The OSCE and the Strategic Challenges of Globalisation
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On 25 January 1904 Halford Mackinder read a paper called 'The Geographical Pivot of History' to the Royal Geographical Society in London.[1] 1904 was a time of deep anxiety in world politics. On 8 February the Russian-Japanese war began and in expectation of a future conflict with Germany Britain and France agreed on the *Entente Cordiale* in April. In his lecture to the Royal Society Mackinder tried to give a sense of direction to the flurry of present events by presenting them in a geographical and historical context, and thus he in many ways invented what we today know as 'geopolitics'. A hundred years later we have again arrived at a time of anxiety in world politics, and rereading Mackinder's paper it is striking how familiar our anxieties are to the ones he laid out. But perhaps most striking to the members of the OSCE is the way Mackinder identified the OSCE-area as the strategic pivot of the world.

In 1904 Mackinder asked his audience at the Royal Society to take a look at a world-map with the Euro-Asiatic region projected in the middle. From this point of view the landmass from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Arctic Ocean to Indian Ocean constitutes a 'world island'. Mackinder believed this to be the strategic 'heartland' of the world. From the earliest times, he argued, the majority of the world populations and the great centres of commerce and culture had been placed on the costal rim of the 'world island', in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, Arabia, India, Vietnam and China. Mackinder argued that because Genghis Khan and other nomadic leaders of Central Asia had the strategic mobility, which the farmers of the heartland's periphery lacked, they were able to conquer the lands of the periphery.

The rise of Western European naval power in the 16th and 17th century changed that. Instead of importing security threats from the heartland, Mackinder argued that Europe had been able to export its problems to the rest of the world. In terms of military security, the Seventh Years' war was the first European war to be largely fought on non-European territory.[2] In economic terms, the excess population, which the industrial revolution created in Europe, was exported to the colonies, thus avoiding social instability at home. However, by the twentieth century Mackinder argued that the technological break-throughs in communications and transport had furthered the European colonisation of the world to an extent where there was no open land

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[1] Halford J. Mackinder *The Scope and Methods of Geography and The Geographical Pivot of History*, reprinted with an introduction by E. W. Gilbert, The Royal Geographical Society, London.

[2] The war was fought 1756-63 in Germany as well as in North America and India.

left to export problems to, or rather that what we today would call the 'globalisation' of the world had become so great that any problem exported would quickly return as a boomerang to the region of export. Mackinder noted:

> 'Every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements of the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence.'[3]

One can identify three conditions for a global security environment in which security concerns are 'sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe' in Mackinder's lecture to the Royal Society:

> (1) Global security environment
> (2) Proliferation of technology
> (3) New security agents

The global security environment came into being when the heartland and periphery could influence one another a the same time instead of taking turns in exporting security problems to one another. With regard to the proliferation of technology, Mackinder described how the railroad was opening the plains of Central Asia to industrialization, thus generating huge resources which could be harnessed into military power, thereby once again making the centre of the 'world island' the strategic heartland of the world. Mackinder also described how the industrial revolution made military power much more devastating than before. That point was to be proved ten years later in the First World War. Finally, it was the rise of 'new security agents' that motivated Mackinder's lecture and generated a huge interest in it. Being the dominant power at the time, Britain was concerned about the fact that the industrial revolution was giving new resources to Germany, Russia, Japan and the United States. Mackinder concluded that the industrial revolution opened up the heartland. In Mackinder's day this meant that Russia would be the world power of tomorrow seriously challenging the British Empire's possessions along the world island's seaboard in the Middle East, India and the Far East.

In 2004, Mackinder's geopolitics and notions of 'civilization' and 'barbarism' seem embarrassingly out of date, but his description of a globalised world where security concerns are 'sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe' seem more fitting and acute than perhaps at any time in the twentieth century, which Mackinder aimed to prophesize about, because the world wars and the Cold War prevented the 'world island' from being a single political system.

      In 2004 the nations that make up what Mackinder called the pivot area of the heartland are members of the OSCE, and because the organization also includes the European states the strategic heartland of the world is represented in the organization. From that point of view Mackinder would not be the least surprised that the nations of North America find it in their

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[3] Mackinder, *op. cit.,* p. 30.

interest to be part of the OSCE as well. The three conditions for a global security environment Mackinder described in 1904 may also describe the challenges the OSCE member states faces today.

Global security environment. The period of pre-1914 globalisation, which Mackinder described, did end with the world wars and globalisation only picked up again in the 1980s. The end of the Cold War came to mark the acceleration of the globalisation process. Now the standards of good governance are becoming global, as are the demands on economies to be guided by free and open markets. In security terms this translates into an increased interdependence between the nations of the world. In Mackinder's terms, 'every explosion of social forces … will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements of the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence.'

The CSCE served an important purpose in bringing this new, globalised world order into being by ensuring a stable transition from the Cold War to a global peace. But ensuring stability was not only a matter of ending the Cold War, it has become a matter of making sure that globalisation does not destabilise states or produce new threats. Today no system of alliances or ideological confrontation is preventing the proliferation of technologies and the creation of markets across state-borders. Today it is possible to freely exchange ideas, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, people and goods across the entire 'heartland' in the way Mackinder imagined the railway would make possible for the first time in human history. However, these new possibilities also make possible human trafficking, transnational crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction technologies, the spread of radical Islam and give new possibilities to terrorists.

Proliferation of technology. One may argue that the heart of globalisation is the way information, communication and transport technologies are making the transaction costs of the international system increasingly smaller. In other words, it becomes ever easier to talk and trade. However, this also means that it becomes ever easier to talk about how to make weapons of mass-destruction and to trade the know-how and technologies used for producing such weapons. The spread of weapons of mass-destruction is the result of economic and technological development that makes it possible for many more nations to make what only the most advanced nations were able to produce not that many years ago. But new technologies are also spreading. The ability to fight high-tech wars, as the one the US-led coalition fought in Iraq in 2003, is proliferating with the development of information and communication technologies at the centres of economic growth all over the world.

The OSCE-area borders states with an interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction and the OSCE member states hold most of the world's know-how on these weapons. An effective coordination in this forum is thus the key to preventing proliferation. In time, the OSCE might wish to engage in arms control in order to prevent an arms race in regard to the new weapons platforms associated with the so-called revolution in military affairs.

New security agents. Mackinder was concerned about the way the technological development would enable Russia to be the pivot strategic player and thus out-manoeuvre Britain in the 'great game' of world politics. Today this concern for rising great powers has been replaced by the concern for a type of non-state security agents: terrorists. Globalisation makes it possible for terrorists to operate. While some people, including transnational anarchist groups, in

Mackinder's day were also concerned about the dominance of globalised values and the power of the great powers of the day, they were not able to strike back the way al-Qaida was able to strike New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. Globalisation gives terrorists abilities to project power with substantial casualties for their opponent in ways only states were able to do before. Al-Qaida is the first organisation to use this ability systematically, but it will hardly be the last.

The governments of the OSCE are vulnerable to terrorism, but they are only able to prevent existing terrorist groups form operating effectively by coordinating their effort to stem the rise of terrorist organisations. Because the OSCE countries form a coherent geographical block and have experience in cooperation and the peaceful mediation of conflict the OSCE may also provide a platform for attempts to stabilise and 'democratize' the Middle East and thus address at least some of the underlying causes that may prevent new terrorist organisations from appearing.

In 2004, as in 1904, globalisation is challenging the security and stability of world order. This is not because globalisation is a bad thing. On the contrary, globalisation produces new wealth and new freedoms in most of the world. However, globalisation is also a source of conflict because it makes states more vulnerable by creating a global security environment and facilitating the proliferation of weapons technology. But most importantly, globalisation gives new actors the possibility for destabilising world order. In 1914 the first period of globalisation ended in the First World War. As Mackinder had predicted, the industrial revolution destabilised the strategic balance of the heartland, thus once again making Europe an importer for security concerns rather than an exporter. Today this is happening again. Terrorism is but a terrible example of the way 'every explosion of social forces … will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe' in a globalised international system and how these echoes of insecurity can jeopardise the stability and security of the international system itself.

There are many differences between the world of 2004 and the world of 1904, but perhaps one of the most profound differences is the fact that forces of globalisation is no longer allowed to create instability in the heartland. The OSCE is organising the area which Mackinder deemed strategical pivotal by creating means of settling conflicts peacefully, ensuring stable governance, coordinating the member states' attempts to contain human trafficking and transnational crime while keeping potential arms races at bay by the CFE-treaty. On these and many other areas the OSCE is a source of calm in a time of anxiety. The great challenge of the OSCE is to keep pace with the rise of new security agents, the proliferation of weapons technology and the need for stability in a globalised security environment in order to continue to provide a relevant forum for discussing the strategic issues of today and tomorrow.