolution had consequences, producing unfairness beyond Russia's borders. The head of the British Legation at Christiania (Oslo) wrote to the British Foreign Minister in London that it was 'quite evident' the Bolsheviks were 'in touch with Germans.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed, for some commentators, the whole purpose of the Russian revolution was to serve German ends

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Holman, 'Report on the British Military Mission, South Russia' (8 Oct. 1919), CAB 24/94, C.P. 219, ff. 53-80, ff. 78v-79r.

<sup>44</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Official Report. House of Commons, 5<sup>th</sup> Series [Commons Debates]*, 116 (29 May 1919) col. 1526.

<sup>45</sup> Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay to Arthur Balfour, 19 Aug. 1918, 'Russia. No.1 (1919). A collection of reports on Bolshevism in Russia,' *British Parliamentary Papers 1919* [Cmd. 8] liii. 987, p. 1.

and to help the continued prosecution or renewal of the war between Germany and the Allies. One account, from 'a British chaplain, insisted that atrocities in Russia were 'deliberately incited by [...] secret German Bolshevik agents' so that Austro-German troops re-occupying South Russia would be 'welcomed as deliverers.'<sup>46</sup> Another reverend gentleman, formerly chaplain to some of the British forces in Petrograd (St Petersburg), assured Curzon that the whole of the Russian misadventure was directed by German interests so that out of the economic chaos, Germany could acquire Russian resources at fire-sale prices; could, for example, 'by means of bankruptcies [...] get [Russian enterprises] into German hands.'<sup>47</sup> The Russian revolution, then, was directed by Germany for its own ends and thus Russia could be considered as a German pawn and as effectively a belligerent in the war from which Lenin claimed to have extracted it. The fact that these reports were circulated in an official government publication lent them further credence and one Member of Parliament told the House of Commons that the truth of these stories was unquestionable because the 'Government vouched for it,' and he at least was sure that it was Germany that was trying to 'organize Russia' and if successful 'through Russia would organize China, and there would be a vast combination infinitely greater than that which we had had to face in the past.'<sup>48</sup>

But the international arguments went beyond equating Russia with Germany, they also included the claim that Russia had made itself an international outlaw by refusing to honor international agreements. Thus the British official in Christiania wrote that the Soviets had broken into the British embassy in Petrograd, a 'gross breach of international law.'<sup>49</sup> Another official advised from Archangel (Arkhangelsk) that 'no Government as at present constituted can safely have dealings with [a] body of persons [the Bolshevik regime] whose object is to overturn [the] interests of Governments, especially those whose broad democratic base makes them most solid, and who have shown that no agreements they make will be allowed to stand in their way.'<sup>50</sup> This was the basis for a sustained

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<sup>46</sup> 'Extract from a Report by a British Chaplain,' Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> Bousfield Lombard to George Curzon, 23 Mar. 1919, Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> Clement Edwards in House of Commons, 9 Apr. 1919, *Times* (10 Apr. 1919) 16c.

<sup>49</sup> Findlay to Balfour, 6 Sep. 1918, 'Bolshevism in Russia,' p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Lindley to Arthur Balfour, 27 Nov. 1918, Ibid., p. 21.

campaign in Parliament and in the press against any formal recognition of the Bolshevik regime, either at the Paris Peace Conference or for the purposes of allowing investment in and trade with Soviet Russia.

Alongside the arguments that Russia was effectively German and that it had no government capable of making honorable treaties, the international effects of the Bolshevik revolution were additional reasons why intervention was justified. The collapse of agriculture in Russia caused by Bolshevik policies imperiled not only Russian lives but also food security in the rest of eastern Europe since so many countries there had hitherto relied upon Russian grain, as the British commercial commissioner in Vladivostok wrote to the Foreign Office: '[t]here will be serious shortage of foodstuffs in Europe so long as the fields are unproductive, or their produce is unable to be exported, as Russia is the principal granary of Europe and supplies all the contiguous States with the bulk of their imported cereals.'<sup>51</sup> For this reason, the official added, the Allies had a clear justification for 'military intervention' to 'restore order and render Russia once more self-supporting' and thus '[i]t seems to be the duty of the Allies, not only to themselves, but to humanity, to restore order in Russia.'<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the Bolsheviks were accused of fomenting revolution overseas. Two British industrialists who had been in Petrograd told officials at the Foreign Office that Germans were 'undoubtedly working hand in hand with Russian Bolsheviks with the idea of spreading Bolshevism ultimately to England, by which time they hope to have got over it themselves, and to be in a position to take advantage of our troubles.'<sup>53</sup> The acting British Vice-Consul at Petrograd reported that it was the intention of the Bolsheviks to advocate nationalization of assets in neighboring countries and thus 'the danger is very great indeed that Bolshevism will spread in those countries [and] [i]n that case it will be impossible to stop the movement which presents a danger to the civilisation of the whole world.'<sup>54</sup> Another British citizen who had fled Petrograd added that exporting revolution was the only way for Russia to degrade the military capacity and political will of the Allies for 'unless [the Bolsheviks] can by propaganda induce a sympathetic revolution in other countries their fate

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<sup>51</sup> Beilby Alston to Balfour, 3 Jan. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> 'Notes on Interviews with Mr. C. and Mr. D., February 13, 1919,' *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> 'Report by Colonel Kimens,' 12 November 1918, *Ibid.*, p. 21.

must be sealed; and the fever of propaganda which now possesses them is really a measure of self-preservation.'<sup>55</sup>

Alongside these arguments that the Bolshevik state violated the norms of intercourse between states, and was thus an outlaw regime, there were other arguments of a more domestic character. In effect, the Russians were accused of holding their own people hostage and of subjecting them to all manner of unnecessary misery. The vassals of the Russian empire were unable to protect themselves from this deadly tyranny. There were two main sets of charges relating, respectively, to economic and civil liberties. Both endangered the physical security of helpless people who, therefore, needed a foreign champion simply in order to survive.

For many British observers, the Bolshevik abolition of private property was at the root of all evil. From Petrograd, one British official reported that:

The expropriation of land has led to a very considerable decrease of crops, the nationalisation of factories to a standstill of industry, the seizure of the banks to a complete cessation of money circulation, and the nationalisation of trade to a deadlock in that branch of the economic life of the country, so that nothing is being produced [...].<sup>56</sup>

From Vladivostok, the High Commissioner insisted that the Bolsheviks were no longer a political party but a 'small privileged class which is able to terrorise the rest of the population because it has a monopoly both of arms and of food supplies.'<sup>57</sup> According to these British observers, the bourgeoisie and opponents of the regime were being systematically starved so that the 'classes who support the [regime ...] consist of the people who are fed and paid by the Bolsheviks, [that is,] the Red Army, and the not less numerous army of paid officials' who themselves 'have also an unlimited opportunity of plundering the peaceful population,' of which they have taken advantage to an extent which was 'simply terrifying.'<sup>58</sup> This reign of terror involved the complete dissolution of civil liberties. Bruce Lockhart (1887-1970), who had been sent by the British government as envoy to the Bolsheviks in January 1918 told his masters in London that by

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<sup>55</sup> 'The Progress of Bolshevism in Russia. Memorandum by Mr. B--,' p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> 'Report by Colonel Kimens,' Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Alston to Curzon, 23 Jan. 1919, Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> 'Report by Mr. G., who left Petrograd in November, 1918,' Ibid., p. 18.

November 1918 the Bolsheviks had 'suppressed [...] every newspaper which does not approve of their policy,' had 'abolished' the 'right of holding public meetings,' had 'abolished even the most primitive forms of justice,' had 'restored the barbarous methods of torture,' and, in short, had 'established a rule of force and oppression unequalled in the history of any autocracy.'<sup>59</sup>

In some places, 'churches have been desecrated and bishops arrested or shot.'<sup>60</sup> Sent to South Russia at the end of 1918, Major-General Frederick Poole sent telegrams back to the War Office, advising that 'commissariats of free love have been established [...] and respectable women flogged for refusing to yield. Decree for nationalization of women has been put in force.'<sup>61</sup> From the Ukraine came intelligence of atrocities against Polish people including cases where people were 'burnt [...] alive,' or 'frightfully tortured before being killed.'<sup>62</sup> In Estonia, after the Bolsheviks had been ejected from some cities, photographs were apparently taken by local officials of bodies in mass graves which 'showed signs of the rage and revenge of the Bolsheviks,' and in one of these it was found that the '[a]s well as being shot, most of the murdered had been pierced with bayonets, the entrails torn out, and the bones of the arm and leg broken.'<sup>63</sup> A consular official in Ekaterinberg was the source for a report that in one case 'Bolsheviks crucified father and sisters of man who served in the national army.'<sup>64</sup>

Only foreign intervention, the British officials argued, could save the Russian people. The British representative to the Ukraine, Picton Bagge (1877-1967), insisted that the 'cardinal condition for saving Russia from famine is maintenance of order in the occupied territory of South Russia.'<sup>65</sup> A British army chaplain claimed that the 'rank and file of the Red Army is full of men who are heartily sick of the present régime, and would gladly join any really strong force sent to the relief of the country.'<sup>66</sup> Another British subject

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<sup>59</sup> R. H. Bruce Lockhart to George Clerk, 10 Nov. 1918, *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> 'Report by Mr. G,' *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Poole to War Office, 11 Jan. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> 'Letter from Madame X,' Cracow, 17 Jan. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> 'Atrocities by the Bolsheviks in Esthonia,' 17 Jan. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Alston to Curzon, 10 Feb. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>65</sup> Bagge to Curzon, 13 Feb. 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Bousefield S. Lombard to Curzon, 23 Mar. 1919, p. 57.

recently returned from Russia assured British officials that '[e]veryone would welcome Allied intervention [and ... not] many troops would be required, as the Red Army is of small account and directly they got there it would go to pieces.'<sup>67</sup> Yet another insisted that the Russian 'people are waiting and hoping for some sort of intervention from England.'<sup>68</sup> While another was sure that '[e]verybody is hoping and praying that the Allies will intervene, and they would be welcomed with open arms everywhere.'<sup>69</sup>

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### *Mackinder's Mission*

This, then, was the context in which, in late October 1919 and with the anti-Bolshevik forces in retreat, Halford Mackinder got his opportunity to convert geopolitical theory into practice. He was to go to South Russia as High Commissioner, organize the opposition to the Bolsheviks and in particular to 'support General Denikin as the only force in South Russia likely to bring about the creation of a stable Russian Government.'<sup>70</sup> When Mackinder received his charge, the conceit at the heart of British policy was that the British 'were not out to destroy a revolutionary Government in Russia' but that large parts of Russia were under the control of parties who had refused Lenin's abdication of the war against Germany and that these parties, as loyal allies during the First World War, ~~sh~~would be aided in their attempts to hold the territory they commanded.<sup>71</sup> One such territory was a stretch of South Russia to the north of Crimea and here the forces under General Denikin confronted the Bolshevik army under Trotsky. ~~I~~but in supporting Denikin against the Bolsheviks, Mackinder was 'to use his best endeavours to restrain' Denikin from pursuing any designs he might have 'on the independence of the newly-formed States in the Caucasus.'<sup>72</sup> The official position, then, appeared to respect the integrity of states and to be purely defensive of former allies who were establishing their own independent states out of the break-up of the Russian Empire. And yet, when Mackinder met with Curzon, the Foreign

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<sup>67</sup> 'Interviews with Returned British subjects,' Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> 'Interviews with Returned British subjects,' Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>69</sup> 'Interviews with Returned British subjects,' Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>70</sup> 'Draft Instructions for Mr. Mackinder,' CAB 24/94 C.P. 225, ff. 88-9, f. 88r.

<sup>71</sup> 'Final Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet,' 4 November 1919, CAB 23/19 C.C. 1/19, pp.1- p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Loc. cit.



Secretary, for one of a series of meetings with ministers in advance of his departure, the prospect of unseating the revolutionary government in Russia was very much on the table and Curzon held out to Mackinder the glorious prospect that he 'should probably enter Moscow beside General Denikin.'<sup>73</sup> The imperialist aim was covert.

There was certainly deceit in the claim that Britain had no intention of overthrowing the revolutionary government in Russia; it had every wish, it simply did not have the means. Its opposition to the revolution in Russia was both to Bolshevism and to any resurgent Russian Empire. In a discussion of the military situation in the Caucasus, Prime Minister David Lloyd George had been nervous of German military authorities retaining residual control over the oil town of Baku. He said he would prefer Turkish control since they might be most likely to keep the Russians out in the medium term and 'it was not probable they would ever be dangerous to our interests in the East, whilst, on the other hand, Russia, if in the future she became regenerated, might be so.'<sup>74</sup> Containing Russia by dividing it into a northern and southern province and by detaching from it as many nations as might bid fair to establish independence was one way to cage the bear. Thus, the integrity of the new Transcaucasian Republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan was dear to the British. Here, again, though, the considerations were basically imperialist. The British had turned over to Denikin the ships of the Russian navy that had been seized in the Black Sea and Denikin was now using these to occupy Baku and to conduct a blockade of Georgia. This did not suit the British because it served effectively to deny Batum and Azerbaijan access to the Mediterranean. These regions were under British control and were held close on account of their petroleum. These oil exports would be largely under British control through an agreement between the British government and the Dutch-British Shell group and in this way would reduce Britain's dependence of oil from the United States.

There were two oil-exporting districts that shipped westwards out of the Black Sea. The first was in the region of Grozny, ~~which was and this lay within the region~~ controlled directly by Denikin. The British were anxious to see oil flow from here since it would help Denikin establish a state on a

<sup>73</sup> Mackinder, 'Autobiographical Fragments,' Mackinder Papers, School of Geography, Oxford University, MP/C/100, f.12.

<sup>74</sup> 'Meeting of the War Cabinet,' 24 June 1918, CAB 23/6 W.C. 435, ff. 190-192, f. 191v.

**Comment [N1]:** This is the first time you've mentioned these new republics. It might be useful to give us more of this context earlier - a single sentence on page 6 or 7, where you introduce power struggles in Russia in the years 1917-19, would suffice.

secure financial basis and these revenues could also repay Denikin's 'debt to the British Government' for the military assistance he had received already.<sup>75</sup> The oil was to be paid for by creating a credit for Denikin in London in pounds sterling. This would naturally allow the region to begin buying what it needs and '[i]mports of every class of manufacture article are urgently required.'<sup>76</sup> If the credits for the petroleum exports were sitting in a London account, then, the needed manufactured imports would very likely come from the same place. The second set of petroleum concerns that shipped through the Black Sea were those around Baku and, once again, the agreement was with the Shell company and once again the company was being invited to agree that 'the export of oil should be utilised as far as possible for the creation of credits [in London] for goods to be exported to Russia.'<sup>77</sup> Shell was unable to conduct this trade without military support because of trouble with the railways. Mackinder was particularly directed to ensure that rolling stock of the Shell company be not 'diverted for other purposes.'<sup>78</sup>

These concerns, to establish amity between all possible members of an anti-Bolshevist alliance and to secure a regular export of oil from the region, were paramount in the discussions about Mackinder's mission but there was one respect in which public opinion demanded that matters relating to human rights be taken up by the British representative. One letter to the London *Times* asserted that '[t]he Jews in Russia are now living through days of terror that are without parallel in history. They are the victims alike of Bolshevist tyranny and anti-Bolsheviks crusades. Not thousands but tens of thousands of innocent Jews [...] have been butchered during the last 18 months.'<sup>79</sup> In the House of Commons, the culpability of Denikin's army was raised directly, with one Member quoting from a 'proclamation distributed by Denikin's forces throughout the towns of Kozlov, Tamboy and Yeletz: "Peasants, arm yourselves and rise against the common enemy of our Russian lands, against the Jew, Bolshevik, and Communists; drive out the diabolical

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<sup>75</sup> 'Petroleum Executive. Memorandum for the Cabinet,' 11 Nov. 1919, CAB 24/93, C.P. 115, ff. 60-80, f. 71.

<sup>76</sup> 'Petroleum Department. Memorandum for the Cabinet,' CAB 24/94, 6 Dec. 1919, C.P. 259, ff. 200-204, f. 202.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 204.

<sup>78</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Israel Cohen, 'Jews and Bolshevism,' *Times*, 25 Nov. 1919, 8c.

power.”<sup>80</sup> Another Member reported that ‘after the evacuation of Kiev by the Bolsheviks, some Cossacks and a corps of the volunteer army perpetrated a pogrom on the Jews in that city, killing some hundreds of Jews in the suburb of Podol alone,’ to which Bonar Law, replied for the Government that ‘His Majesty’s High Commissioner [Mackinder] has been instructed to report fully on alleged pogroms in South Russia.’<sup>81</sup>

As with most foreign policy initiatives, Mackinder’s mission to South Russia thus had multiple purposes and he was asked to address Churchill’s anti-communist agenda, Curzon’s wish to keep Russia away from the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean the better to ensure British access to India, Lloyd George’s hope that trade could be established with parts of the former Russian Empire so that Britain could get its oil and British workers could be employed making goods in return, and, finally, the concerns of some in the House of Commons about atrocities committed by all sides against Jewish people within the former Russian Empire. These aims were explained to him in private meetings with Churchill, Lloyd George and Curzon, and to some extent were spelled out in Curzon’s formal instructions. Mackinder left for Russia on 4 December 1919, and after short stays in Paris, Warsaw, and Bucharest, he went to the Crimea via Constantinople, finally arriving in South Russia, at Novorossisk on New Year’s Day and then travelling to Tikhoretskaya to meet with Denikin on 10 January. He returned south again to Novorossisk the next day and left on 16 January to return to England to consult with the government., reaching Marseilles by 21 January. He had been in Russia about a fortnight and at the front line of the war for two days. The military situation was deteriorating and the British had in any case decided to finish their financial support for Denikin by the end of March so that upon his return to London Mackinder was informed that his mission was over.

Mackinder made two reports upon his mission in which he set out his own case for continued intervention. In the first place, Mackinder repeated his arguments about the significance of the resource basket of South Russia:

Bolshevism is for the moment triumphant. The wheat and coal areas of South Russia are now accessible from Moscow, and Bolshevik tyranny has a new lease of life. That fact alone must encourage all the forces of disorder in the world. Peace with the

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<sup>80</sup> Lieut. Col. Malone, *Commons Debates*, 121 (17 Nov. 1919) col. 733.

<sup>81</sup> John Swan, *Commons Debates*, 122 (11 Dec. 1919) col. 1606.

Soviet at this moment would be universally construed as a decisive victory for Bolshevism.<sup>82</sup>

If these resources were re-taken by Denikin, then, the situation would be swiftly reversed for, then, 'we should obtain what we required [i.e. funds] in the form of wheat, sugar, oil, etc., and [then] in a single season he believed a great deal could be done to re-establish the position.'<sup>83</sup> To this end, Mackinder urged that Denikin's first military advance be made into the Donetz Basin so that he might obtain coal to trade for food with the Kuban Cossacks.

Mackinder also played upon Churchill's theme about the need to stop the spread of communism, saying that 'if some barrier were not opposed to the march of Bolshevism, it would go forward like a prairie fire in Turkey and Central Asia.'<sup>84</sup> He also appealed to Curzon's ever-present anxiety about India deploying the same metaphor to suggest that only by action during the winter, before the thawing of the rivers allowed easier movement could 'the advance of Bolshevism, sweeping forward like a prairie fire, [...] be limited, and kept away from India and Lower Asia.'<sup>85</sup> The Russian revolution menaced the entire world for '[u]nless destroyed at the root the Bolshevik propaganda may be a danger to all civilisation before long. Its centre is a great office at Moscow, in the Kremlin I believe, and it has a trained personnel at its disposal which is as efficient as the general staff of one of the great armies.'<sup>86</sup> Counter-propaganda was needed and the 'truth should be carried home to [the British working classes]. They must be made to realize that, whatever the communistic ideals originally characteristic of Bolshevism, there is to-day a growing threat from Moscow of a state of affairs which will render this world a very unsafe place for democracies.'<sup>87</sup>

Mackinder made very little reference to the atrocities he had been asked to investigate. Indeed he retained many of the bases of anti-Jewish feeling. He speculated that Germany manipulated the Bolsheviks 'probably through Jewish

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<sup>82</sup> 'Report on the Situation in South Russia by Sir H. Mackinder, M.P.,' 21 Jan. 1920, CAB 24/97, C.P. 516, ff. 92-103, f. 95r.

<sup>83</sup> 'Notes of Points, Supplementary to his Memorandum of January 21, 1920, made by Sir Halford Mackinder,' CAB 23/20, Cabinet 6 (20), 29 Jan. 1920, ff. 59-66, f. 64.

<sup>84</sup> 'Notes of Points,' f. 65.

<sup>85</sup> 'Report on the Situation in South Russia,' f. 97r.

<sup>86</sup> 'Report on the Situation in South Russia,' f. 95r.

<sup>87</sup> 'Report on the Situation in South Russia,' f. 97v.

channels.’<sup>88</sup> One of the few specific instances of anti-Semitism that he documented pertained to a ‘bandit leader in the Southern Ukraine’ whose battle cry included ‘kill the Jews for they own the money.’<sup>89</sup> But, while Mackinder advised Denikin to introduce a broadly democratic government in order to win favour with European supporters, he does not appear to have made any attempt to investigate the atrocities against Jewish people or to have made this a matter in his discussions he had with Denikin, at least insofar as he recorded them for Curzon as Foreign Secretary, the person who had specifically given him the charge to make such representations.

### *Imperialism and the Heartland*

In Mackinder’s The Heartland theory the Central Asian and Causasian region was presented primarily as a threatening set of resources. Since it could be the basis for a land-power that could aspire to the status of a global hegemon, the problem for geopolitical strategy was to devise ways to prevent the potential of the Heartland being converted into the reality of World Empire. This meant that political and economic developments in the region were never simply a matter for local people alone. The risk of global reach gave all world powers an interest in the region. Conceptualizing the Heartland as the possible base for a virile imperialism, invited in return imperialistic intervention by those threatened by the prospect. Thus, when Russia left the First World War, the Allies decided that, in self-defence, they had to deny Germany control of the resource basket of South Russia and the Caucasus and so they occupied part of this region themselves. As the Bolshevik government consolidated its hold on Russia, the British identified communism as a threat to Western civilization more generally and in order to contain that danger decided to deny the new Soviet state the use of the resources of South Russia and the Caucasus and so the British funded the White Russian army under Denikin.

Time and again in Mackinder’s textbooks, he described the lands of the Heartland, not as independent societies but as the springboard for a challenge to British interests. By conceptualizing expansionary land power as radically different in character to pacific sea power, Mackinder denied the possibility of peaceful co-existence. He established a presumptive case for repeated interventions to cage the land power. He taught that the choice was between the tyranny of

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Report on the Situation in South Russia,’ f. 94v.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Report on the Situation in South Russia,’ f. 97v.

land power and the freedom of sea power. This was an alibi for an imperialism that could deny its own exploitative ambitions and pose instead [as](#) the defender of freedoms and faiths abroad. The Heartland, in short, has served as an invitation to imperialism.