

The Heartland Theory and the Present-Day Geopolitical Structure of Central Eurasia

The Planet's Pivot Area in Mackinder's Theory

The geopolitical situation of the early 21st century gave a new boost to studies of the regional structuralization principles for the geopolitical and geo-economic space of the entire Eurasian continent.¹ This revived the conceptions formulated by Halford Mackinder in the early 20th century and his opponent, Nicholas Spykman, somewhat later. They offered very original approaches to the regional geopolitical structuralization of the Eurasian continent and the identification of the functional value of its spatial segments.

Mackinder interpreted the world historical processes based on the idea that the world was inherently divided into isolated areas each of which had a special function to perform. He asserted that the European civilization was the product of outside pressure. His account of Europe and European history, regarding it as the result of many centuries of struggle against invasions from Asia, proceeded from the same idea.² He believed that Europe's advance and expansion was stimulated by the need to respond to the pressure coming from the center of Asia. Accordingly, it was the Heartland (where the continental masses of Eurasia were concentrated) that served as the pivot of all the geopolitical transformations of historical dimensions within the World Island.

¹ For example, Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*; Svante E. Cornell, "Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia Perceptions," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (1999), pp. 100-125; Darabadi, "Central Eurasia;" Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*; Ismailov and Esenov, "Central Eurasia in the New Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Dimensions;" Laruelle, "Pereosmyslenie imperii;" A.S. Panarin, "Evraziyskiy proekt v mirosistemnom kontekste" [The Eurasian Project in the World Systemic Context], *Vostok*, No. 2 (1995), pp. 66-79; Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Pathways after Empire: National Identity and Foreign Economic Policy in the Post-Soviet World* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), 2002.

² Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History."

He pointed out that the Heartland was in the most advantageous geopolitical location. Aware of the relative nature of the conception “central location,” Mackinder pointed out that in the context of the global geopolitical processes, the Eurasian continent is found in the center of the world, with the Heartland occupying the center of the Eurasian continent. His doctrine suggested that the geopolitical subject (actor) that dominated the Heartland would possess the necessary geopolitical and economic potential to ultimately control the World Island and the planet.

According to Mackinder, a retrospective analysis of military-political and socioeconomic processes in the Heartland revealed its obvious objective geopolitical and geo-economic unity.³ He pointed to the pivotal nature of the vast Eurasian region: inaccessible to sea-going vessels, but an easy target for the nomads in antiquity. Mackinder was convinced that Eurasia possessed sustainable conditions for the development of military and industrial powers.

When structuring the geopolitical expanse in the form of a system of concentric circles, Mackinder conventionally placed the Pivot in the planet’s center, which included the river basins of the Volga, Yenisey, Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and two seas (the Caspian and the Aral).⁴ “This Pivot was thus all but impregnable to attacks by sea powers, yet was able to sustain large populations itself. The nations that arose from within it depended on horse and camel to negotiate its vast expanses, which gave them the mobility to mount raids on Europe, which could not mobilize in return.”⁵

For historical and geopolitical reasons, the Pivot became the natural center of force. Mackinder also identified the “inner crescent,” coinciding with the Eurasian coastal areas. He described these as the area of the most intensive civilizational development. It included Europe and Southern, Southwestern, and Eastern Asia. There was also the “outer crescent,” which included Britain, South and North America, Southern Africa, Australasia and Japan, zones geographically and culturally alien to inner Eurasia. He believed that the historical processes were concentrated on the Heartland, territory

³ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1943), pp. 595-605.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Megoran and Sharapova, “Mackinder’s ‘Heartland,’” p. 12.

populated by Turkic tribes whose inroads forced Europe to unite, and the homeland of all the nomadic empires of the past.⁶

Proceeding from the above, Mackinder insisted on preventive measures of various means to remain in control of the situation in the Pivot. One of them consisted of controlling the “inner crescent.” He put his idea of Eastern Europe as the key to the Heartland in a nutshell by saying: “whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the World.”⁷

The history of the Pivot, whose conception will be assessed below, suggests that its spatial-functional parameters have been in constant change. Even though the process that took place within the area confirms what Mackinder said about the functional unity of Eastern Europe and the Heartland, the real meaning of the latter does not stem from the imperative nature of Eastern Europe when it comes to control over the Heartland, but from their structural unity. In other words, at all stages of the Heartland’s development, especially today, Eastern Europe remains a spatial element of its structure. Its geopolitical unity is the *sine qua non* of the Pivot’s functional validity on a Eurasian scale.

Mackinder’s later works support the thesis of Eastern Europe as part of the Heartland.⁸ Within a very short period of time he revised his theory twice in an effort to adapt it to the changing geopolitical realities. He readjusted the Pivot (see Fig. 1) and included the Black and Baltic Sea basins (Eastern Europe) in the Heartland.⁹ This means that his famous formula should be

⁶ S.A. Pletniova, *Kochevniki srednevekov’ia: Poiski istoricheskikh zakonomernostey* [Nomads of the Middle Ages: A Search for Consistent Historical Patterns] (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1982).

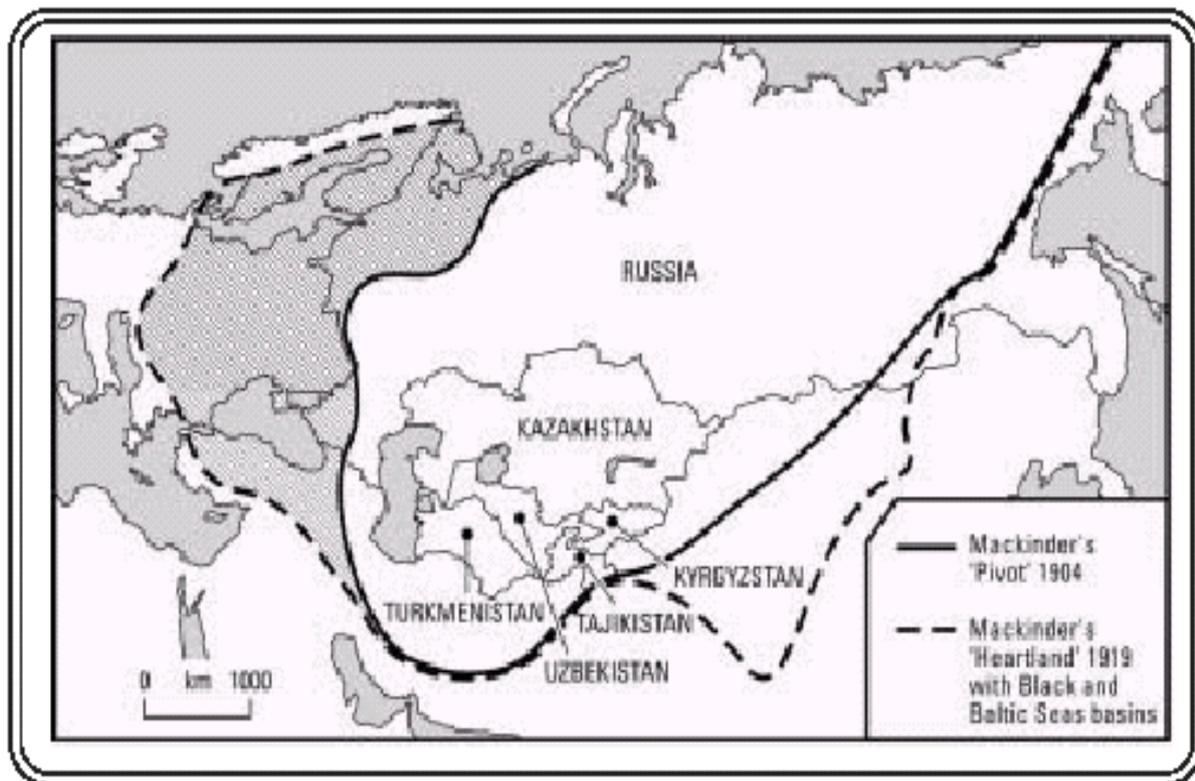
⁷ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 113.

⁸ Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace.”

⁹ He included in Eastern Europe some of the East European states that formed part of the Ottoman Empire (the southeastern European states – the Kingdom of Bulgaria, the Hungarian Kingdom, the Rumanian Princedom, the Princedom of Montenegro, the Kingdom of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia) and of the Russian Empire (the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Central (Ukrainian) Rada, the Byelorussian Rada and the governorships of Bessarabia, Lifland, Kourland, and Estland).

rephrased as: Whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the World.

Figure 1: Halford Mackinder's Pivot in 1904 and 1919¹⁰



This appeared to be confirmed in the mid-20th century when, after World War II, the Soviet Union expanded its domination zone westwards. COMECON and the Warsaw Pact meant that the classical Heartland merged with Eastern Europe. They disintegrated along with the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1990s, giving rise to new geopolitical and geo-economic conditions in the World-Island. This did not, however, set Eastern Europe apart from the Heartland. The geopolitical transformations of the late 20th century isolated Russia as a Eurasian geopolitical subject in the northeastern part of the continent and narrowed down the Pivot in its central part, that is, in three relatively independent regional segments of the latter – Central (Eastern according to Mackinder) Europe, the Central Caucasus, and

¹⁰ The map is borrowed from (Megoran and Sharapova, “Mackinder’s “Heartland,” p. 9).

Central Asia. To be more precise, the main relatively altered functions of the Heartland concentrated in the newly emergent spaces of its system-forming segments. This launched another cycle of their integration and revival as a whole entity.¹¹

Early in the 20th century (during World War I) and in the latter half of the same century, the geopolitical logic created first by the domination of the Ottoman and Russian empires and later by the Soviet one in Eastern Europe suggested a division into Western Europe (the countries outside the Ottoman and Russian/Soviet domination zones) and Eastern Europe (the countries completely dominated by the Ottoman and Russian/Soviet empires). The geopolitical logic created by the disintegration of the empires and Russia's isolation in the northeastern part of Eurasia excluded the former COMECON countries and post-Soviet countries from the East European expanse (with the exception of Russia's European part). The isolation of the last Eurasian geopolitical subject and its domination sphere in the northeast of the European continent, first, shifted the Pivot from the continent's north to the center; and thus, called for conceptual changes. Indeed, that part of Europe's political expanse controlled by the last empire (the Soviet Union) should be identified as Central Europe and then included in the contemporary Pivot (Central Eurasia), while Russia, as part of the World-Island that occupies Eastern Europe and Northern Asia, should be described as a Northern Eurasian Power. In this context Turkey, which is located in the southern parts of the East Europe and West Asia, becomes the Southern Eurasian Power.

Spykman also paid much attention to the role of the Pivot of the Eurasian continent in world history.¹² He relied on what Mackinder wrote before him to produce his own version of the basic geopolitical model. It differed

¹¹ The discussion about the Heartland's new expanses is still ongoing; there is the opinion that it has shrunk to cover the territory of Central Asia (for example, Ehsan Ahrari, "The Strategic Future of Central Asia: A View from Washington," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2003), pp. 164-165; G. Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3 (1999), pp. 15-38).

¹² Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942); Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944).

significantly from that of his predecessor. He was convinced that Mackinder had overestimated the geopolitical significance of the Heartland. He argued that the dynamics of the geopolitical history of the “inner crescent” – the Rimland, the coastal zones – was the product of its inner development impetus rather than the result of external pressure coming from the “nomads of the Land,” as Mackinder had asserted. Spykman was convinced that the Heartland was nothing more than a geographic expanse open to cultural and civilizational impulses coming from the Rimland. He stated that while Mackinder’s Pivot had no independent historical role to play, the Rimland was the key to world domination. Hence his formula was: whoever rules the Rimland commands Eurasia, and whoever rules Eurasia commands the world.

In both geopolitical conceptions, the world’s spatial-functional structure consists of three main levels: the Heartland, Eurasia, and the Planet in Mackinder, and the Rimland-Eurasia-the Planet in Spykman. The former model insisted on the primordial and decisive role of the Heartland in the geopolitical expanse of the World-Island, while the latter claimed that same role for the Rimland.

At different times, the state structures of both the Heartland and Rimland were either objects or subjects of the geopolitical relations in Eurasia. Their functional value in the global geopolitical processes changed accordingly. It is very hard, therefore, and hardly correct in the present context, to describe either the Heartland or the Rimland as primordial and all-important. Both theories have one, and a serious, shortcoming: they do not intend to explain objective global geopolitical processes. They were formulated to serve the strategic interests of two Western powers (the U.K. and the U.S.). This accounts for the inevitable one-sidedness of their approaches to the question discussed above: what is primordial/more important – the Heartland or the Rimland? Their arguments confirm their obvious biases; therefore Mackinder’s and Spykman’s theories about the place and role of the Heartland/Rimland on the Eurasian continent and worldwide will not be simply reproduced. Instead, their approaches will be used as a reference to an alternative geopolitical conception about the Pivot of the 21st century and possible scenarios for the future.

To achieve a much more profound idea about what is going on in the Pivot area, we should revise our old ideas and supply them with new content. First, we analyze the historic evolution of the Pivot expanse, that is, the regularities and stages of the development of its geopolitical structure; second, we identify the main features, functions, and principles of its emergence and functioning, as well as its parameters and structure under present-day conditions.

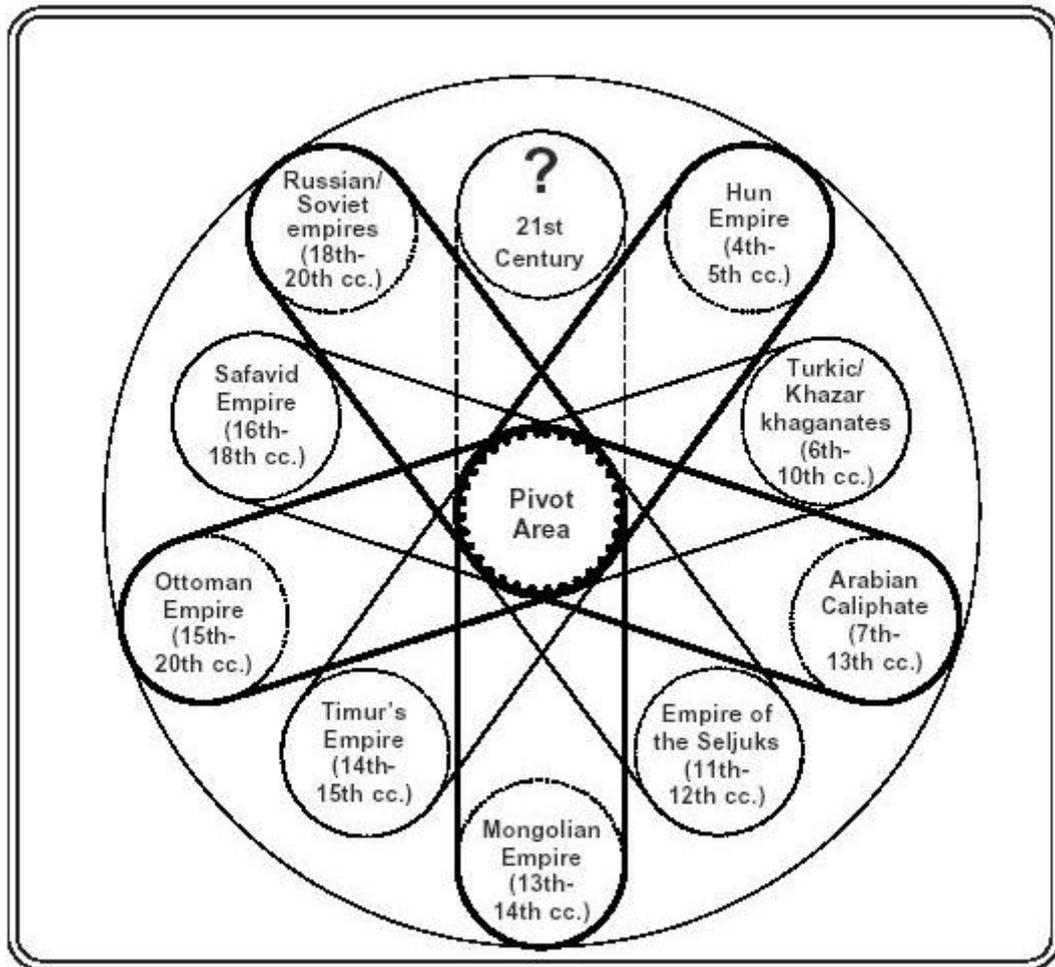
Historical Evolution of the Pivot Area – Central Eurasia

The history of the Heartland as a single and integral region began with the Hun Empire and unfolded through the consecutive changes of geopolitical actors: the Turkic and Khazar Khanates, the Arabic Caliphate, the empires of the Seljuks and Mongols, Timur's Empire, the Ottoman and Safavid empires, and the Russian and Soviet empires (see Fig. 2).

At different times, the Pivot expanded or contracted within empires that for several centuries replaced one another in its expanses (see Appendix). As a rule, each of them left behind stable administrative-territorial units within which the historical evolution of the Pivot area unfolded (see Table 1).

A concise overview of the Pivot's evolution reveals that the Huns first began shaping the European and Caucasian segments of the Pivot Area into a functionally united geopolitical and economic expanse when squeezed out by the Chinese Empire (a geopolitical subject of the Rimland's eastern part) from the Central Asian segment of the Heartland in the 4th century. Bugged down by their struggle for domination in Europe with the Roman (and Byzantine) empire, which controlled mainly the Western part of the Rimland, they failed to stabilize and develop the emerging integration trends among the still developing Heartland segments.

Figure 2: Evolution of the Pivot Area



The Huns shattered the Roman empire with devastating blows, but were however themselves defeated in 451 in the battle at Chalons in present-day France. This ended the period of their passionarity¹³ and buried the Empire of the Huns as well. For many centuries after that, neither the Heartland nor

¹³ The conception of “passionarity” (“passionarnost” in Russian) was used by Lev Gumilev for explaining principles of origination and development of ethnoses. In his theory “passionarity” is a characteristic of humans’ behavior (representatives of certain ethnoses), based upon the abundance of bio-chemical energy of living substance, which exhibits itself in humans’ ability to excessive strain and achieving of top priority tasks. Saturation of ethnoses with such humans – “passionaries” – determines the level of its development and dominance within the framework of a certain political space. In other words, the increase of the number of “passionaries” within an ethnic group leads to “passionary explosion” and expansion of a given ethnoses, while the decrease of the number of the above-mentioned subjects results in an impoverishment of ethnoses, its loss of spatial conquests that took place in the period of “passionary explosion,” and gradual retirement from the historical stage. See L.N. Gumilev, *Etnogenez i biosfera zemli* [Ethnogenesis in the Earth’s Biosphere] (Moscow: Rolf Publishers, 2001), pp. 200-350.

the Rimland could completely revive to perform their geopolitical and geo-economic functions in Eurasia.

Table 1: Heartland Territory within Different Empires

Segments of Empires Empires/ Contemporary States	Periods Centuries	Total Area		Including Post-Imperial Sizes of Segments												
				Size of the State formed by the Tibular Ethnos—subject		Size of the Heartland—object									Size of the Rimland—object	
						Total			Including Segments of the Heartland:							
									European		Caucasian		Asian			
Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	Thous sq km	%	
Hun Empire	4th-5th	3,237	100	—	—	3,237	100	2,852	89	355	11	—	—	—	—	
Turkic Khaganate	6th-8th	5,701	100	—	—	5,701	100	550	10	355	6	4,796	84	—	—	
Khazar Khaganate	7th-10th	791	100	—	—	791	100	436	55	355	45	—	—	—	—	
Arabian Caliphate	7th-13th	13,848	100	2,606	19	1,917	14	—	—	187	1	1,730	13	9,325	67	
Saudi Arabia	21st	—	—	2,150	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Empire of the Seljuks	11th-12th	3,801	100	200	5	2,171	57	—	—	993	26	1,178	31	1,430	38	
Turkmenistan	21st	—	—	488	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Mongolian Empire	13th-14th	22,484	100	1,565	7	14,144	63	2,145	10	653	3	11,346	50	6,775	30	
Mongolia	21st	—	—	1,565	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Timur's Empire	14th-15th	5,929	100	244	4	4,248	72	—	—	298	5	3,950	67	1,437	24	
Uzbekistan	21st	—	—	447	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Ottoman Empire	15th-20th	8,182	100	779	9	1,114	14	1,079	13	35	1	—	—	6,289	77	
Turkey	21st	—	—	779	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Safavid Empire	16th-18th	2,000	100	228	11	335	17	—	—	35	2	300	15	1,437	72	
Azerbaijan	21st	—	—	87	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Russian Empire	18th-20th	22,430	100	—	73	6,073	27	1,480	6	599	3	3,994	18	—	—	
R.S.F.S.R.	20th	—	—	16,357	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
U.S.S.R.	20th	22,402	100	—	77	5,202	23	1,021	4	187	1	3,994	18	—	—	
RF	21st	—	—	17,200	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
COMECON	20th	26,334	100	17,200	65	8,893	33	2,295	9	187	1	6,211	23	441	2	
RF	20th	—	—	17,200	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Central Eurasia	21st	—	—	—	—	8,585	100	2,187	26	187	2	6,211	72	—	—	

One hundred years later, the second cycle of shaping the Pivot Area began. A new state, the Turkic Khanate, sprang into existence in the Huns' original homeland. Having established its domination over Central Asia, it spread eastward (Manchuria, Xinjiang, Altai, and Mongolia) and westward reaching the Northern Caucasus and the Northern Black Sea coast (Bosporus/Kerch),

which belonged to the Byzantine Empire. In this way, the Turkic khans gained control over the main routes of the Great Silk Road – the most important segments of the Pivot Area. This allowed them to perform a geopolitical and geo-economic function on the Eurasian continent. They failed, however, to tighten their grip on the Pivot. In 588 the Turkic state disintegrated into the Eastern and Western khanates.

A century later (in the 7th c.), the Khazar Khanate came into being. It was based on the Western Turkic Khanate, which covered the North Caucasian and Northern Black Sea coast areas. Similar to the Empire of the Huns before it, this state also tended to spread to the Caucasian and the European segments of the Pivot. The Asian segment of the Heartland was dominated by the Eastern Turkic Khanate. Its rulers were involved in protracted wars with China, a geopolitical actor in the Eastern part of the Rimland, which destroyed their state.

At the same time, in the 7th century, a new geopolitical subject, emerged on the Arabian Peninsula: the Arabian Caliphate. The Arabs established their rule over individual segments of the Pivot Area as they had conquered the vast territories between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans (the Western stretch of the coastal area of the World-Island) from the very beginning. Throughout the 8th century, the Caliphate was engaged in wars against the Khazar Khanate in the Caucasian segment of the Heartland and, the Eastern Turkic Khanate (712-713) in Central Asia.

The resumed clashes between the new key actors operating in the Rimland (the Arabian Caliphate and the Chinese Empire) and the Heartland (the Khazar Khanate and Eastern Turkic Khanate) evicted the latter from the geopolitical scene.

In this way, the Arabian Caliphate established its control over two segments of the Pivot Area (Central Asia and the Central Caucasus). It cut short the emerging integration trends in the Pivot Area. Its domination in the key segments of both the Rimland and the Heartland (nearly the entire World-Island) lasted for nearly two centuries. In the first quarter of the 9th century, the Caliphate started crumbling. It lost some of the Rimland segments (Southwestern Europe, North Africa, Western Asia, and part of Asia Minor) and its Heartland segments (Central Asia and the Central Caucasus).

In the 11th century, another Eurasian power, the Empire of the Seljuks, appeared in the Central Asian segment of the Pivot Area. This started a new phase of revival for the Heartland. Having conquered Central Asia, the Seljuks captured the Central Caucasus, the second segment of the Pivot Area, as well as individual segments of the Rimland (Western Asia and part of Asia Minor, and the Arabian (Baghdad) Caliphate itself). The decline of the Arabian Rimland revived the Seljuk Heartland which, in the guise of other geopolitical actors of the Pivot Area, dominated the World-Island throughout the 20th century.

In the 13th century, the Seljuks were replaced by the Mongols. The Mongols retained their domination not only in all segments of the Heartland (Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia), but also across the Eurasian continent.

In the 15th century, the Ottoman Turks replaced the Mongols. They moved to Asia Minor from Central Asia mainly in the 12th and 13th centuries and set up their own state – the Ottoman Beylik – in 1299. The Ottoman Empire defeated the Byzantine Empire in 1453 and captured its territory. Then, beginning in the 16th century, it gradually moved into the Central European and Central Caucasian segments of the Heartland and the North African segments of the Rimland.

In the 16th century, the Safavid Empire was also pressing forward in Central Asia and the Central Caucasus (segments of the Pivot Area). Naturally, it clashed with the Ottoman Empire. The many centuries of their confrontation ultimately destroyed the Safavid state. As a result, ethnopolitical and state units of the eastern part of the Central Caucasian and the Central Asian segments restored their independence. This also relieved the impact of the Ottoman Empire on the Central European and western parts of the Central Caucasian segments.

In the mid-18th century, the Russian Empire began moving into all segments of the Pivot Area. It had conquered the entire Central Caucasian region by the 19th century and was looking westward at Central Europe and eastward at Central Asia.

Thus, the period of the Turkic empires' uninterrupted domination (the Hun Empire, the Turkic and Khazar khanates, the empires of the Seljuks and Mongols, Timur's Empire, the Ottoman and Safavid empires) in the Heartland came to an end in the 19th century. Slavs (represented by the Russian Empire) moved in.

Initially, the ethnic Russians lived mainly in the East European segment of the Heartland. Later, in the 19th century, Russians gained domination over all the key segments of the Pivot Area (Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian) in the form of the Russian Empire. It also conquered the strategically important littoral strips in the west (the Baltic states and Finland), in the east (Kamchatka, Sakhalin, the Maritime Area, and Alaska), and in the north (the littoral part of the Arctic Ocean). As a result, the Russians gained access to three oceans and became a land and sea power able to function as a geopolitical actor in the Heartland and Rimland simultaneously.

Early in the 20th century, the Russian Empire was transformed into the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union inherited the same territory and geopolitical potential. In 1949, it set up COMECON and expanded the Pivot Area by including the Central European countries of the socialist camp (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, the GDR, and Yugoslavia), as well as Mongolia and Afghanistan in Central Asia, in the new structure. This means that only during the Soviet Empire's lifetime did the Pivot Area acquire its most complete territory and function accordingly.

The concluding stage of the Pivot's last evolution cycle, that is, the disintegration of the last Eurasian power – the Soviet Union – marked the first stage of the Heartland's new cycle of revival. The analysis of these two moments clearly reveals that, very much as before, Central European, Central Caucasian, and Central Asian segments appeared along with the area of the dominant nation that detached itself from the Pivot and became an independent subject of geopolitics – the Russian Federation.

Each of the Eurasian powers that emerged in the Pivot Area, as a rule, developed into an independent geopolitical subject that dominated the Heartland, its "mother lode." In other words, the Pivot Area gradually developed from a system-forming element of the Heartland into something

functionally different from the other elements of the same entity. This means that the new geopolitical subject leaves the place of its birth, that is, the mother lode, the Heartland. As a result, the Heartland shrinks as much as the titular nation expands.

It is possible to liken the Pivot Area and its segments to the pupil of the eye which dilates, contracts, and even shifts continuously. In short, it is never the same. This is one of the reasons why the territory of the contemporary states and segments of Central Eurasia does not coincide with their original historical frontiers.

The principles according to which the Heartland and Rimland were formed were mainly ethnic (the Hun Empire, the Turkic and Khazar khanates, the empires of the Seljuks and Mongols, Timur's Empire, the Ottoman and Safavid empires where the Turkic ethnic group dominated, in Russia this role belonged to the Russians), religious (the Arabian Caliphate, ruled by Muslims), or political-ideological (the U.S.S.R). Their evolution proceeded according to similar lines:

- Emergence – detachment of the titular nation which strikes root in its Pivot expanse;
- Flourishing – total control over main Pivot segments and the desire to conquer the entire world;
- Disintegration – emergence of new frontiers of the Pivot segments and detachment of the titular nation.

The above suggests that at the stage when the Heartland was taking shape as an integral object/subject of world politics, one of the numerous ethnic groups moved apart as the passionarity ethnic group that came to dominate the other ethnic groups of the Eurasian continent. This ushered in the second stage: flourishing. During this period, the area of the passionarity ethnic group as the most stable geopolitical unit of the Pivot Area transformed from the object of geopolitics into its subject (in the form of an empire), resolved to dominate the adjacent territories of the Pivot and then the entire world. However, when domination was established over the Heartland and part of the Rimland, the Eurasian imperial system (and the single expanse of the Heartland) began to fall apart into separate, relatively isolated elements, one

of which became the territory of the state of the titular ethnic group. This pattern repeated itself at every stage of the evolution of the Heartland.

Essence, Functions, and Principles of Forming the Pivot Area in the 21st Century

The Essence of the Pivot Area. The Heartland is the central part of the planet's largest World-Island with no access to the strategically important littoral strips, but full of inner ethno-demographic and sociopolitical potential (passionarity). The systemic nature, dynamism, and sustainability of the Eurasian continent, depend on the degree to which the Heartland is orderly and manageable.

The Function of the Pivot Area. The main function of the Heartland – Central Eurasia – can be described as ensuring sustainable land contacts along the parallels (West-East) and meridians (North-South). In other words, Central Eurasia should contribute to consistent geopolitical and economic integration of large and relatively isolated areas of the Eurasian continent.

The Principles of Forming the Pivot Area. Today, to achieve balanced development of mankind on a global scale, it is necessary to predominantly use the principles of socio-economic expediency (compatibility and mutual complementarity) and self-organization. Its functioning calls for the principles of self-regulation and self-administration. Central Eurasia's centuries-long history has demonstrated that the development of the Heartland predominantly functions according to the ethno-confessional or political-ideological principle and in line with the principle of the titular nation dominating the conquered area; this principle led the Eurasian empires ultimately to fall apart. The same can be said about the Heartland: a united and integral geopolitical expanse that disintegrated into segments because of the same principles. This was how the objective ties between the main regions of the Eurasian continent were disrupted.

A New Geopolitical Structure for Central Eurasia

The evolution of the Pivot Area, the main stages of which have been discussed above, confirms the permanent functional mobility of its system-

forming segments. This offers a clearer idea about how Central Eurasia is structured today. We explained above that from the spatial-functional point of view Central Eurasia is much more than the Central Caucasus and Central Asia.¹⁴ The spatial point of view offers the same conclusion. Indeed, since Europe and Asia are two organic parts of the Eurasian continent, as was previously mentioned, its central part should inevitably include the central segments of both – territories of the Central European and Central Asian countries – as well as a “special zone” where the both segments meet – the territories of the Central Caucasian states. This has been confirmed by the Pivot’s centuries-long socioeconomic history.

At the same time, the structuralization of Eurasia’s geopolitical expanse cannot rest on physical-geographical features (spatial-geographic parameters) alone.¹⁵ It seems that regional structuralization of the geopolitical expanse should take into account not so much the criterion of physical geography, but also rely on the principle of the functional unity of the given expanse, compatibility and mutual complementarity of the independent neighboring states, their social-cultural affinity rooted in their common past, as well as their joint functional importance for world politics and economics.

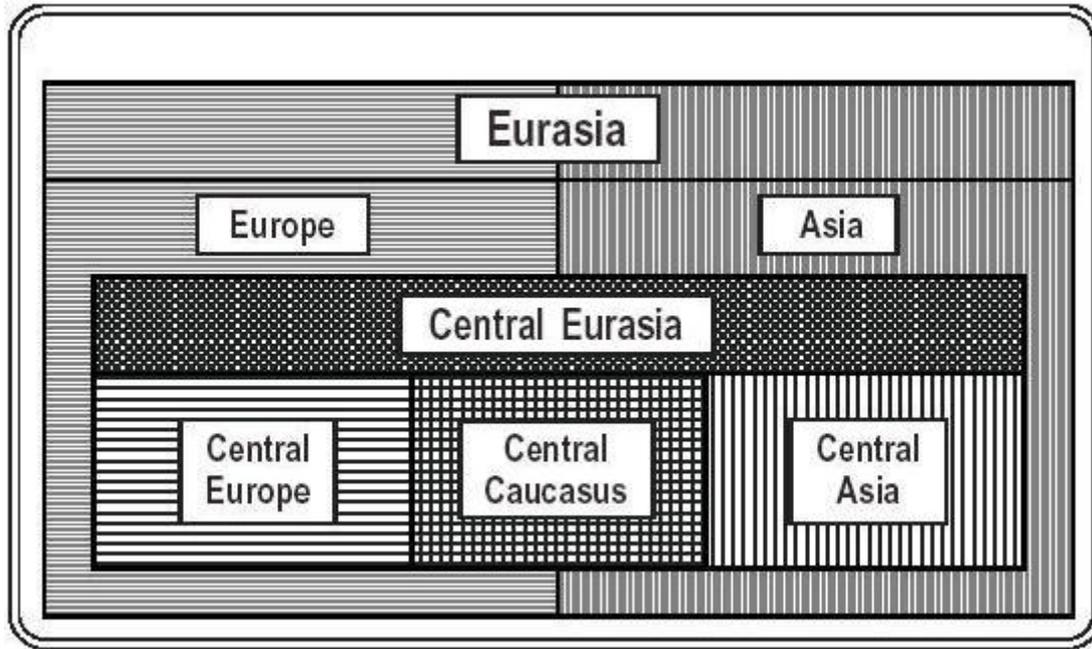
The above suggests that any discussion of the contemporary geopolitical structure of Central Eurasia should proceed from the fact that it consists of three segments¹⁶ – Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia (see Fig. 3).

¹⁴ In the post-Soviet period, Central Eurasia included mainly two segments of the Pivot Area (see, for example, Amineh and Houweling, “Introduction: The Crisis in IR-Theory,” pp. 2-3, Fairbanks et al., *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*, p. vii; Ismailov and Esenov, “Central Eurasia in the New Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Dimensions.”)

¹⁵ On many occasions, because of this approach, territories of sovereign states and parts of the neighboring states are included in individual regions. For example, the geopolitical concept of Central Asia is regarded as belonging to physical geography because part of Chinese territory (the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region) is also included in it together with the post-Soviet states.

¹⁶ Ismailov, “O kategorii Tsentral’naia Evrazia”; Ismailov, “Central Eurasia.”

Figure 3: Structure of Central Eurasia's Geopolitical Expanse



This approach towards the place and role of Central Eurasia completes the Pivot with its “missing element” – Central Europe. It is distinct from the currently accepted conceptions that embrace only two segments (Central Asia and the Central Caucasus) and presuppose the formation and functioning to follow the principle of the “domination of the titular nation.” Our approach to the parameters, structure, and principles of the formation and functioning of Central Eurasia as the Pivot Area presupposes that:

- First, the third segment – the territories of the Central European states – should be included in the Pivot together with Central Asia and the Central Caucasus;
- Second, the Heartland should be built and function according to the principles of socioeconomic expediency, self-organization, self-administration, and self-development.

History and the present geopolitical realities have demonstrated that precisely these principles ensure long-term and uninterrupted horizontal (West-East) and vertical (North-South) land contacts, that is, consistent socioeconomic integration between Western Europe and East Asia, and Russia and South Asia.

In the past several decades, marked by accelerated globalization, geopolitical literature has exhibited a bias toward macro-categories. The term “Greater” has become more frequently used than before: Greater Europe,¹⁷ the Greater Middle East,¹⁸ Greater Central Asia,¹⁹ Greater China,²⁰ etc. This approach is obviously rational, but the positions and interests of the actors involved in the rivalry on the European geopolitical stage also need to be conceptualized. This approach reflects the objective regularities of the regional political systems’ development and interaction in Eurasia under the conditions of globalization.²¹

However, the interests of the states that are part of the regional subsystems, in dynamic and sustainable political, economic, and socio-cultural development, cannot be realized without the necessary degree of their functional openness and mutual involvement in the process underway in the

¹⁷ For example, Igor’ Fiodorovich Maksimychev, “Os mira kak nachalo Bol’shoy Evropy” [The World’s Axis as the Beginning of Greater Europe], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 28, 2003, <http://www.ng.ru/world/2003-02-28///6_europe.html>; Iurii Solozobov, “Bol’shaia Evropa protiv Bol’shoy Rossii” [Greater Europe vs. Greater Russia], *Zavtra* [Tomorrow], No. 29, July 20 (2005), <<http://www.zavtra.ru/cgi/veil/data/zavtra/05/609/41.html>>.

¹⁸ For example, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “A Broad View of the ‘Broader Middle East,’” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, July (2004), <<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/8/587.html>>; Aleksander B. Krylov, “Neft i novye igry na globuse” [Oil and New Games on the Globe], *Fond strategicheskoi kul’tury* [Strategic Culture Foundation], September 8, 2006, <<http://www.fondsk.ru/article.php?id=269>>; Irina Lagunina, “NATO i Bol’shoy Blizhniy Vostok” [NATO and the Greater Middle East], *Radio svoboda* [Radio Liberty], October 29, 2003, <<http://www.svoboda.org/programs/ep/2003/ep.102903.asp>>.

¹⁹ For example, Kazakhstan: analitika, “Bol’shaia Tsentral’naia Azia: ob’ediniay i vlastvuy” [Greater Central Asia: Unite and Rule], *Dumaem.ru*, April 16, 2006, <http://www.dumaem.ru/indexkz.php?iq=st_show&st_kztm_id=8&st_id=814#up>; Murat Laumulin, “Bol’shaia Tsentral’naia Azia (BTsA)—novy mega-proekt SShA?” [Greater Central Asia (GCA)—The U.S.’s New Mega Project?], *TsentrAsia* [CentrAsia], November 21, 2005, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1132564860>>.

²⁰ For example, Konstantin Syroezhkin, “Byt’ li Bol’shomu Kitaiu” [Will There Be a Greater China], *Kontinent* [Continent], No. 2 (15), January 26—February 8 (2000), <<http://www.continent.kz/2000/01/17.html>>.

²¹ Globalization stimulates intensification and deepening of political, economic and cultural interactions within and between regions, bringing about the actual widening of certain regions at the expense of adjoining political areas. Accordingly, considering the geopolitics and geo-economics of this region, one has also to take into account adjoining regions/states. This necessitates applying the term “Great” to the regions under consideration.

region. Autarchic development belongs to the times of classical geopolitics. Today, under the conditions of globalization, none of the states can achieve self-sufficiency, at least from the point of view of economic expediency. This is reflected in the processes underway in each of the segments of the Eurasian continent and among them. The “narrow” definition of the Eurasian regions cannot fully reveal the new realities created by the widening and deepening ties and relations among the regions. This means that achieving a full understanding of them requires a wide, macro-regional approach to the structuralization of the Eurasian expanse. In other words, the definition “Greater” should also be applied to Central Eurasia and its components.

Academic writings widely use the definition in the case of Central Asia (Greater Central Asia). Two other segments – Central Europe and the Central Caucasus²² – have not yet acquired this definition. The logic of the extended interpretation of the regions suggests that Greater Central Europe should be described, as pointed out above, as a geographic expanse filled by three post-Soviet republics (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova), by three Baltic republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), and by post-COMECON states (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Montenegro) (see Fig. 4).

The countries included in Central Eurasia, it could be said, have no common past, ideologies, ethnic affiliation, or axiological systems. This means that they would not be able to organize and administer themselves, or move toward the common development trends of the Eurasian continent and the entire planet. In fact, some integration potential of the Pivot Area is rooted in the common historical past of the peoples of Central Eurasia (many of them lived side by side in nearly all the Eurasian empires, which inevitably caused ethnic mixing and cultural, linguistic, economic, and technological affinity). So far, however, the sociopolitical and historical writings have failed to provide objective descriptions of these historical periods and events that, in turn, greatly interfere with the speedy integration of the Pivot Area and the Eurasian continent as a whole.

²² This definition cannot be applied to the Central Caucasus because of its natural spatial limits.

Figure 4: The Countries of Central Eurasia

