Imperial Perspective Of Geography: An Assessment Of Afghanistan’s Geography In The Light Of Imperial Theories Of Halford John Mackinder

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ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to briefly narrate imperial perspective of geography and also assess the importance of geography in the light of imperial geographical theories of Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947) during twentieth century. This paper also attempts to briefly assess the significance of geography of Afghanistan from the perspective of the imperialist powers that always remained eager to discover opportunities to capture Afghanistan for their commercial trade and colonial domination. Moreover, this paper also assesses that how the imperial geopolitical and geostrategic theories of Mackinder become relevant to geography of Afghanistan. The paper is divided into three sections viz., the first section will briefly highlight the imperial perspective of the geography; the second section will contain theoretical framework of Halford John Mackinder; while the third section will assess Afghanistan’s geography in the light of imperial geographical theories of Mackinder.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO IMPERIAL VERSION OF GEOGRAPHY

Geographical knowledge is the analytical description of the spatial distribution of natural or human made conditions that constitute the concrete basis to replicate social life. It enlightens about successive transformatory phases of geography that undergoes through pressure of changing practical imperatives. Early cartographic practices were designed to accurately navigate and establish private rights over alien territories. This had led to create markets and thus give way to explore earth in multiple directions to find out new and valuable materials to promote universal exchange of products of all foreign climates and lands (Marx, 1849, p. 409).

According to Alexander Von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859), the construction of a systematic description of the surface of earth to naturally or humanly exploit its use value and constitutes forms of economy and social reproduction. The direct foreign management to explore commercial opportunities and colonial administration had adversely affected the geographical practices during late nineteenth century. The major imperialist powers had divided the world into their sphere of influence that gave birth to imperial geopolitical perspectives, for instance, Halford John Mackinder made invaluable contributions as geographer in the field of imperial geography in dealing with the struggle to control over space through accessing the raw material, markets and supplies of workers for the British imperialist to control of the world geography.

Most of the geographers believe in “rational management” by accumulating human and natural resources and spatial distributions. This material and imperial perspective of geography, as opposed to idealist perspective, nonetheless holds some version of environmental conditions, location or spatial determinism such as economic manifestation and political power. The idealist perspective aims to always preserve strong ideological contents. It also aims to understand the diversity of social life through the lens of parochial, hidebound and ethnocentric standpoints. As a result, it transmits and develops into national superiority or racio-cultural doctrines.

3 This perspective of geography deals with the society that is engaged in the active transformation of the face of the earth, either in response to nature’s will or according to the dictates of human will and consciousness.
The historical perspective of imperial geographers, in manifesting destiny on the basis of civilizing the world or white man’s burden, has now been scattered and diffused, for instance, the geographical maps are used to exploit fears of peoples and generate enmity between them to find reason for intensifying internal repression, neo-colonial administration and imperialism. Imperialism is the geographical expansion that aims to manifest through colonialism, foreign trade and export of capital. By combining imperialism with the world markets, it leads us to unify themes of geographical expansion, exploitation, territorial wars and conflicts, accumulation of capital, superiority and domination. Thus, imperial perspective of geography persuades the centers to exploit the peripheries; metropolitan areas to exploit the surrounding areas; and the developed world to mercilessly exploit the underdeveloped worlds.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF HALFORD JOHN MACKINDER
Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947), a British geographer and founding father of geo-politics, also possessed the imperial perspective of geography. Mackinder’s studies at Oxford, the Royal Geographic Society (RGS) and the Linacre Professor had laid deep imprints on his understandings to physical geography and, as a result, he secured degree in history with especial reference to geography. He then enhanced his exploratory experience by establishing contacts with the RGS officers, such as Scott Keltie, a pioneer in the education of geography and Clements Markham, the explorer of the Andes. Moreover, his early extensive readings about voyages of Captain Cook also increased his interest and understandings about adventures of the empire and competitive territorial conflicts. His empirical knowledge and scientific expeditions at climb Mount Kenya and Marseilles via Suz Canal to Mombasa had enabled him to believe that imperial perspective of geography could only be the alternative to give channel for the investments of the British oversees (Semmel, 1968, p. 157).

Following his return from expeditions, he shared his experiences in his lectures’ series with the bankers at the Institute of Bankers entitled: “The great trade routes”. The central argument of his lectures was that if “the British failed to encounter German’s increased competition in the continent, the economic future of the British manufacturers would be at stake and they would thus not be in a position to compete other great powers in the continent”. As a result, scheme of thought of Mackinder was converted into protectionism i.e., from the concept of free trade into imperial unity. He argued that “England would be less safe in near future by rapidly approaching strong military powers and their developed resources would also enable them to raise enormously huge army,
navy and fleets”. He further suggested in his work entitled: “the Britain and the British seas”, published in 1902, that the British Empire had to economically nurture, grow alongside the creation of a strong navy” (Mackinder, 1902, p. 343), in other words, he now became the advocate of protectionism.

This uncertain future of the British imperialism persuaded Mackinder to present his paper in 1904 entitled: “Geographical Pivot of History” to the RGS, wherein, he argued that “the age of sea powers was about to end and their existence was susceptible and defenseless as land powers would reemerge” (Mackinder, 1904, p. 421). He analyzed the geostrategic importance of Eurasia, wherein, Mackinder argued that the construction of transcontinental railroad in Central Asia i.e., Heartland would enable a power or allied powers to take advantage of its natural resources. Meanwhile, he suggested the British imperial power to manage to control this huge land with multiple natural resources to build an enormously gigantic fleet (Mackinder, 1904, p. 436).

He furthered his argument by saying that “if Russia or Germany or both in alliance take up the Heartland would thus be able to launch navel attacks through the Baltic and Black seas to capture the Suez Canal. By capturing of the Suez Canal, these powers would be able to geographically expand across the world-Island and eventually dominate the world by conquering the British sea power”. By sensing the impeding rival mercantilism in the continent, Mackinder persuaded the British policy makers to make policies for the encouragement of investment in the Britain in order to build an efficient economy and create an ability to financially support imperial defence of the British (Semmel, 1968, p. 157).

In his paper, he presented a panoramic insight of wide-reaching imperialism, wherein, the Natural Seats of Power set in the closed heartland of Eurasia (Mackinder, 1904, p. 434) and the balance of power was shifting to land powers and, as a result, it would weakened the British Empire. The paper carried a message for the British policy makers to economically integrate imperial territories; enable the British to encounter emerging powers; and prevent it from decline (O Tuathail, 1992, p. 105).

Similarly, the writings of Mackinder also contributed a great deal in the development of imperialism because his geo-strategic and geo-political visions possessed several features of global nature, including for instance, the existence of empire alongside the use of strength and force. Furthermore, he envisaged a strategy that “it is pertinent to limit the access of a power by empowering over and maneuvering the relationship between sea-power of the rimland and land-
power of the heartland and thus exploiting the environmental conditions to maintain domination”.

In 1919, Mackinder’s work was published entitled: “Democratic Ideals and Reality” that helped to shape and design geo-strategic thinking in relation to the rivalries and conflicts of great powers. He still focused on the significance of Heartland alongside the territories, material strength and strategic access. He urged to manage to improvise the British manpower through policy of protectionism because he thought that Russo-German unity would endanger the survival of the British. Subsequently, he concluded his wordings as “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World” at the time of finalizing Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

In this work, he enlarged and extended the area of Heartland with the inclusion of the Baltic Sea, the navigable middle and lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor (Turkey), Armenia, Persia (Iran) Tibet and Mongolia and entire Eastern Europe (Mackinder, 1942, p. 78). His opinion was that “the geographical location of heartland does not permit sea-powers to accessing it under any condition though the western part of it lies without the region of Arctic and Continental drainage” (Mackinder, 1942, p. 78). He provided geographical grounds to the British policy makers with utmost precisions and persuaded them to accept the ground realities of the time (Brian, 1987, p. 167).

Both the British and US policy makers did not pay due heed to Mackinder’s idea of heartland during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, while on the other, the German Institute of Geopolitics gave tremendous importance to the works of Mackinder for promotion of German imperialist designs (Alexandros, 2011, pp. 24-25). During 1938-39, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Russia but Germany did not comply with the provisions of the pact and ultimately attacked the Soviet Russia from flank of the Eastern-Europe. Afterward, it also attacked European part of the Heartland that endangered the interests of USA and the British (Alexandros, 2011, p. 26). With the breaking out of World War II (1939-45), writings of Mackinder on Heartland began to receive tremendous importance, especially during 1941-42, especially from amongst all the quarters of international strategists and scholars.

Subsequently, Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of Foreign Affairs, requested Mackinder in 1942 to produce an article, wherein, he critically reviewed his theory of Heartland under the circumstances of World War II (Alexander, 2015, p. 39). Mackinder agreed to review his theory and produced
an article entitled: the Round World and the Winning of the Peace in July 1943. This article emphasized the degree of the Heartland under the circumstances of World War II. He modified his theory, equally compared area of the Soviet Russia with the area of heartland, by cutting down territory of east of the Yenisei River (Saul, 2003, p. 185). He argued that “It is inescapable from the fact that rise of the Soviet Russia, from the ashes of World War II as victorious, would enable it the greatest land power on the global world. Furthermore, it would be at the strongest defensive and strategic position. The greatest natural citadel on earth is: heartland. It happens first time in history that a garrison is manned with sufficient number and quality” (Mackinder, 1943, pp. 595-605).

He envisaged that “Germany, in future, would be capable enough to provide a wall between the Allied powers and area of Heartland”. He furthered his argument by saying that “France would act like a “defensible bridgehead,” Britain like a “moated aerodrome” and the United States like a “reserve of trained manpower, agriculture and industries” (Mackinder, 1943, pp. 595-605). He assumed that “the Allied powers, such as USA would remain allied with the Soviet Russia for stopping emerging Asiatic powers” (Mackinder, 1943, p. 604). In case of failure of the Allied powers, China as an Asiatic power would probably manage to be in a position to appear and also manage to control the Heartland as “Freedom cannot be taught; it can only be given to those who can use it” (Mackinder, 1943, p. 601) He, therefore, anticipated the Allied powers to remain united with the Soviet Russia, failure of which, China would emerge as regional power alone (Francis, 2002, p. 21).

ASSESSMENT OF AFGHANISTAN’S GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIGHT OF IMPERIAL THEORIES OF HALFORD JOHN MACKINDER

Geopolitics plays a very vital role to determine politico-economic and strategic affairs and their effects on the country. These geographical factors comprise of both material and immaterial elements, such as size, location, economy, functions, natural resources, trade routes, culture and ideology of a country (Francis, 2002, p. 05). For instance, Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1890 said, ‘location of the sea power is proved to be supportive for peacefully conducting relations in trade and commerce.’ He, further, argues that it is ‘the pre-condition for every country to inevitably possess both absolute land and naval powers prior to control the resources of sea’ (Lliopoulos, 2009, p. 08). Consequently, possession of a strong navy is thus become an inevitable requirement of the oceanographic country. Similarly, Mahan also attached a great deal of
importance to the location of a country into littoral zone or its close proximity to the sea for using advantages of extensive coastal line and good harbours (Mahan, 1891, pp. 1-6). The work of Mackinder on geopolitics has, in that way, gained an immense significance as it explored the major concepts of geopolitics, its effects and consequences in this regard.

Since, Mackinder believed in studying the dynamics of the world politics. He knew that the strategic opportunities and resources had unevenly been distributed. He, furthermore, argued that owing to the tremendous advancement in science and technology, countries of the world began to reassess spatial concepts of distribution and military strategies. For instance, countries of the world had been constructing rail roads’ by now depending less upon the naval forces. Mackinder thus shifted the focus of competition and combat amongst rival countries, from sea to local, interiors or land powers of the country (Mackinder, 1904, pp. 421-437).

His writings laid deep imprint on major powers of the world, such as Russia, Germany and USA during twentieth century as these powers had consistently been striving to protect their strategic location (Scott, 2008, p. 02). However, basis of Mackinder’s writings was also to seek protection for geo-strategic interest of the British alone (Chris, 2006, p. 44). According to the famous dictum of Mackinder that “any state or combination of states controlling the area of pivot or heartland would, therefore, be able to control the rest of the world and also would be safe from the invasion of naval forces occupying the littoral zone around”. Moreover, he also strongly recommended to the British policy makers for managing to control the heartland with the intention to easily get access the naturally rich resources of the heartland. For instance, the owners of heartland had thoroughly been expanding the rail road with the purpose to occupy the natural seat of power i.e., heartland. Similarly, he explained that various powers, such as commercial, naval, authoritarian and territorial administrations, of the world had been ensuing their struggle to control the region during the twentieth century (Peter, 2004, pp. 426-439). The tug of war between the Soviet Russia and the British over Afghanistan during the twentieth century can best be cited as an example in this regard.

Indeed, Mackinder had realized the geo-strategic graphical location and significance of the heartland as the centre of Eurasian landmass. The area of heartland was underdeveloped, thinly populated as well as far away from the access of sea powers (Francis, 2002, p. 11). In the recurrently modified theories of 1904, 1919 and 1943, he also demarcated and re-demarcated the geographical boundaries of the heartland, keeping in view the varying geo-strategic interests
of the British according to the changed circumstances. Presently, the area of heartland of Central Asia is, thus, expanded with the inclusion of Afghanistan as it also possesses all the features meeting the criteria for becoming the part of the heartland. For instance, Afghanistan is a land locked, underdeveloped and thinly populated country lying also beyond the access of sea powers. Moreover, its rivers flow into the inland seas and largely inaccessible to Arctic Ocean and most significantly it is the fortress of rich natural resources.

AFGHANISTAN’S GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIGHT OF MACKINDER’S THEORY OF 1904

Central Asia, an expanded geographical zone, is located in the centre of the Eurasia representing a vast continental landlocked region. For instance, it comprises on various countries of Central Asia including: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The internal drainage system of the entire region does not flow into the sea or ocean because of its huge geographical position making it inaccessible to sea or ocean. Moreover, its main rivers run through various lakes, such as Aral Sea, Amu Darya and Lake Balkhash. Its topography also includes: mostly deserts, un-wooded, barren steppes and mountains (Milan, 1990, p. 140).

Political borders of Central Asia that connects geopolitical zone of heartland together with West, East, Central and South Asia at the region. The territory it occupies comprising of four million square kilometers together with sixty million populations (Mackinder, 1904, pp. 421-437). It is significant to briefly describe Mackinder’s own understanding over heartland before moving to assess his geographical theories in the context of Afghanistan. Mackinder articulated his theory differently at different stages of history as each of his theory reflected geo-strategic context of the time. He never changed the core area of the heartland including: Central Russia, Western China, Northern parts of the South Asia (currently, Pakistan) as well as of Iran, the heartland pivot itself including the whole of Central Asia and Afghanistan. Presently, Afghanistan is the hub of geo-strategic activities of the entire world) (Nick, 2013, p. 68).

Mackinder described in his theory that both “Euro-Asia as one of the greatest continents measuring twenty one million in miles of huge land and covering with ice in north and water in elsewhere. Moreover, Nine million square miles of center and north of Euro-Asia include no channel to the ocean, however, this part is considered normally good for horsemen’s mobility. The marginal regions of Euro-Asia, locating at the western and southern parts, are
ranged in gigantic crescent and accessible to shipmen” (Mackinder, 1904, p. 421-437).

Keeping in view the above theory, Afghanistan underwent through course of great game owing to internal infightings as well as the arrival of foreign imperialism during early nineteenth century. For instance, the land of Afghanistan had become combat zone, between the British imperialism and the Czarist Russia, for taking control of Central Asia and, shortly afterward, Mackinder introduced his theory of Pivot in 1904. Prior to this, the British agreed to support the claim of Amir Abdur Rahman to the Afghan throne, following the Anglo-Afghan wars; embarked to create the borders all around accordingly and, consequently, the British also succeeded to establish line of demarcation i.e., Durand Line between the British India and Afghanistan (Meredith, 2007, pp. 81-82). Similarly, both the imperialist powers i.e., the British and the Czar Russia agreed to concede status of Afghanistan as a buffer zone between them on one side and on the other both the powers continued to take control of the land for dominating the entire globe in future (Keith, 2007, pp. 82-97).

Similarly, Lord Curzon (1899-1905), the then viceroy of the British India, also expressed that “Afghanistan, including other parts of Central Asia, is a great chessboard upon which external and regional players of the world play great game for the purpose of dominating the entire world”. Hence, these expressions of Mackinder and Curzon, regarding the region, showed systematic geo-strategic interest of the British in the region, especially in Afghanistan (Pirouz, 2001, p. 10). According to Parker, it was immeasurably significant for the British to stop Germany moving ahead in comparison to Czarist Russia and, similarly, the British also made some arrangements to have ties of friendship with the closest European neighbour of Czarist Russia in this regard.

The paper of Mackinder’s pivot' identified to discover major potential threats to international geo-strategic position of the British. These included: trend of shifting equilibrium in favour of land power by replacing sea power instead and, thus, the predominance of the British would deal with potential threats from the continental powers, such as Czarist Russia and Germany (Cyril, 1991, pp. 15-16). Meanwhile, Mackinder also anticipated that the British would be in alliance with the Czarist Russia and Germany in near future. As a result, he recommended the British to adopt strategy of making an alliance with Czarist Russia. Subsequently, the British concluded an Anglo-Russian alliance in 1907 that finally settled to share political influence of identical nature in the region including Afghanistan (Pascal, 2004, pp. 330-336).
Presently, Afghanistan is situated in the heart of Asia, surrounded by China lying on its North-East, Central Asian States on its North, Iran on its West and Pakistan on its East. Landlocked Afghanistan has, over the centuries, been the combat zone for the invading foreign armies from all quarters of the world. For instance, it had been a buffer zone between the British from the South side, and the Czarist Russia from the North side during nineteenth century. Being centre of the great game, both the imperial powers always used it to ascertain and retain their influence in Central Asia alongside various other important trading routes. Surely, Louis Dupree has, aptly described it as “Afghanistan was the 'land of the mud curtain', where the country, like its fortified villages, could be set up against outsiders and which, no sooner breached, was rebuilt” (Louis, 1973, p. 249).

AFGHANISTAN’S GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIGHT OF MACKINDER’S THEORY OF 1919

During the course of civil war in Russia in 1919, Mackinder was appointed as the British High Commissioner for the region of South Russia. He was assigned to persuade wing of Russian Mensheviks⁴ to endanger the cause of the Russian Bolsheviks. He subsequently realized that the British must strive to stop the Russian Bolsheviks⁵ as they were stepping ahead to capture lower Asia i.e., the British India and, consequently, it would lead them to strategically exploit the location of the heartland (Colin, 2013, p. 28). According to the report to the cabinet, he anticipated “the growing influence of Russian Czardom, by now, in the shape of working class under the banner of Bolshevism”. According to his speech in the House of Commons on May 20, 1920, he concluded that “the arrival of Bolshevik Russia would lead to create an environment endangering the interests of the flourishing democracies of the world” (Mark, 1999, p. 77)

Meanwhile, he published his masterpiece on international politics entitled: “Democratic Ideals and Reality” in which he introduced his modified theory of 1919. By now, he enlarged and extended the area of Heartland by including: the Baltic Sea, the navigable middle and lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor (Turkey), Armenia, Persia (Iran) Tibet and Mongolia and entire Eastern Europe (Mackinder, 1942, p. 78). His opinion was that ‘the

⁴ “Menshevik” meaning minority wing in Russian Social Labour Democrat Part (RSLDP) in 1903

⁵ “Bolshevik” meaning majority wing in Russian Social Labour Democrat Part (RSLDP), the Bolsheviks came into power in Russia in 1917.
geographical location of heartland does not permit sea-powers to accessing it under any condition though the western part of it lies without the region of Arctic and Continental drainage” (Mackinder, 1942, p. 78). At this juncture, he provided geographical grounds to the British policy makers with utmost precisions and persuaded them to accept the ground realities of the time (Brian, 1987, p. 167). For instance, he stressed the significance of the issue in the light of great game by giving detail of the situation in his own following words:

“We were opposed to the Russian Czardom, because Russia was the dominating, threatening force both in East Europe and the Heartland for a half century. We were opposed to the wholly German Kaiserdom, because Germany took the lead from the Czardom, and would then have crushed the revolting Slavs, and dominated East Europe and the Heartland” (Mackinder, 1942, p. 99).


Straightforwardly, he reiterated the geo-strategic position of the heartland proclaiming that:

“It is the strongest citadel on surface of the earth, the reservoir and centrality of natural resources to lead huge trans-continental area. The only way of entry to this region was: south-western part via the corridor of grassy-land. Any power that could succeed in controlling effectively the key of supremacy and hegemony i.e. Heartland, might rise as a world power to lead the rest of the powers in whole of world of the inner or marginal crescent. As a result, it might emerge the leader of the world island if it succeeded in subjugating every single state of the marginal crescent. And, if it succeeded in ruling the world island, in turn, would thereby command the world including two-thirds of the land area and seven-eighths of the population of the world” (Collin, 1998, p. 10).

Meanwhile, the geo-strategic location of Afghanistan was not ignored by the British with effect from 1904 to 1919. For instance, the British, just shortly
before the presentation of Mackinder’s theory in 1919, was successful in keeping Afghan Amir Habibullah Khan neutral during World War I, notwithstanding the persuasion of the Germans for flaring up anti-British sentiments. Nevertheless, the neutral stance of Afghanistan soon changed after stimulating Turkey towards Afghanistan (Hamid, 2013, p. 264). For instance, the arrival of the Turko-German mission to Kabul in September 1915 stirred the Amir of Afghanistan. However, he sustained to insist upon neutral status of Afghanistan, for instance, he reassured neutral status of Afghanistan, for a while, in 1916 and, thus, it enabled Afghanistan to receive increased subsidy from the British (Radhey, 2002, p. 422). Subsequently, for instance, he refused to provide support to the Bolsheviks in overthrowing of the Czar during 1917 and, thus, took side with the British. During the course of the Bolshevik October Revolution in 1917, land of Afghanistan was used as the combat zone between the British and the Czar Russia, each of the imperialist country sought to simultaneously influence for possessing control in the heartland of Asia (Shaista, ND, p. 102). By supporting the British, Amir Habibullah was expecting to achieve full independence of Afghanistan at the end of the World War I, on the contrary, he was assassinated on February 20, 1919 owing to pro-British stance and his unrelenting support to the British against Turkey (Ludwig, 2010, p. 14).

King Amanullah (1919-1929), the successor of Amir Habibullah, soon proclaimed to have sovereign status of Afghanistan free from the control and influence of foreign powers. Notwithstanding past influence of foreign governments, Amir Amanullah wished to have independent Afghanistan from the influence of foreign powers (Cary, 2001, p. 104). During late nineteenth century, imperial powers maneuvered to influence Afghanistan, for instance, the British pressurized Afghanistan to conclude the treaties, such as Gandamak and the Durand Line, in 1879 and 1893 respectively. Similarly, the border agreements of the Czar Russia with Afghanistan, such as the land settlement of the Amu-Darya in 1888 and, subsequently, the Pamir settlement in 1895 and so on. Hence, these border agreements, established by the imperialist powers, grew strong resentments and abhorrence in the hearts of Afghan ruler and Afghan nationalist forces (Reunion, ND, pp. 88-89).

Consequently, Amir Amanullah adopted a different strategy, unlike his father, launched a war against the British, popularly known as third Anglo-Afghan War in May 1919. His main rationale behind attacking the British was to ultimately get Afghan’s foreign policy under their control. In the ensuing struggle, King Amanullah succeeded to obtain independence of Afghanistan and
thus concluded a famous treaty with the British i.e., Treaty of Rawalpindi on May 1919 (Khalil, 2014, p. 10). Thus, it propelled the British to recognize independence of Afghanistan and keep the former within the bounds of Khyber Pass. Since, Afghanistan had already developed relations with the Soviet Russia even before the conclusion of the treaty, however, the treaty emphasized independence of Afghanistan on one hand and on the other it was seemed ending of the Great Game between the imperialist powers (Gladston, ND, p. 104).

On one side, the British were engaged in fighting with the Afghans, whereas, the Soviet Russia began to establish agreeable relations with its neighboring Afghanistan on the other. The Soviet Russia also made efforts to create friendly environment for its Muslim inhabitants. Moreover, it also took initiatives to seek and foster friendly relations, being significant part of its strategy, with Muslim countries around the Soviet Russia. The example of Afghanistan can be best cited in this regard as Amir Amanullah sent his envoy to the Soviet Russia for seeking their assistance in 1919 (Angelo, 2007, p. 19). To counter Afghan-Soviet alliance, the British increased constraints on free flow of trade items from the British India to Afghanistan. Efforts were intensified, on both sides, to cause friction because the British denied to accept Afghan’s control over tribal belt lying in the British zone (Reunion, ND, p. 90).

Amir Amanullah ultimately urged to get rid of the traditional isolationist policy of Afghanistan and replaced it by developing friendly relation with its neighbouring countries. To counter his progressive reforms, the British supported several local uprisings in different parts of the country, for instance, religious uprising of Khost region in 1924 (Homayun, 2009, p. 20). Similarly, the British trained Habibullah from Tajik origin, alias Bacha-e-Saqao (son of water carrier) and helped him to strongly resist Amanullah’s progressive rule by uniting anti-Amanullah forces and, therefore, attacked the capital of Afghanistan in 1929. During entire rule, Amanullah adopted a balanced approach to deal both with the Soviet Russia and the British, however, he was failed to do so as the opposition succeeded to charge him as puppet of the Soviet Russia (Douglas, 1999, pp. 14-16).

In ensuing struggle, Zahir Shah was succeeded to the throne as Afghan ruler and thus received acknowledgment by becoming member of League of Nations in 1934 (Thomas, 2010, p. 199). Meanwhile, USA also acknowledged Afghanistan as an independent country. Zahir Shah adopted the policy of making foreign relations with Germany, Japan and neighbouring countries of Afghanistan on one hand and on the other avoided to revive relations with the
Soviet Russia and the British both. His ultimate aim, by joining hands with the aforementioned imperial powers, was to build up Afghan army, develop economy, system of transportation and acquire advance methods of communication in Afghanistan. For instance, several German factories and business projects came into being in Afghanistan in 1935. Secondly, the example of Treaty of Saadabad, concluded on July 9, 1937, can also be cited in this regard, wherein, Afghanistan established regional ties and cordial relations with neighboring countries, such as Iran and Turkey (Amin, 2004, pp. 108-109).

From 1919 to 1939, Afghanistan had been remained hub of all the imperial activities owing to its geo-strategic position, abundance of natural resources and en route to Central Asia.

AFGHANISTAN’S GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIGHT OF MACKINDER’S THEORY OF 1943

The idea of heartland had been less influential and tempting to the policy makers of the British and United States of America during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, nevertheless, it succeeded to gain a good deal of significance at German Institute of Geopolitics (Alexandros, 2011, p. 24). Shortly afterward, German policy makers as well as its politicians eagerly received Mackinder’s theoretical outline with a view to advance its expansionist programme (Alexandros, 2011, p. 24). During this time, when World War II broke out and writings of Mackinder on heartland began to receive tremendous importance, especially during 1941-42, from amongst all the quarters of international strategists and scholars (Alexandros, 2011, p. 24).

Meanwhile, literature, highlighting the significance of geography in history, was being produced. This literature included: News Week, the Life and Reader’s Digest. Subsequently, the work of Mackinder i.e., Democratic Ideals and Reality was reprinted and, shortly afterward, Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of Foreign Affairs, requested Mackinder in 1942 for writing an article to review and re-modify his theory of Heartland in the context of World War II (Alexander, 2015, p. 39).

Accordingly, he finally agreed to produce an article entitling: the Round World and the Winning of the Peace in July 1943, which highlighted and validated the magnitude of the Heartland in the context of World War II. In 1943, his article created stirrings in the West (Saul, 2003, p. 185) as.

“It is inescapable from the fact that rise of the Soviet Russia, from the ashes of World War II as victorious, would enable it the greatest land power on the global world. Furthermore, it would
be at the strongest defensive and strategic position. The greatest natural citadel on earth is: heartland. Historically, it happens first time that a garrison is manned with sufficient number and quality” (Mackinder, 1943, 595-605).

He envisaged that “Germany, in future, would be capable enough to provide a wall between the Allied powers and area of Heartland”. He furthered his argument by saying that “France would act like a “defensible bridgehead,” Britain like a “moated aerodrome” and the United States like a “reserve of trained manpower, agriculture and industries” (Mackinder, 1943, 595-605). He assumed that “the Allied powers, such as USA would remain allied with the Soviet Russia for stopping emerging Asiatic powers”. For instance, Asiatic power, such as China would manage to be able to emerge and control the Heartland in case of failure of the Allied powers as “Freedom cannot be taught; it can only be given to those who can use it.” (Mackinder, 1943, 595-605) Hence, he sent a message, via this anticipation, to the Allied powers that they were required to remain integrated with the Soviet Russia for creating balance of power as well as containing China to Asia alone (Francis, 2002, p. 21).

Theories of Mackinder with regard to the heartland attached a great deal of importance to the area of Heartland because of its geo-strategic position, enormous region with huge population, inner drainage and unapproachable to open sea. Surrounded by physical barriers, the area was effectively guarded and protected from external attack. Due to its vastness in size, food self-sufficiency and abundance in raw material, it had, thereby, acquired the powerful status. Side by side, its far-off location from sea also enhanced its position that proved to be guarded against foreign attack (Debabrata, 1975, p. 199). To fulfill the requirements of the time, Mackinder foresaw development and transformation in the traditional means of communication, such as horses and camels into a huge network of railroad. Indeed, this vast area, existing between India and China and; Russia and the West, would effectively play its decisive role in creating balance amongst international and regional powers (Ramesh, 2000, p. 187).

Hence, these powers could better understand the meaning and essence of Mackinder’s famous dictum regarding geo-strategic significance of the heartland. Indeed, Mackinder urged the British policy makers to ponder over the matter and he advocated it for the purpose of securing the geo-strategic and political interests of the British in future. In a nutshell, his ultimate urge was to effectively create balance amongst international powers and preserve the
interest of the British, via Eurasia, from Germany and Russia (Ramesh, 2000, p. 187).

It was during early phases of World War II that Afghanistan hurriedly declared its neutral stance on August 17, 1940. On one side, Afghanistan announced its neutral status and on the other it allowed German representatives to be stationed in Afghanistan, which greatly annoyed the Allied forces. However, Afghanistan had extremely been under great pressure of the Allied powers and the Soviet Russia, which insisted upon expelling representatives of Central powers from Afghanistan as quickly as possible. Notwithstanding its announcement for maintaining neutral status during the World War II, King Zahir Shah eventually issued order to drive out the representatives of the Central powers from Afghanistan (Yahia, 2013, p. 97).

Following World War I, Afghanistan established cherished relations with USA by joining irrigation venture i.e., the Helmand Valley Project. USA had, thus, provided a good deal of financial support to Afghanistan (Misdaq, ND, p. 97). It was during this period that Afghanistan also began eagerly accepting financial support from Germany, Italy and Japan. Though, it showed refusal to the Soviet Russia for permanently admitting Russian trade missions on one side, however, it showed no reluctance to Germany on the other. For instance, there began regular air service on weekly basis between Germany and Afghanistan in 1937 and air route was, later on, extended to China as well. Similarly, German companies established their offices at Kabul as well as built some of the factories. Moreover, German mining experts seemed busy in exploring mineral resources at the sensitive site of Paktia province, situating at the opposite of the British Indian tribal area (Gerhard, 2008, pp. 162-163). Furthermore, German anthropologists also began to conduct surveys in Nuristan and Afghan students were also sent to Japan for further studies, hence, all these created atmosphere of suspicions and fears for the British Indian government (Jeffery, 2003, p. 69).

However, invasion of Germany over the Soviet Russia changed the equation in June 1941 and, subsequently; the British together with the Soviet Russia attacked to occupy Iran and, consequently, removed Shah of Iran on his refusal to drive out spies of Germany. On expelling German representatives from Afghanistan, the British India, in lieu of accepting request, increased substantial sale of agriculture to Afghanistan and, correspondingly, Afghanistan also enhanced to export wool to the United States and, moreover, established diplomatic relations with USA together with major Allied power. Shah Mahmud, new premier of Afghanistan, sided with the victorious USA, at the
end of World War II, to be the partner for future development (Wahab, ND, p. 116).

During his rule, Afghanistan initiated Helmand Valley Project (1946–53), in cooperation with San Francisco engineering firm Morrison-Knudsen, for the purpose of increasing productivity in agriculture and industry through installation of hydroelectric power. However, the project could not achieve more of its goals, notwithstanding financial support from the USA. Nevertheless, the project succeeded to provide training to a large number of Afghan mechanics including numerous skilled workers (Jagmohan, 2004, pp. 143-146). As a result of the failure of the Helmand project, the interest of USA was thus minimized to further invest in Afghanistan and, therefore, USA was declined in selling arms to Afghanistan despite of personal request of the then premier. USA adopted the plea that these arms would be used against Pakistan (ally of USA) and, therefore, it would also facilitate USSR to intervene in Afghanistan (Borer, ND, pp. 76-77). This clash of world powers has continued till date and Afghanistan’s geography has become the springboard for operation against the opponents.

CONCLUSION
The imperial perspective of geography is concerned with the economic consolidation and political domination. From this perspective, geography is considered as the discipline of Empire that analyzes geographical conditions, spatial relations and environment. Consequently, it leads to reproduce specific social formation of imperialism, wherein, division of the world into sphere of influence and exploitation of natural resources and environment come into existence. Halford John Mackinder, as a free trade imperialist, described his extraordinary insight over the imperialism of capital export, however, he began to reveal his sudden thought on protectionism i.e., a rival neo-mercantile imperialism. From the above geographical theories of Mackinder, it is well established that Afghanistan had always been remained the geographical pivot of history inviting several empires to develop rivalries and confrontations due to its close proximity to Central Asia.

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