

2023

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Michael Hochberg
Luminous Computing

Leonard Hochberg
Foreign Policy Research Institute

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Recommended Citation

Hochberg, Michael and Hochberg, Leonard (2023) ““Confining the Enemy”—Halford Mackinder’s Theory of Containment and the Conflict in Ukraine,” *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 76: No. 2, Article 7.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol76/iss2/7>

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"CONFINING THE ENEMY"

Halford Mackinder's Theory of Containment and the Conflict in Ukraine

Michael Hochberg and Leonard Hochberg

In 1946 and 1947, George F. Kennan outlined the psychological and ideological mainsprings of action by the elites of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.¹ Kennan ascribed their "neurotic view of world affairs" to deep-seated geopolitical and cultural circumstances: "Originally, this was insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on [a] vast exposed plain in [a] neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with [the] economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area."²

Kennan coupled this geopolitical insight into the origins of the Russian neurosis with an appreciation of the impact of current events. As the Soviet dictatorship took hold after the communist revolution in Russia, it destroyed capitalist and other forms of independent socioeconomic organizations, leaving the Communist Party with a profound need to justify its continued despotic rule. Stalin, therefore, shifted the capitalist threat that was ever present in Marxist ideology from domestic capitalists to an external, encircling enemy. According to Kennan, "This began at an early date. In 1924 Stalin specifically defended the retention of

the 'organs of suppression,' meaning, among others, the army and the secret police, on the ground that 'as long as there is a capitalist encirclement there will be danger of intervention[,] with all the consequences that flow from that danger.'"³

Given this worldview of unrelenting antagonism between capitalist and communist powers, Kennan believed that the Soviet Union inevitably would

Michael Hochberg, PhD, is a physicist who earned his degrees at the California Institute of Technology. He is president of Luminous Computing.

Leonard Hochberg, PhD, is a retired professor. Currently, he is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and the coordinator of the Mackinder Forum—U.S.

Naval War College Review, Spring 2023, Vol. 76, No. 2

challenge the United States. The threats emanating from the Soviet Union were numerous and varied. He argued that the Soviets soon would seek control over strategically important locations such as “Northern Iran, Turkey, [and] possibly Bornholm,” an island off the coast of Denmark in the Baltic Sea. In addition, the USSR would attempt to “stimulate” the “resentment” of colonial peoples as they secured their independence from Western powers: “Soviet dominated puppet political machines will be undergoing preparation to take over domestic power.”⁴ To meet these international challenges posed by the Soviet Union, Kennan insisted that

the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. . . .

. . . Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence.⁵

The U.S. policy of containment directed at the Soviet Union emerged from Kennan’s remarks.⁶

Before Kennan outlined his vision of containment, which was merely reactive to Soviet military and political adventures, Sir Halford John Mackinder articulated a vision of maritime geostrategic logic that prioritized some geographic locations over others. Although Kennan usually is credited with having articulated first the idea of “containment,” Mackinder should be acknowledged as having advanced an understanding of containment grounded in a geopolitical theory.⁷ Mackinder is an authoritative author whose theory of the Eurasian “heartland” is found in his major book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (1919), and two other important articles (1904 and 1943).⁸ His theory of containment does not rest primarily on the psychology of elites or the ideology of a transitory regime but rather stands on the enduring significance of the territory that the tsarist and Soviet states occupied and the Russian state now does.⁹

The purpose of this article is not merely to recapitulate Mackinder’s understanding of containment, as important as that enterprise may be in the realm of intellectual history. Instead, because Mackinder’s writings have been marshaled to assess the current U.S. commitment to Ukraine, it is of paramount importance to appreciate how his theory applies to the current crisis.¹⁰ For instance, an insightful commentator on geopolitics, Francis P. Sempa, recently claimed that Mackinder would have advised our government not to intervene in Ukraine.¹¹ Sempa’s argument boils down to the fact that Mackinder admired imperial German statesman Otto von Bismarck for engaging in three successful wars against Denmark, Austro-Hungary, and France and then unifying Germany. Bismarck

then managed to avoid any further European wars by maintaining a balance of power. Bismarck supported noninvolvement in wars fought in remote lands where one's national interest was involved marginally at best, and Mackinder, Sempa alleges, would make the same recommendation.

Despite changing circumstances over the past century, Mackinder is read and reread precisely because *Democratic Ideals and Reality* explained the development of two distinct geostrategic logics—those of territorial and of maritime powers—and how acting according to the precepts of those competing logics may result in conflict.¹² Although Mackinder rarely mentions Ukraine in his published work, the focus of his 1920 "Report . . . on the Situation in South Russia" is extremely relevant.¹³ Mackinder, who deserves to be appreciated as an early anti-communist author and politician, served as the British high commissioner to the anti-Bolshevik forces located in Ukrainian territory. His report summarized his findings and recommendations, which are an elaboration of his geostrategic logic relative to the Ukrainian situation in 1920. This article highlights Mackinder's containment theory and demonstrates how he provides a useful geostrategic assessment of the 2022–23 Ukraine crisis.

MACKINDER'S THEORY OF CONTAINMENT

The Geographic Pivot

In 1904, Mackinder presented his major scholarly work, "The Geographical Pivot of History." It focused on the vast, inland Eurasian plain—the *geographic pivot*—stretching north from the Tibetan highlands to the icebound, frozen wastes of the Far North and from the Mongolian highlands to just east of the Black Sea. Rivers there flowed into inland seas or north to the Arctic waste, thereby insulating Russia—the state occupying the pivot—from naval power.¹⁴ This region, according to Mackinder, was newly organized and undergoing a major transformation—one that probably would result in the emergence of a major, modern land power. Tsarist Russia had just completed the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway—an infrastructure project that was expected to accelerate the growth of three things: first, newly tilled land would be accessible for raising foodstuffs; second, the population would increase; and third, new and significant natural resources would be discovered and exploited. Even though the Trans-Siberian Railway had serious deficiencies—initially, it was a one-track line—it nonetheless permitted interior lines of communication and transportation from which armies could move between Russia's European provinces and its Pacific territories and along all points in between, thereby applying pressure to the states arrayed along the Eurasian littoral.¹⁵

Mackinder feared that a land power occupying the geographic pivot one day might conquer an oceanic coastline and threaten Great Britain, which was the

foremost naval power of the time. In a prescient passage, he presented the essence of his maritime geostrategic perspective:

The oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal [i.e., coastal] lands of Euro-Asia, would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight. This might happen if Germany were to ally herself with Russia. The threat of such an event should, therefore, throw France into alliance with the over-sea powers, and France, Italy, Egypt, India, and Corea [*sic*] would become so many bridge heads where the outside navies would support armies to compel the pivot allies to deploy land forces and prevent them from concentrating their whole strength on fleets.¹⁶

Notice Mackinder's use of *bridgeheads*. This is a medieval military term that means more than a mere foothold or a beachhead; rather, it implies the construction of fortification on a strategic location at the far side of a river or waterway from which a defense or an offensive campaign might be mounted. The likely alliance between the foremost maritime power and such onshore bridgeheads became the core of Mackinder's notion of containment.

Mackinder's Heartland and Strategic Geography

Mackinder wrote *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919) in the aftermath of World War I. He used it to elaborate further his concept of the *geographic pivot*. He highlighted the fact that war on the eastern front between imperial Germany and tsarist Russia had created a strategic extension of the geographic pivot to the Baltic and Black Seas and the lands along their respective coastlines. According to Mackinder, two cities on the European continent were critical to projecting maritime power onto the heartland: Copenhagen and Constantinople.

The Islanders of the world cannot be indifferent to the fate either of Copenhagen or of Constantinople . . . for a great Power in the Heartland and East Europe could prepare, within the Baltic and Black Seas, for War on the Ocean. During the present War it has taken the whole naval strength of the Allies to hold the North Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. An adequate submarine campaign, based on the Black Sea from the beginning of the War, would probably have given security to an army operating overland against the Suez Canal.¹⁷

Mackinder termed this redefined and enlarged pivot area—which included the Baltic and Black Seas—the Eurasian *heartland*.¹⁸

In *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Mackinder mapped in greater detail the extent of the Black Sea littoral on the basis of its control by a territorial power, such as Russia, versus the boundaries of the heartland on the basis of access to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean by a naval power, such as Great Britain. According to Mackinder, the outcome of a heartland extending to the Baltic and Black Seas was possible as a result of what just had occurred: “When the

Dardanelles are closed by land-power to the sea-power of the Mediterranean, as they have been in the Great War [1914–18], that condition of things is in effect realised so far as human movements are concerned.”¹⁹ Thus, when the Ottoman Empire closed the straits to the Black Sea, the Black Sea littoral and potentially the Danube River basin were at risk of falling prey to a territorial power. Russian policy makers long have sought control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and if those straits ever are conquered the heartland power could extend its influence over the entire Black Sea basin.

Mackinder sought to indicate how the European balance of power—in his mind, a necessity for the preservation of peace—might be reestablished by the delegates at the Versailles Peace Conference. Submerged non-German ethnic groups in the territories of imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire would receive sovereign status. Mackinder stipulated that this “tier” of new European states falling between the basins of the Baltic and Black Seas should have sufficiently educated, wealthy, numerous, and unified populations to maintain their security. He recommended statehood for “the Poles, the Bohemians (Czechs and Slovaks), the Hungarians (Magyars), the South Slavs (Serbians, Croatians, and Slovenes), the Rumanians [*sic*], the Bulgarians, and the Greeks.” An accompanying map, titled “The Middle Tier of States between Germany and Russia,” suggested borders for two Baltic states, Estonia and Latvia, and called attention to the presence of Ukraine.²⁰ However, he did not specify a border for Ukraine, thus rendering its status ambiguous. Mackinder’s goal was not merely to separate the Germans from the Russians but also to curb German power while limiting, for as long as possible, the interference of the heartland power (i.e., the Soviet Union) in Europe. To achieve this goal, Mackinder recommended that these newly independent states enter an alliance with the Western maritime powers, thereby restoring the European balance of power.

Mackinder's Sojourn in Ukraine and Its Aftermath

Mackinder’s effort to contain the Soviet Union was not limited to mere intellectual exercises. After the publication of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, he was appointed late in November 1919 the British high commissioner to South Russia, where an anti-Bolshevik (“White”) Russian force was based.²¹ In a letter from Foreign Secretary Earl Curzon appointing him, Mackinder was reminded that the situation there was “a notoriously complex, and temporarily insoluble, problem.” Specifically, in Curzon’s assessment of the armed conflict between the Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik forces, “there is . . . no reason to conclude that the wheel of fortune has finally turned in favour of the Bolshevik armies and against their opponents.” However, Mackinder also was informed that “you will have, in all probability, to deal on arrival with a receding force.” In the midst of this uncertainty, Mackinder was charged with an unenviable task: “to elucidate [the

reasons] more fully” why the supply of British war material for the anti-Bolshevik forces would end on 31 March 1920. After that date, Britain was prepared to provide only advice and moral and political support. Finally, he was apprised that—although the British government had not formulated a definitive policy toward the newly founded states carved out of the territory of tsarist Russia—the desire of these communities for “a separate national existence” should be met, provided such independence was in accord with a final peace settlement.²²

Before Mackinder arrived, the anti-Bolshevik forces led by General Anton Ivanovich Denikin managed to advance to within approximately 250 miles of Moscow, but by the time Mackinder reached Crimea to discuss Britain’s interest in the civil war Denikin’s armies had been defeated and forced to retreat south.²³ After returning to Britain from his sojourn in Ukraine, Mackinder briefed Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the cabinet on 29 January 1920.²⁴ In his formal report, Mackinder offered several recommendations for bolstering the finances and administration of the anti-Bolshevik war effort. Those proposals, which largely fall beyond the scope of this essay, sought to bolster the anti-Bolshevik forces without a further British commitment of finances or war materials.

Of paramount importance here are Mackinder’s geostrategic and geopolitical recommendations. According to Mackinder’s report,

[Denikin’s military forces] hope . . . to preserve as a base for future action a row of three relatively small territories, which they are seeking to defend by a war of position, namely: (1) the peninsula east of the Strait of Yenikali [i.e., Yenikale, the Kerch Strait], including the important port of Novorossisk, with a wide and fertile glaciis in the Cossack country east of the Sea of Azov; (2) the peninsula of the Crimea south of the Isthmus of Perikop; and (3) the city and district of Odessa. Naturally, the question arises whether the Government of such a relatively small group of territories is worth supporting.²⁵

In geostrategic terms, Mackinder insisted that “[t]he first military movement forward [by anti-Bolshevik forces] should be limited to an advance from the Odessa–Perikop direction to a line which would include the Donetz Basin. The wheat country which feeds Odessa would be recovered and . . . the coal of the Donetz Basin. If supplied with manufactured articles[,] the Kuban would in the meantime probably feed the whole area—Novorossisk, Crimea and Odessa.”²⁶ The geography of this region deserves further elaboration. The Strait of Yenikale (or the Kerch Strait) connects the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea.²⁷ The Isthmus of Perikop (or Perekop) is the narrow neck of land connecting the Crimean Peninsula to the rest of Ukraine. Odessa and Novorossisk (or Novorossiysk) are ports; the former is on the coast, to the west of Crimea, and the latter is on the northeastern coast of the Black Sea, situated not far from the Strait of Yenikale and the Kuban River region.

Mackinder coupled this geostrategic proposal with the belief that merely seizing territory from the Bolsheviks was insufficient. The militia needed to be

reorganized into a standard military. In addition, a formal administration needed to follow each military advance to consolidate areas won, impose order, and encourage the resumption of economic exchange. He noted that "[t]he exchange of goods has been so paralysed that the peasant will willingly sell neither grain for human food nor horses for the cavalry, and this Russian warfare is largely a matter of food and cavalry." Mackinder's goal was to "establish a contrast on the two sides of the defensive line, a contrast as it were between Heaven and Hell."²⁸ By emphasizing the sequencing of anti-Bolshevik military advance inland from the Baltic Sea coastline and the subsequent imposition of local and regional good governance, Mackinder was articulating a policy that today would be understood as counterinsurgency.

In making these geostrategic recommendations, Mackinder was bringing his maritime perspective on the Black Sea (as outlined in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*) to bear on the situation in southern Russia. His recommendation was tantamount to bolstering the White Russian regime along the Ukrainian coastline in locations where sea power—entering the Black Sea from the Mediterranean—could provide "naval and technical" support for the armed forces commanded by General Denikin. He highlighted the reasons for his support of the White Russians: "I must draw attention to the fact that Sevastopol in the hands of the Bolsheviks would, to say the least, be very inconvenient to us as a sea power in the Black Sea."²⁹

Geopolitically, Mackinder also had a plan. Despite raising grave concerns about the possibility of communist revolutions in Transcaucasia, the loyalty of the Cossacks, and the overall effectiveness and leadership of the anti-Bolshevik cause, he urged the creation of a "Polish-Denikin League of Governments." To facilitate the creation of this anti-Bolshevik alliance among the borderlands of the Soviet Union, Mackinder secured a key territorial concession from General Denikin: the newly independent state of Poland's "eastern frontier shall be determined on ethnographical grounds." In discussions with Mackinder, Denikin had been adamant that such concessions would prejudice the formation of a unified Russia once the Bolsheviks were defeated. Yet, without this concession regarding the unification of the Polish irredenta with the Polish state, no alliance was possible. Furthermore, Mackinder believed that several new states should be brought into the Polish-Denikinite alliance: "The Baltic provinces, Georgia and Azerbaijan," with Armenia and Daghestan also as possible members.³⁰

Mackinder wanted to establish a cordon sanitaire of secondary powers around the Russian cultural core that had fallen to the Bolsheviks. The Baltic States and Poland along the Baltic Sea formed the northern bulwark against the expansion of the Soviet Union—the post-World War I heartland power. The combination of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine's coast with the Donetz (or Donets) Basin, the

Kuban region on the far side of the Sea of Azov, and Georgia along the Black Sea formed the southern bulwark. Insofar as a proposed alliance with Poland and the Baltic States might lead to coordinated campaigns against the Bolsheviks, that alliance might enable General Denikin to expand his bridgehead in Ukraine and once again threaten the Soviet regime from the south. For Mackinder, the three remaining Transcaucasia states—Daghestan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia—were an additional insurance policy, presumably to keep Soviet power at a distance from British interests in post–World War I northern Persia. In Mackinder’s understanding, these powers were “essential links in the chain confining the enemy.”³¹

Had his plan been implemented fully and had it succeeded, a geopolitical alliance stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea would have opposed further Soviet expansion westward and provided a springboard from which—in Mackinder’s memorable phrase—the “new Russian Czardom of the proletariat” might have been swept into the dustbin of history.³² However, the Bolsheviks deployed brutal tactics to dominate disaffected local populations and thus defeat their opponents. They proceeded to conquer Ukraine and the Transcaucasia republics, incorporating their territory into the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, British prime minister Lloyd George and his cabinet were hard-pressed by war weariness and the expense of the Great War, and so they rejected Mackinder’s proposal. Soon thereafter, Mackinder resigned his commission.³³

Mackinder’s Final Thoughts on Maritime Power and the Heartland

Despite this setback, Mackinder never abandoned his commitment to containing the power that occupied the Eurasian heartland. In his book written for a popular audience, *The World War and After* (1924), Mackinder advanced a counterfactual analysis that suggested the geopolitical consequence of a victory by imperial Germany in Western Europe: “Had the Eastern Empires succeeded in crushing the free peoples of Western Europe, a naval rivalry on the ocean between Imperial Europe and Republican America would have been inevitable. . . . The victory of the oceanic nations has brought it about that the line between east and west, between the continental and the oceanic nations, runs to-day along the Rhine and not through [the] Mid-Atlantic.”³⁴

He also noted that, as of the early 1920s, Western Europe and the eastern United States were “physical complements to one another,” with approximately 90 percent of the world’s coal mined in these two regions bordering on the North Atlantic and approximately 90 percent of the world’s steel produced there as well. Maritime travel, transport, and undersea communications already tied the two regions together. He then claimed that “Western Europe and North America now constitute for many purposes a single community of nations. That fact was first fully revealed when American and Canadian armies crossed the Atlantic to

fight in France during the Great War."³⁵ The importance of these economic and cultural changes for geopolitical developments could not be overestimated.

Given the emergence of the North Atlantic community of nations, Mackinder, in his final essay, addressed how this community should defend itself. What should be the geostrategic principle for North Atlantic defense, and against which power? In "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," published in 1943, Mackinder recapitulated his arguments about the nature of the Eurasian heartland that Germany once again, almost, had conquered. Although he did not envision an end to the alliance of Western powers with the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II, he did recognize the danger that the Soviet Union, as the post-World War II occupant of the heartland, presented: "All things considered, the conclusion is unavoidable that if the Soviet Union emerges from this war [i.e., World War II] as conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land Power on the globe. Moreover, she will be the Power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth."³⁶

To meet the dangers of the post-World War II era, Mackinder argued for a "Grand Strategy" that relied geographically on what he called the Midland Ocean of North Atlantic powers. This alliance would rest on the following: "a bridgehead in France, a moated aerodrome in Britain, and a reserve of trained manpower, agriculture and industries in the eastern United States and Canada. So far as war-potential goes, both the United States and Canada are Atlantic countries, and since instant land-warfare is in view, both the bridgehead and the moated aerodrome are essential to amphibious power."³⁷

Britain, as Mackinder must have realized, was no longer the dominant maritime power. Instead, its role in a North Atlantic alliance was characterized as that of an aerodrome, or a stationary aircraft carrier, off the European coast. France was to be the bridgehead—a spatial function that was reestablished on D-day with the Allied Expeditionary Force landing at Normandy—and Canada and the United States together were to be a strategic reserve of resources, agricultural and industrial production, and population. Curiously, Mackinder, within four years of his death, did not identify the United States explicitly—in this final essay on the heartland thesis—as the power that had assumed the thalassocratic responsibility for keeping the sea-lanes open and for containing the power occupying the heartland.³⁸

Bridgeheads and Confining the Enemy

Mackinder's geostrategic logic informed his lifelong commitment to containing the extent of the control of powers that occupied the Eurasian heartland. Whether it was tsarist Russia, imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union,

he feared that as the heartland was organized and exploited more effectively, an occupying power eventually would secure the necessary resources, experience a decisive growth in population, and gain the resultant strength to alter the balance of power in its favor. In his 1904 essay, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” he highlighted how the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway began this process. The prospect that the heartland power would mobilize its resources to build a large enough fleet to threaten the dominant maritime power—which during most of his lifetime was Great Britain—amplified his concern. How to disrupt or forestall that possibility informed his geostrategic analyses.

Mackinder recommended (in “The Geographical Pivot”) that Britain form alliances with a number of countries encircling the Eurasian heartland—that is, bridgeheads. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, when it appeared that the entire European world might undergo reconstruction, Mackinder called (in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*) for an alliance along a line of newly independent Eastern European states with the Western European maritime powers. These new states—anchored along the Baltic and the Black Seas—would serve to limit Germany’s power and keep the Soviet Union from exercising a deleterious influence in Europe. During World War II—when Mackinder remained worried about a postwar German resurgence—he conceptualized a North Atlantic alliance in which the power of the North American states was mobilized on behalf of Western European maritime powers, with Great Britain functioning as an offshore aircraft carrier and France as the European bridgehead. The details of establishing onshore bridgeheads to distract the power occupying the heartland or establishing forward positioning to confine a heartland power to its territorial base depended on the geopolitical circumstances of the moment.

In his 1920 “Report . . . on the Situation in South Russia,” Mackinder directly addressed the importance of geostrategy. His report was not entitled “General Denikin’s Situation,” although he addressed the issue of the anti-Bolshevik leadership. Given the sensitivity of the demands for national autonomy by the ethnic groups living along the Russian periphery, his report was not entitled “The Ukrainian Situation.” In fact, Curzon, in his appointment letter to Mackinder, noted a significant feature of the emergence of Ukrainian national sentiment amid the civil war and the associated popular support for the rival Ukrainian government that was competing with Denikin’s: “It is generally believed that the so-called Ukrainian Government does not command much popular support, a conclusion which is borne out by the rapid success of the volunteer army in the territory which the Ukrainians claimed as strongly Nationalist. General Denikin has therefore always treated the Ukrainian Government as hostile to United Russia.”³⁹

Denikin, the Russian nationalist, opposed all demands for national autonomy—including, presumably, Ukrainian demands—and Mackinder recognized

this constraint. Accordingly, Mackinder offered the following assessment in his report: "There might also result, I would point out incidentally, something in the nature of a Federal System, since the part of Russia first reorganised would coincide with the Ukraine, in the large sense, and the Cossack territory. But such federal projects should not be spoken of publicly in England. They will be realised, I think, but at present they merely tend to divide Denikin's supporters."⁴⁰ Therefore, Mackinder chose in the title to highlight "South Russia" as a Black Sea bridgehead.

He emphasized that an alliance in southern Russia among General Denikin, Poland, the Baltic countries, and potentially the other newly independent Eastern European and Transcaucasia states might lead ultimately to a defeat of the Bolsheviks. He insisted that, until then, this alliance would create an essential territorial chain to confine the Soviet Union—the power then threatening to establish an uncontested occupation of the Eurasian heartland. In the meantime, Denikin might be able to reconquer the industrial Donbas region, thereby keeping the Bolsheviks at a distance from the Black Sea littoral.

A MACKINDERITE ANALYSIS OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS

Were Mackinder alive today, what policy recommendations would he make to NATO and the United States regarding the war between Russia and Ukraine? Such questions cannot be answered with any degree of precision. Why? In the immediate aftermath of World War I, Mackinder insisted that the fluidity of circumstances allowed for international reconstruction, as the subtitle of his 1919 book (*A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*) suggests. As high commissioner to South Russia, Mackinder attempted to address the question he raised at the beginning of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: "Is it possible for us so to grade the stream bed of future history as that there shall be no more cataracts?"⁴¹ The subsequent White Russian military failures, coupled with British financial and political exhaustion, nullified Mackinder's attempts to advance a geographically informed containment policy.

In today's crisis, Mackinder probably would make two points suggesting caution. First, he would indicate that the moment for a decisive intervention in Russian affairs and in its near abroad passed long ago. Russia is—to use an expression that Mackinder deployed frequently—"a going concern"; the term suggests that the Russian Federation has "social momentum," or directionality of purpose and acceleration in reaching that goal.⁴² President Vladimir V. Putin seeks to restore Russian imperial greatness by reincorporating breakaway territories in a Eurasian Union.⁴³ In advance of Putin's recent attack on Ukraine, nothing short of direct NATO involvement with troops on the ground or a massive infusion of advanced weaponry coupled with appropriate training might have deterred Russia from invading Ukraine. Second, because Mackinder was acutely aware

of how new technologies transform geopolitics and geostrategy, he might have recommended prudence, given Putin's repeated threat to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine and NATO powers. If Ukraine, backed by NATO (including U.S.) weaponry, should threaten to expel Russia from Ukrainian territory, Putin might calculate that using tactical nuclear weapons to destroy Ukraine's economy and society completely would be preferable to the domestic political consequences likely to follow a military defeat.⁴⁴ Given Mackinder's concern for changed military technology and his awareness of "social momentum," he probably would regard Western calls for regime change in Moscow as extremely provocative and dangerous.

Even if policy recommendations cannot be inferred from his writings with a high degree of certainty, a Mackinderite analysis of the current conflict seems possible on the basis of his geostrategic logic. In fact, Mackinder believed that his geographic analysis provided a transhistorical method to assess changes in the balance of power. "The actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on 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. . . . And the geographical quantities in the calculation are more measurable and more nearly constant than the human. Hence[,] we should expect to find our formula apply equally to past history and to present politics."⁴⁵

He summarized this point by stating, "My aim is not to predict a great future for this or that country, but to make a geographical formula into which you could fit any political balance."⁴⁶ The political occupant of the heartland may change—it is an ephemeral factor—but the geography as a determinant of the balance of power is more enduring. It is in the spirit of these remarks that the following Mackinderite analysis of the current Ukrainian crisis is presented.

In the current situation, a Mackinderite assessment would highlight how President Putin is implementing the territorial geostrategic logic from his particular heartland perspective. Territorial powers generally seek to make neighboring states either clients or buffers that could slow down and perhaps stall a conventional enemy attack before it reached the heartland power's cultural and demographic core area. With the formation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955, the Soviet Union formalized its relationship with several conquered satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1991, the Soviet Union imploded, and Russia lost its status as a great power. The Warsaw Pact countries embarked on destinies independent of that of the Soviet Union, and the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine secured independence. Without control of Ukraine, Russia remains a secondary power that has only two significant sources of strength: a large stockpile of nuclear weapons and vast deposits of oil and natural gas, the latter of which it uses as an economic weapon to attempt to bend the energy-dependent European states to its will.

The heartland geostrategic perspective of the Russian Federation dictates domination of Ukraine. Securing control over Ukrainian industrial and agricultural productivity serves Russian interests; it is perceived as critical to reversing Russia's decline as a great power. National pride requires reunification with Russian minorities living in the near abroad, such as across the border in Ukraine.⁴⁷ A similar justification for intimidation and invasion eventually might be leveled at the Baltic States, which also have large Russian minority populations. The Russian government fears that sometime in the future Ukraine will join NATO.⁴⁸ NATO's relentless eastward expansion prompts Russian policy makers to redress a situation that—despite NATO's claims to being a purely defensive alliance—presents Russia with the possibility of a two-front war: a northern front with Poland and the Baltic States and a southern front with Ukraine.⁴⁹ Russians offer several reasons for their aggression against Ukraine: their fear of NATO, a desire to restore their country's great-power status, a belief that Ukrainians are in fact Russians and would welcome reincorporation but for the influence in Ukraine of a Nazi regime, and, perhaps, a geostrategic and geoeconomic interest in dominating their neighbors.

In contrast, Russian aggression and Ukraine's resistance have strengthened NATO's resolve and prompted Sweden and Finland to apply for membership in NATO. Should Sweden and Finland ultimately join NATO, Russian concern over the threat that NATO might pose to Russia will be exacerbated, particularly because Finland's entrance into NATO represents a third potential military front for Moscow. NATO must weigh the risk involved against the potential geopolitical advantages.⁵⁰ With Sweden and Finland as members, the Gulf of Bothnia and most of the Gulf of Finland also fall into NATO's ambit. The Baltic Sea becomes almost entirely a NATO lake.⁵¹ The Russian naval base at Kaliningrad is suddenly at risk because it is surrounded by Poland and Lithuania—NATO allies—and potentially cut off by sea from Saint Petersburg.⁵² This NATO expansion aligns strongly with a Mackinderite maritime geostrategic logic.⁵³

Because Mackinder's geostrategy rests on a geographic distinction between maritime and territorial powers, his understanding of containment differs fundamentally from Kennan's. In 1997, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were under NATO membership consideration, but Kennan opposed NATO expansion. He insisted that

expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era.

Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations[;] and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.⁵⁴

Kennan remained concerned with the psychology of Russian international policy makers. After the Soviet Union imploded, containment, for Kennan, was no longer desirable.⁵⁵ Kennan's initial approach to containment was aspatial and reactive and rested on military means; therefore, he could question the policy of containment in 1997.⁵⁶ In contrast, Mackinder's theory of containment was proactive, prioritized location, and recognized the utility of military force in achieving political ends—therefore, his geostrategic logic has applicability to our current circumstances.

From his theoretical work on the Eurasian heartland and his diplomatic mission to one of the bases of the anti-Bolshevik forces in 1919–20, Mackinder developed a firm appreciation for the strategic importance of the Crimean Peninsula, the nearby seaports, and the industrial and agricultural regions in their vicinity. From this potential bridgehead on the Black Sea, he thought it might have been possible to forge an alliance with the anti-Bolshevik forces situated in Poland and newly independent states along the Baltic Sea, and eventually to confine the power of the Soviet communists. With Lloyd George's decision in 1920 to end support for the anti-Bolshevik forces, that geopolitical opportunity passed. Yet Mackinder's territorial and maritime geostrategic logics enable us to assess why Ukraine remains a geopolitical flash point along the littoral of the Eurasian heartland.

If, by the end of the current campaign in Ukraine, Russia secures recognition of its control over the naval port of Sevastopol and the Crimean Peninsula, the land bridge to Crimea, the Black Sea littoral out to Odessa and beyond to Moldova, and the industrial base in the Donbas of eastern Ukraine, then in a number of years—after its military has been rebuilt—Russia may take the next step. It may attempt to gain control over all Ukraine or present NATO with a *fait accompli* by seizing control over the Baltic States, which lack the strategic depth for defense that Ukraine has.⁵⁷ A successful, lightning-fast invasion of these NATO allies would present NATO policy makers with the choice of engaging in a direct confrontation with a nuclear power or suffering a defeat that could break the alliance. If Russia gains a greater naval presence on the Black Sea or Baltic Sea, the prospect for the heartland power to turn NATO's flank by virtue of access to the eastern Mediterranean or the North Sea cannot be dismissed.

Mackinderite analysis rests on an imperative of checking the territorial power—either alone or in alliance—occupying the heartland. The elements of Mackinderite maritime geostrategic perspective endure, and they are as follows: onshore bridgeheads, offshore (island) aerodromes and military bases, maritime denial of threatened seas, and the United States reestablished as a thalassocracy.⁵⁸ Today, what that means is a strategy of containment that is designed to forestall Russia—in alignment with China—from becoming an amphibious power.⁵⁹ So,

for as long as the Eurasian heartland remains relatively impervious to the operations of naval power, the clash of maritime and territorial imperatives will produce geopolitical flash points emblematic of a cold war.⁶⁰

However, the United States must deal with several geopolitical flash points beyond the Baltic and Black Seas. China is exploiting its frontage on the Pacific Ocean to challenge American naval power. With Russia and China deepening their strategic alignment, the United States is presented with the prospect of a multifront war.⁶¹ Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development Elbridge A. Colby has suggested that the United States strengthen alliances with states along the South and East China Seas.⁶² Meanwhile, the United States and NATO should continue to create and equip a territorial force in Ukraine—a "continental sword" sufficient to degrade the Russian war machine such that many years must pass before it can threaten NATO allies.⁶³ Such a development would give the United States an opportunity to turn its attention to other geopolitical flash points—such as the Taiwan Strait—without having to worry about Russia launching a revanchist war simultaneously with a Chinese war against Taiwan.⁶⁴

NOTES

The authors wish to thank Paul Rahe for his encouragement, John Mearsheimer for providing an outline for a book, Brian Blouet for confirming the location of the Strait of Yenikali (Yenikale), and the many speakers at the recent Mackinder Forum online seminars who have discussed the Ukraine war. Leonard Hochberg thanks the participants in the Liberty Fund Socratic Seminar (held 10–11 March 2022) devoted to the thought of Halford John Mackinder. Any mistakes remain our own.

1. Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, Moscow cable no. 511, 22 February 1946, in *Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union*, ed. Rogers P. Churchill and William Slany, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), pp. 696–709 [hereafter Kennan, "Long Telegram"], available at [upload.wikimedia.org](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9c/George_F._Kennan_-_The_Sources_of_Soviet_Conduct.pdf); X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947), pp. 566–82. The online version of "Long Telegram" was used for citations herein.
2. Kennan, "Long Telegram," p. 5.
3. X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," p. 570.
4. Kennan, "Long Telegram," pp. 8, 13.
5. X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," pp. 575–76.
6. For the impact of Kennan's "Long Telegram" and the ambiguities associated with his idea of containment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1972; repr. 2000), pp. 302–304, 321–23; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 1–88; and Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1988), pp. 383–85, 421–23, 435–38.
7. Brian W. Blouet briefly compared Kennan's and Mackinder's ideas of containment in *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 196–97, and *Geopolitics and Globalization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001; 2nd ed., 2010). Geoffrey Sloan also compares the thoughts of Kennan and Mackinder in *Geopolitics, Geography and*

- Strategic History* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2017), pp. 158–64, 166.
8. H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904), pp. 421–37, and repr. vol. 170, no. 4 (December 2004), pp. 298–314; H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable, 1919); Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” *Foreign Affairs* 21, no. 4 (July 1943), pp. 595–605.
 9. Frank Costigliola, *Kennan: A Life between Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2023), p. 276; Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).
 10. For instance, Leonard Hochberg and Michael Hochberg, “Tragedy, National Insecurity, and War in Ukraine,” *RealClearDefense*, 30 April 2022, www.realcleardefense.com/; Yaroslav Hrytsak, “Putin Made a Profound Miscalculation on Ukraine,” *New York Times*, 19 March 2022, www.nytimes.com/; Michael Barone, “Ukraine Points to the Dangers of the Eurasian Heartland Axis,” *Washington Examiner*, 16 March 2022, www.washingtonexaminer.com/; Leonard Hochberg and Michael Hochberg, “Only a Threat of Force Can Deter Autocrats like Putin,” *American Spectator*, 7 March 2022, spectator.org/; Pratik Mall, “Déjà Vu in Ukraine,” *The Geopolitics*, 26 February 2022, thegeopolitics.com/; Leonard Hochberg and Michael Hochberg, “Could the US Fight a Four-Front War? Not Today,” *The Hill*, 6 June 2021, thehill.com/.
 11. Francis P. Sempa, “Democratic Statesmen Need to Re-read ‘Democratic Ideals and Reality,’” *RealClearDefense*, 7 March 2022, www.realcleardefense.com/. Sempa’s insistence that Mackinder would oppose NATO and U.S. involvement in Ukraine is very peculiar insofar as he is aware of Mackinder’s trip to Crimea during the Russian Civil War and the recommendations that followed. See Francis P. Sempa, “The First Anti-communist: Halford Mackinder in South Russia 1920,” *RealClearHistory*, 13 December 2020, www.realclearhistory.com/. For another aspatial critique of NATO expansion, see Christopher Roach, “Expanding NATO Undermines European and American Security,” *American Greatness*, 22 May 2022, amgreatness.com/.
 - John J. Mearsheimer also references George Kennan’s opposition to NATO expansion: “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014), pp. 77–89.
 12. For intellectual biographies see Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*; W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon, 1982); and Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009). Commentaries on and applications of Mackinder’s thought include John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996); Brian W. Blouet, ed., *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Alexandros Petersen, *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011); Blouet, *Geopolitics and Globalization*; Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012); Nick Megoran and Sevara Sharapova, eds., *Central Asia in International Relations: The Legacies of Halford Mackinder* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2013); Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History*; and Kent E. Calder, *Super Continent: The Logic of Eurasian Integration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2019). Among the many scholarly articles assessing the impact of Mackinder’s thought or evaluating its significance are Leonard Hochberg and Geoffrey Sloan, “Mackinder’s Geopolitical Perspective Revisited,” *Orbis* 61, no. 4 (Fall 2017), pp. 575–92; Geoffrey Sloan, “Sir Halford Mackinder’s *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: A Centennial Appreciation,” *Orbis* 64, no. 1 (Winter 2020), pp. 4–23; and Brian Blouet, “Halford Mackinder: The Pivot and the Heartland,” *Mackinder Forum*, 3 October 2020, mackinderforum.org/. Louis Halewood, in “Peace throughout the Oceans and Seas of the World: British Maritime Strategic Thought and World Order, 1892–1919,” *Historical Research* 94, no. 265 (August 2021), pp. 554–77, places Mackinder’s maritime geostrategic thought in the context of contemporaneous debates.
 13. Crucial documents may be found here: Earl Curzon to Mr. Mackinder, November 1919,

- no. 576; Earl Curzon to Mr. Mackinder, 2 December 1919, no. 580; and "Report by Sir H. Mackinder on the Situation in South Russia," 21 January 1920, no. 656; all in 1919, ed. E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, 1st ser., vol. 3 (London: H.M. Stationery Off., 1949), pp. 672–78, 681–82, 768–98.
14. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 312 (p. 435 in 1904 ed.).
 15. Christian Wolmar, *Blood, Iron, and Gold: How the Railroads Transformed the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), pp. 169–70, and, more generally, pp. 159–70.
 16. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 313 (p. 436 in 1904 ed.).
 17. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, pp. 224–25.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 135, fig. 24. For a map depicting the geographic extent of the pivot versus the strategic heartland see Megoran and Sharapova, *Central Asia in International Relations*, p. 2, fig. 1, and "Halford Mackinder's Pivot in 1904 and 1919," fig. 1 in Eldar Ismailov and Vladimir Papava, *Rethinking Central Eurasia* (Washington, DC: Central Asia–Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2010), p. 87, available at www.researchgate.net/.
 19. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 137, fig. 25, for relevant map, and pp. 136–38.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 206, and p. 207, fig. 31.
 21. There are many historical accounts of the causes, course, and consequences of the Russian Civil War. Some studies treat the international diplomatic aspect. Nevertheless, surprisingly few accounts deal with Mackinder's proposal in any detail; a few authors have mentioned an aspect of his report as evidence in their presentation of an overall narrative. See David Footman, *Civil War in Russia* (New York: Praeger, 1961); George A. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917–1921: A Study in the Politics and Diplomacy of the Russian Civil War* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1966), pp. 182, 201, 209, 213, 222, 230; John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918–1919: And the Part Played by Canada* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967); John Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 165, 169–70; Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921*, vol. 2, *Britain and the Russian Civil War November 1918–February 1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 217–18, 325, and vol. 3, *The Anglo-Soviet Accord* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 23, 61, 63, 65, 72; Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), p. 208; W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 76–105; and Ilya Somin, *Stillborn Crusade: The Tragic Failure of Western Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918–1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1996).
 22. Curzon to Mackinder, November 1919, pp. 672–74, 676.
 23. Given these constraints, was Mackinder's mission doomed to fail? Historians disagree on the timing of British disillusionment with the efforts of the White Russian armies. Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia*, pp. 164–65, argues that "[b]y November 1919 the British became convinced that General Denikin and his volunteers could not win the civil war and began to draw logical conclusions from this finding. . . . Mackinder's appointment was in fact that of the liquidator." On the other hand, Kenez, in *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 208, claims that "[i]n January and February 1920 the Whites still had substantial territory and possessed sizable forces, but their fighting spirit was broken, and friend and foe alike sensed that the end of the Volunteer Army's struggle was near."
 24. Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History*, p. 74. See also Blouet, *Halford Mackinder*, pp. 172–77; Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 168–72; and Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire*, pp. 194–222.
 25. "Report . . . on the Situation in South Russia," p. 780.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 782.
 27. The Strait of Yenikali (or Yenikale) is identified with the Strait of Kerch in Saul Cohen, ed., *The Columbia Gazetteer of the World* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), vol. 3, p. 3525.

28. "Report . . . on the Situation in South Russia," pp. 781–82.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 784, 786.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 772, 786.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 784.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 779.
33. On 16 March 1921, Soviet Russia and the British government signed a trade agreement. According to Geoffrey Sloan, this policy initiative "was based on the deeply flawed assumption that the best way to achieve a lasting peace on the European continent was to try and integrate the Soviet Union into the family of European states. . . . [T]his agreement did little to ameliorate the ideological hostility that was directed towards the west." See Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History*, p. 75.
34. Halford John Mackinder, *The World War and After: A Concise Narrative and Some Tentative Ideas* (London: George Philip & Son, 1924), p. 251.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," p. 601.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 603, 604.
38. Paul Kennedy, *Victory at Sea: Naval Power and the Transformation of the Global Order in World War II* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2022), pp. 293–329.
39. Curzon to Mackinder, November 1919, p. 676.
40. "Report . . . on the Situation in South Russia," pp. 773, 782–83.
41. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 2.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 14.
43. Jeffrey Mankoff, *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2022), p. 74.
44. Spengler [David Goldman], "Cardinal Richelieu Explains Vladimir Putin," *Asia Times*, 2 April 2022, asiatimes.com/.
45. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 314 (p. 437 in 1904 ed.).
46. Spencer Wilkinson et al., "The Geographical Pivot of History: Discussion," *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904), p. 443, and repr. vol. 170, no. 4 (December 2004), p. 320.
47. Mankoff, *Empires of Eurasia*, pp. 16–79.
48. Chris Jewers, "Ukraine WILL Become a NATO Member in the 'Long-Term,' Head of the Alliance Says," *Daily Mail*, 28 February 2023, www.dailymail.com.uk/.
49. The two paragraphs above summarize some key points found in Hochberg and Hochberg, "Tragedy, National Insecurity, and War in Ukraine."
50. Jared Malsin and Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Turkey's President Approves Finland's NATO Membership Bid," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 March 2023, www.wsj.com/. As of this writing, Finland's accession to NATO was not yet complete.
51. One further development has occurred regarding the Baltic Sea, as demonstrated in Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Denmark Votes to Deepen Military Cooperation with EU amid Ukraine War," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 2022, www.wsj.com/.
52. This passage was written before 17 June 2022, when Lithuanian authorities announced the implementation of a ban imposed on the movement of goods to Kaliningrad. Andrius Sytas, "Kaliningrad Sanctions to Take Effect, Lithuania Says," *Reuters*, 18 June 2022, www.reuters.com/.
53. In an assessment of the advantages of Sweden and Finland joining NATO, the impact of their membership on the Arctic Sea must not be overlooked. See Arthur Herman, "Sweden and Finland Will Help NATO Counter Russia in the Arctic," *Wall Street Journal*, 9 June 2022, www.wsj.com/.
54. George F. Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *New York Times*, 5 February 1997, www.nytimes.com/. Former President Bill Clinton recently defended NATO expansion on his watch: "I Tried to Put Russia on Another Path," *The Atlantic*, 7 April 2022, www.theatlantic.com/.
55. Was Kennan familiar with Mackinder's work in the period prior to 1946–47? Kennan, in *Memoirs: 1925–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 308, states that, while he was in residence at the National War College, he and his colleagues "had the admirable compilation *Makers of Modern Strategy*, edited by

E. M. Earle to draw on; and in my own case, at least, this proved invaluable. But it was obvious that in no instance was the thinking of these earlier figures fully relevant or remotely adequate to the needs of a great American democracy in the atomic age." The contributors to *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1944) mentioned Mackinder in passing (pp. 148, 391, 452, 515) and discussed his thought in three brief passages (pp. 390, 404–405, and 444–45). In addition, Giles D. Harlow and George C. Maerz, in the introduction to their edited volume, *Measures Short of War: The George F. Kennan Lectures at the National War College, 1946–47* (Washington, DC: National Defense Univ. Press, 1991), p. xx, claim that Kennan, while in residence at the National War College, "became involved in the study of Clausewitz, Mackinder, and other classical military strategists." Francis P. Sempa notes that Kennan read Earle's edited volume *Makers of Modern Strategy* in the mid-1940s, a volume that "included essays on Clausewitz, Jomini, Mahan and Mackinderesque geopolitics." See Sempa's "Kennan's 'Measures Short of War' Applied to U.S.-China Cold War," *RealClearDefense*, 22 July 2021, www.realcleardefense.com/. Colin Gray, in "Keeping the Soviets Landlocked: Geostategy for a Maritime America," *National Interest*, no. 4 (Summer 1986), pp. 24–36, insists that "Mackinder was the intellectual father of the U.S. policy of containment." On the other hand, David Mayers, in *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 130, opines that "Kennan's views in 1947 about America's place in the world were unclear and unfinished. Although he had long agreed with Halford Mackinder, whom he studied, that geography was an aid to statecraft, it was not until [Walter] Lippmann prodded him [in 1947] that Kennan began really to grapple with the questions of what constituted power and how foreign centers of power related to US security." Mayers does not cite a source indicating that Kennan actually "studied" Mackinder or how he deployed Mackinder's geostrategic thought prior to Lippmann's critique of "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." Commentators have argued that after Kennan left the State Department his work incorporated some of Mackinder's perspectives.

For instance, Richard L. Russell in *George F. Kennan's Strategic Thought: The Making of an American Political Realist* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999) quotes a Mackinderite analysis on page 52 that originally appeared in George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954), p. 65; similarly, Geoffrey Sloan in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History*, p. 160, quotes a lecture Kennan delivered at the University of Chicago in 1951, in which there was a passage with—in Sloan's words—"a close congruence to the . . . Heartland Theory." Both Russell and Sloan reference materials that suggest Kennan's familiarity with Mackinder's theory, but the materials they cite were published or presented after the appearance of the "Long Telegram" and "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." For a summary of the columns appearing in 1947 in the *New York Herald Tribune*, see Walter Lippmann, "The Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (Spring 1987), pp. 869–84. In the final analysis, although some of Kennan's thoughts appearing in the 1950s were congruent with Mackinder's ideas, there is scant evidence that Mackinder's geostrategic thinking influenced Kennan's assessment in the three critical documents: "Long Telegram," "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," and the 1997 *New York Times* op-ed column, "A Fateful Error."

56. Blouet, *Geopolitics and Globalization*, pp. 149–50. Costigliola, in *Kennan*, argues that after the initial formulation of the idea Kennan sought to shift containment away from military to diplomatic and economic responses. For a discussion of Kennan on Ukraine see Lee Congdon, *George Kennan for Our Time* (Ithaca, NY: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, an imprint of Cornell Univ. Press, 2022), pp. 60–63, 187.
57. James D. Hardy Jr. and Leonard J. Hochberg, "The Ukraine Crisis, Part IV: In Extremis," *Mackinder Forum*, 5 September 2014, mackinderforum.org/. Lukas Milevski provides a more recent treatment of strategic interactions along the Baltic in *The West's East: Contemporary Baltic Defense in Strategic Perspective* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).
58. For a discussion of American thalassocracy, see Seth Cropsey, *Mayday: The Decline of American Naval Supremacy* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2013).

59. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).
60. Stephen Kotkin makes a similar point using the Russian war with Finland, the Korean War, and the Ukraine crisis in “The Cold War Never Ended: Ukraine, the China Challenge, and the Revival of the West,” *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 3 (May/June 2022), pp. 64–68.
61. Hochberg and Hochberg, in “Could the US Fight a Four-Front War?,” argue for the presence of geopolitical flash points along the coastal rimlands of Eurasia. In Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, ed. Helen R. Nicholl (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), p. 50, map 41, “Gates to the Heartland,” Spykman suggests three routes (and potential geopolitical flash points) from the Atlantic and Mediterranean into the heartland: first, through Arkhangelsk from the White Sea; second, along the northern European plain from the North Sea; and third, from Crimea and the Black Sea. Spykman interpreted, applied, and popularized Mackinder’s thought in *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), pp. 165–87.
62. Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2021).
63. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (New York: Scribner’s, 1976), p. 133. For a brief discussion of Ukraine’s military, see Taras Fedirko, “The Military Roots of Modern Ukraine,” *Wall Street Journal*, 28 May 2022, available at www.wsj.com/.
64. A. Wess Mitchell, “A Strategy for Avoiding Two-Front War,” *National Interest*, 21 August 2021, nationalinterest.org/; A. Wess Mitchell, “To Prevent China from Grabbing Taiwan, Stop Russia in Ukraine,” *National Interest*, 14 March 2022, nationalinterest.org/.