Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis?

Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells on Britain in the global industrial era

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Abstract. At the zenith of British power at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a widespread recognition that Britain's position in the emerging global industrial inter-state system was increasingly precarious and that widespread adjustments would be needed. One solution, the 'imperial federalism' of Seeley and Mackinder, proposed the political integration of the scattered British settler colonies into a 'Greater Britain'. Alternatively, Wells predicted that Britain would become integated into an Anglo-American 'greater synthesis', and that Europe would be unified on 'Swiss confederal' rather than German authoritarian lines. These proposals and prophesies were based upon interpretations of the changing material context composed of technology interacting with geography, and were seriously flawed. Extensive debates on these schemes indicate that the range of grand strategic choice was broader than that conceptualized by contemporary realism. The failure of British national integration due to geographic factors and the endurance of the Anglo-American special relationship casts the roles of the nation-state and the Western liberal order in a new perspective.

Introduction

A century ago the British Empire, encompassing nearly a quarter of the earth, stood at its zenith. The decline and disintegration of this sprawling edifice has been steady and is now nearly complete. In part because of haunting similarities with the contemporary United States, the causes of its decline and the response of British policy to this decline remain of central interest to both political scientists and historians. British decline is a particularly rich case study in the relationship between grand strategic choice and international theory, for unlike the largely silent demise of other great empires, the downward trajectory of British power was accompanied by debate over alternatives often supported with sophisticated theoretical claims about world politics.

In recent years, a number of scholars with a realist orientation to international politics have produced analyses of British decline and policy choice with pointed lessons for contemporary American policy choices.[1] For Robert Gilpin the British Empire serves as a prime example of overextension and hegemonic decline.[2] Paul Kennedy's widely discussed work elaborates upon this view, pointedly comparing the earlier British predicament to the contemporary United States,[3] and Aaron Friedberg has provided a detailed examination of how British imperial military

[1] For an outstanding assessment of the analogy, see: John A. Hall, 'Will the United States Decline as did Britain?' in Michael Mann (ed.), *The Rise and Decline of the Nation State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 114–45.
[2] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[3] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).

planners understood and reacted to the changing international environment in the years before World War I.[4] The limitation of these realist reconstructions and interpretations is not their inaccuracy, but their incompleteness: they fail to capture the scope of the great British debate over alternative policies. These realist analyses omit the competing theoretical issues at stake in the failure of the British system, and thus may be teaching the wrong lessons for contemporary American grand strategy.

In order to recover neglected parts of this debate and extract their theoretical implications, this article examines two diametrically opposed strategies for Britain: John Seeley's and Halford Mackinder's conception of a 'Greater Britain' to be constituted by the federation of the white settler colonies of the Empire with the United Kingdom, and H. G. Wells' conception of the integration of Britain and the United States into a 'Greater Synthesis'. These ideas were developed in many publications, and they were intensively debated at the discussion group of leading Edwardian intellectuals, the 'Coefficients' organized by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, that included, in addition to Mackinder and Wells, Bertrand Russell, Lord Haldane, Leo Amery and others, all seeking, as Wells later put it, 'a common conception of the Empire'.[5] This article seeks to understand and assess the links between their theoretical understandings of world politics and their strategic proposals.

Although their proposals were not implemented, the leaders in these debates were neither unworldly academics nor isolated public voices. The general public, leading intellectuals, and government officials discussed and debated their ideas, and organizations dedicated to their realization were established. Sir John Seeley, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, spelled out his ideas in *The Expansion of England*, and at his death was described as having altered 'the general political thinking of a nation' more than any previous historian.[6] Halford Mackinder, now best-known for his contributions to geography and geopolitics, also spoke to wide audiences as a member of parliament, director of the London School of Economics, Professor of Geography at Oxford, and tireless lecturer and activist.[7] The protean intellectual H. G. Wells, among the most influential thinkers of the Edwardian period, produced a torrent of books, articles and lectures that reached a wide public audience.[8] Although their ideas coincide only partially with what contemporary American realists take to be the real choices for Britain, their interpretations, goals, and programmes were an unmistakably real part of the late Victorian and Edwardian debate about Britain's future.

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[4] Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[5] H.G. Wells, *Imperialism and the Open Conspiracy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), p.10.

[6] Seeley's influence described in John Gross, 'Introduction', to J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Also see two recent full-length studies: Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Gustav Adolf Rein, *Sir John Seeley: A Study of the Historian* (Wolfeboro, NH: Longwood Academic, 1987).

[7] Two recent works describe in detail Mackinder's life and influence: W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Brian Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University, 1986).

[8] For Wells' influence, see: G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 4; and George Orwell, 'Hitler, Wells, and the World State', *Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 1968).

These writers shared three assumptions: (1) the British system was an anomaly in world politics that defied simple categorization,[9] (2) new material forces were creating major threats and opportunities, and (3) fundamental changes were needed to avoid ruin. But they conceive two radically different trajectories for Britain in the new century. Seeley and Mackinder proposed the creation of a 'Greater Britain', an enlarged British nation-state in which the white settler colonies would be federated with the United Kingdom. Wells criticized the viability of such schemes and predicted the emergence of an Anglo-American 'greater synthesis', a political association stronger than inter-state alliance, but not so strong as a state, that would be centred in northeastern North America, and would encompass the English-speaking parts of the British system and perhaps Scandinavia. Seeley and Mackinder hoped to end the exceptional character of the British system by constructing a federal nation-state modelled after the United States, while Wells hoped to build upon its exceptionally cosmopolitan character to construct a world order in which the nation-state was increasingly marginal. All three believed that such a fundamental restructuring of the British system was feasible and they provided programmes to achieve it.

In addition to its historical interest, this debate raises three important issues of enduring concern for theorists of world politics. First, this debate provides insights into the nation-state's prerequisites and role in contemporary world politics. The dominant view in contemporary international theory is that the nation-state has become nearly universal, as groups with shared national identity have sought and found sovereign states. The collapse of the multinational British system into a plethora of nation-states would seem to match this expected pattern, except for two anomalies. Contrary to the hopes and expectations of Seeley, Mackinder, and other British nationalists, the 'white settler colonies' (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) which contemporaries took to be parts of the British 'nation', have subsequently created independent states. At the same time, Britain and the United States, sharing language and political traditions, have engaged in far-reaching collaborations. This in turn raises several intriguing possibilities: did one of the most powerful national groupings fail to achieve statehood? Or is the most important and successful inter-state alliance of the twentieth century actually a type of non-state national unification?

Second, the alternatives in this debate are more fundamental than today encompassed by 'grand strategy', taking this phrase to mean all the measures a state might take in foreign policy (appeasement, alliance, retrenchment, military build-up) and domestic policy (institutional reforms) in order to achieve its goals.[10] In contrast, the debate between Seeley and Mackinder and Wells concerned what Britain was or

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[9] As Seeley puts it, 'Our Empire is not an Empire at all in the ordinary sense of the word'. *The Expansion of England*, p. 44. The widely held view that the British Empire was distinctive was stated by Ramsey Muir: 'This amazing political structure, which refuses to fall within any of the categories of political science, which is an empire and not yet an empire, a state and yet not a state, a supernation incorporating in itself an incredible variety of peoples and races, is not a structure which has been designed by the ingenuity of man …' Ramsey Muir, *The Expansion of Europe: The Culmination of Modern History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), p. 232.

[10] For analyses of the components of grand strategy, see: Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (eds.), *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Barry R. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 1–33; and Randell L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 65–83.

might become: a nation-state, an empire, or part of a 'greater synthesis'. They debated *who* should be a member of *what* kind of British polity as well as about *how* this polity should act. In short, this debate raises issues of what might be called polity ontology as well as statecraft instrumentality.

Third, this debate sheds light on how material forces largely independent of human control shape political choice by creating constraints and opportunities. Like other 'geopolitical' thinkers of their time, Seeley, Mackinder and Wells thought that new industrial technologies, particularly of transportation and communication, were fundamentally altering the possibilities for political association. But they interpreted these material developments in very different ways. Was the world entering a new 'landpower age' where extended sea-based political structures would be obsolete? Or did the 'abolition of distance' by steam and electricity mean that Britain's previously far-flung possessions were now effectively contiguous, as Seeley and Mackinder hoped? Did the technological conquest of climatic constraints mean that the vast and sparsely peopled spaces of the British colonies could become major contributors to British power?

The New World politics and the British predicament

Both to contemporaries and subsequent historians, the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the year 1890 in particular, marked the beginning of a new era in human affairs characterized by global or world-wide scope.[11] New developments, particularly the emergence of non-European great powers, the continental size of the United States and Russia, and the closure of the world frontier, indicated that a new era had begun. This emerging global-scope system would have no frontiers and would be larger in scope than any previous system. As Mackinder famously observed:

Whether we think of the physical, economic, military, or political interconnection of things on the surface of the globe, we are now for the first time presented with a closed system. The known does not fade any longer through the half-known into the unknown; there is no longer elasticity of political expansion in land beyond the Pale. Every shock, every disaster or superfluity, is now felt even to the antipodes, and may indeed return from the antipodes.[12]

The term 'geopolitics', with its connotations of violent conflict, global scope, and geographic and technological materialism, captures the main themes of the intellectual climate of the period.[13] The efforts by Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells to chart the British predicament and design an appropriate strategy were part of an transnational effort to grasp the origins and implications of the emerging global-

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[11] The best overview of the beginning of the global era remains Geoffrey Barraclough, 'From the European Balance of Power to the Age of World Politics', ch. 4 in *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (London: C.A. Watts, 1964).

[12] Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (New York: Henry Holt, 1919), p. 40; For further analysis of closure, see: Gerry Kearns, 'Fin de Siecle Geopolitics: Mackinder, Hobson, and Theories of Global Closure', in Peter J. Taylor (ed.), *Political Geography in the Twentieth Century* (London: Belhaven, 1993), pp. 9–30.

[13] Ladis K. D. Kristof, 'The Origin and Evolution of Geopolitics', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 4 (March 1960), pp. 15–51.

scope system. Their ideas about the new global situation were similar to the concerns of many American (Henry Adams, Homer Lea, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Frederick Jackson Turner), and German (Friedrich Ratzel, Hans Delbruck, Otto Hintze, and Max Lenz) geopolitical writers.[14]

In attempting to explain the origins of the emerging global politics, virtually every geopolitical writer pointed to material forces, particularly the new technologies of transportation, communication, and production made possible by the industrial revolution. These new capabilities were understood to be altering the scale of human activities in a myriad of significant ways and thus redefining the impact of geographic constraints and opportunities. In line with this general tendency, Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells were particularly concerned with how the new technologies would interact with the largest physical features of the earth to shape world politics. All three announced their materialist orientation in unmistakable terms. Seeley argued that his contemporaries are not sufficiently 'alive to the vast results which are flowing in politics from modern mechanism'[15] because of the prevalence of approaches to history based upon literary models.

The collapse of space was widely regarded as the most important feature of the new era. Ralph Waldo Emerson's canny observation that the railroad had 'abolished distance',[16] had become by the end of the century the defining feature of an epoch for many, a central theme of what the historian Stephen Kern has recently labelled the 'culture of time and space' of the era.[17] Seeley argued that the general tendency of the time was to 'bring together what is remote' a trend which 'favors large political unions'.[18] These developments were made possible by science and technology which 'has given to the political organism a new circulation, which is steam, and a new nervous system, which is electricity'.[19] 'Distance is abolished by science'.[20] These trends were most visible in the United States and to a lesser degree in Russia. Of Russia, Seeley noted 'her trials and her transformation to come' and predicted Russia's eclipse of European states 'when all her railroads are made, her people educated, and her government settled on a solid basis'.[21]

For the existing Great Powers of Europe, these development posed an acute challenge, voiced by numerous writers. Seeley drew the lesson for the European states in stark terms:

For the same inventions which make vast political unions possible tend to make states which are on the old scale of magnitude unsafe, insignificant, second-rate. If the United States and Russia hold together for another half century, they will at the end of that time completely dwarf such old European States as France and Germany and depress them into a second

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[14] For an overview of these geopolitical writers, see: Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985).

[15] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 236.

[16] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Young American', in Emerson (ed.), *Complete Works* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1903–4).

[17] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[18] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 204.

[19] Ibid., p. 62.

[20] Ibid., p. 63.

[21] Ibid., p. 237.

class. Russia and the United States will surpass in power the states now called great as much as the great country-states of the sixteenth century surpassed Florence.[22]

Prophecies of the emergence of America and Russia as a new class of power had been made earlier: in 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville had announced that America and Russia appear 'marked out by the will of Heaven to sway half the globe',[23] and in 1846 Friedrich List had predicted the inevitable eclipse of Britain by the United States.[24] In Germany such thinking contributed to the widespread sense that the Reich created by Bismarck was insufficient for survival in the new era, and that an aggressive programme of expansion was required.[25]

Alone among the European Great Powers, Britain could make the most serious claim to world power status. Unlike the other leading European states whose assets were largely confined to Europe, Britain had globe-circling possessions, and aggregates of land, population, and resources that made her a peer of the emerging global Great Powers. But this bulk obscured fundamental weaknesses related to the scattered and heterogeneous character of British assets. As Seeley famously remarked, Britain had 'conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind',[26] and its possessions lacked design and cohesion. The vulnerability of the British system was a prominent part of most geopolitical analyses of the emerging global power system.

Several powerful trends were working to erode Britain's advantages. As the techniques of industrial production pioneered in Britain spread to North America, the European continent, and a few pockets elsewhere, the British Isles seemed an increasingly insufficient base from which to maintain vast territorial possessions scattered across the globe. Britain's insular position and specialization in naval and merchant marine activities had enabled her to serve as the 'balancer' of the European states system and be the primary beneficiary of the European discovery of and control over the world ocean. But the emergence of the railroad was reducing the advantages of maritime mobility at the same time that powerful navies based outside Europe were undermining Britain's positional advantages, as Mackinder argued in his famous geopolitical writings.[27] The rise of Germany in Europe and the emergence of the semi-continental states of Russia and America cast long shadows on Britain's prospects. Mackinder concisely describes the British predicament:

[22] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 62. For further discussion, see: Arnold J. Toynbee, 'The Dwarfing of Europe', ch. 6, *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 97–125.

[23] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 452.

[24] Frederick List, *National System of Political Economy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1856), pp. 487–8; and Raymond F. Betts, 'Immense Dimensions: The Impact of the American West on the Late Nineteenth-Century European Thought About Expansion', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 10 (April 1979), pp. 149–66.

[25] For overviews of German *weltpolitik* thinking, see: Ludwig Dehio, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1960); Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967); and Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[26] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 16.

[27] Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *Geographical Journal*, 23 (April 1904), pp. 421–37; and *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Wells summarizes the bottom line for Britain: 'I set the facts that the existing British Empire was made by the steamship, that its prosperity and security depend upon the sustained control of the seas, that the aeroplane, the submarine, and the competitive shipbuilding of other states, have so changed the cohesion of this sea-knit confederation that it is now no more than a heterogeneous system of regions linked by long and vulnerable lines of communication.' H. G. Wells, *Imperialism and the Open Conspiracy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), p. 22.

… the permanent facts of physical geography now bear a proportion to political organization differing widely from that borne when England was making. In the presence of vast Powers, broad-based on the resources of half continents, Britain could not again become mistress of the seas. Much depends on the maintenance of a lead won under earlier conditions. Should the sources of wealth and vigour upon which the navy is founded run dry, the imperial security of Britain will be lost.[28]

So great were these vulnerabilities that German writers spoke with increasing enthusiasm about what Max Lenz termed the impending 'War of English Succession' in which Britain would be stripped of her overseas empire and reduced to her home islands.[29]

For many observers, these trends pointed unmistakably toward a major readjustment or correction of the international system. Writing in 1902, Wells argued that new inventions alter the military viability of borders and that wars to adjust to the new contours of viability were likely:

Every country in the world, … has been organized with a view to stability within territorial limits; no country has been organized with any foresight of development and inevitable change, or with the slightest reference to the practical revolution in topography that the new means of transit involve … the rectification of frontiers means wars.[30]

Like tides carrying away the sand beneath a beach house, trends in technology and demographics had created great discrepancies between the superstructure of the international system and material realities beneath it.

Seeley and Mackinder's vision of a greater Britain

Given this gloomy constellation of forces, what could Britain do? What outcome could she expect? One answer to these challenges was the proposal to create a 'Greater Britain'—a slimmer, more efficient and coherent, and thus less vulnerable entity composed of those parts of Britain's vast domains settled by colonists from the British Isles. The idea of a 'Greater Britain' to be achieved through a programme of 'imperial federation' seems to have been first advanced by J. A. Froude in 1871:

When we consider the increasing populousness of other nations, their imperial energy, and their vast political development, when we contrast the enormous area of territory which belongs to Russia, to the United States, or to Germany, with the puny dimensions of our own island home, prejudice itself cannot hide from us that our place as a nation is gone among such rivals unless we can identify the Colonies with ourselves, and multiply the English soil by spreading the English race over them.[31]

Seeley gave the vision of Greater Britain its most sophisticated and widely influential formulation in his *The Expansion of England* in 1883. Here Seeley laid out a history

[28] Halford Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), p. 358.
[29] Max Lenz, *Die grossen Machte* (Berlin: 1900). For discussion, see: Ludwig Dehio, 'Ranke and German Imperialism', in *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1960), pp. 38–71; and Fritz Fischer, *World Power or Decline* (New York: Norton, 1974).
[30] H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1902), p. 111.
[31] J. A. Froude, 'England's War', (1871), *Short Studies on Great Subjects, 1867–84*, vol. II (London: Longman Green, 1894), p. 500.

of Britain's rise to world power, an analysis of the emerging threats and opportunities, and a programme of response that served as the classic statement on the topic. The book sold 80,000 copies in its first year and served as a catalyst for the founding of the Imperial Federation League in 1884, whose members included Lord Bryce, James Froude, Lord Rosebery, as well as Seeley.[32] Seeley's book gave great public prominence and credibility to the previously diffuse agitation toward restructuring the empire along federal lines.

Mackinder's thinking on British alternatives in the global era have been overshadowed by his formulations about the Eurasian 'heartland' that have exercised such influence over state strategy and geopolitical theory. In Mackinder's three brief but seminal writings on the Heartland, he does not reflect extensively upon the prospects of the British Empire in the dawning global era.[33] But in several writings largely ignored by geopolitical writers, most notably his *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), his essays and lectures on imperial political economy and strategy, and in his five volume geography-civics text, *Nations of the Modern World*, Mackinder addresses the British predicament and strategy at length.[34] In these works Mackinder brought to the Greater Britain vision the same interpretation of the forces at play in the global era that animated his ominous prophesy that a state based in central Eurasia would be capable of dominating the entire world.

Seeley's and Mackinder's case for a Greater Britain had two main parts: an analysis of the new material conditions making such a novel entity possible, and a programme of institutional reform to realize these possibilities.

Seeley and Mackinder believed new technology was the silver lining in the clouds of doom gathering around the weary British titan. Technology created new opportunities as well as new threats. The same technologies shrinking the world and bringing Britain into proximity with many potentially antagonistic peoples could be employed by Britain to enhance her viability. The new communication and transportation technologies had two beneficial implications: large self-governing regimes were possible, and the fragments of the British 'nation' scattered across the globe could be integrated into a viable nation-state.

Throughout their writings Seeley and Mackinder proclaimed with relief and excitement their conviction that modern means of communication and transportation had made it possible for self-governing regimes to break previous size barriers. The idea that regime-type and size were closely interrelated has fallen into disrepute among recent students of comparative politics,[35] but such morphological arguments had been advanced by many of the leading figures of the Western political tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau, to name some of the more notable). These claims captured an important feature of pre-

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[32] For the activities of the Imperial Federation League, see C. A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism*, (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp. 205–14.

[33] In particular, see: Halford J. Mackinder, *Money-Power and Man-Power: The Underlying Principles rather than the Statistics of Tariff Reform* (London: Simken-Marshall, 1906); and Halford J. Mackinder, 'The Great Trade Routes', *Journal of the Institute of Bankers*, 21 (March 1900), pp. 137–55 and 266–73.

[34] Halford Mackinder, *Our Own Islands: An Elementary Study in Geography* (London: Philip, 1906); Halford Mackinder, *Lands beyond the Channel* (London: Philip, 1908); Halford Mackinder, *Distant Lands* (London: Philip, 1910); and Halford Mackinder, *Nations of the Modern World*, 2 vols. (London: Philip, 1924).

[35] One of the few recent treatments of the topic concludes that size does not matter: Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte, *Democracy and Size* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973).

industrial political life, and they were a central tenet of the Whig and Liberal traditions within which Seeley and Mackinder wrote. In no small measure the optimism of these late Victorians about the ability of the industrial revolution to expand the domain of liberty stemmed from their view that a hitherto 'iron law' of political organization had been repealed.[36]

The pre-industrial view, perhaps stated most clearly and systematically by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws*, held that large regimes would inevitably be despotisms and that republics (self-government combined with individual liberty) were possible only in domains not significantly larger than the city-states of Greece or Renaissance Italy.[37] Citing the large empires of the Persians, the Romans, the Mongols, and the Spanish, Seeley argued that 'large political organisms were only stable when they were of a low type'. In such 'low organization' polities, 'the individual is crushed, so that he enjoys no happiness, makes no progress and produces nothing memorable'.[38] In contrast, self-governing regimes allowing more extensive forms of personal liberty were inevitably small, since intensive communication and assembly were deemed necessary for effective self-government. Free regimes were thus rare, relegated to the geographic nooks and crannies of those exceptional state systems where small polities could survive.

Seeley and Mackinder believed that the new technologies of steam and electricity had overcome this fundamental disability, creating the possibility that 'full liberty and solid union may be reconciled with unbounded territorial expansion.'[39] Polities with self-government and extensive individual liberty could now vie for a more prominent place in world politics, and the great majority of the human race, once condemned to live under despotisms by the relentless imperatives of material conditions, could eventually enjoy a way of life previously available only to those fortunate to live in exceptional geographic settings. For both Seeley and Mackinder the success of the United States demonstrated the possibility of a fundamentally new type of political association, one mixing freedom with size, and thus unprecedented survival potential.[40]

Although technology played a central role in this argument, institutional innovations were also necessary to exploit the new possibilities. Seeley maintained that the United States was based on a set of political as well as technological innovations. The representative system had made possible the extension of liberty to polities the size of England. To this British innovation the United States had added federalism, permitting the further spatial extension of the high type of organization. This combination of industrial technology and representative federalism had enabled the United States to solve 'a problem substantially similar' to that which the old British colonial system 'could not solve',[41] namely large-scale emigration and expansion without either despotism or fission.

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[36] Optimistic Victorian analyses of the impact of improved communications are gathered in Vary Coates and Bernard Finn, *A Retrospective Technology Assessment: Submarine Telegraphy* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Press, 1979).

[37] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), particularly Book VIII 'Of the Corruption of the Principles of the Three Governments'.

[38] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 62.

[39] Ibid., p. 187.

[40] Ibid., p. 135.

[41] Ibid., p. 62.

These inventions made conceivable a different outcome of the American War for Independence which ended the First British Empire. Recalling that Edmund Burke, in his defence of the right of the American colonists to realize independence, had cited distance as an insuperable barrier to representative government,[42] Seeley argued that the technological abolition of distance had eliminated this barrier, making non-despotic transoceanic realms possible for the first time. The independence of British North America in the eighteenth century had been an inevitability, given the state of the mechanical and political arts of the time, but the independence of the English-speaking parts of the British Empire in the twentieth century could be avoided.[43]

The technological 'abolition of distance' also offered the opportunity for closer political union between Britain and overseas territories. These new technologies made the far-flung British settler colonies effectively contiguous with the British Isles. Seeley suggested that the abolition of distance permitted one the choice of neighbours: '… as an island, England is distinctly nearer for practical purposes to the New World, and belongs to it, or at least has the choice of belonging at her pleasure to the New World or to the Old'.[44] It was now possible for a Greater Britain to be 'a world Venice, with the sea for streets'.[45] No distance seemed beyond spanning. Mackinder argued that even the isolated British settler colonies in New Zealand could now be effectively linked with the British Isles:

[It is] … to all intents and purposes, a fragment of the old country lying moored in the antipodean ocean, a portion of that agricultural land which we shall need to add to this country if, with the present scale of our industries, we were to be a balanced and self-contained community.[46]

As technology effectively eliminated the constraints of distance, the previously disconnected and scattered parts of the British nation could be integrated into a nation-state strong enough to be viable in the new global era.

Mackinder believed a second technological opportunity was provided by the ability of modern technology to overcome climatic constraints. In the late nineteenth century the populations of Australia and Canada were too small to make much of difference in the global balance of power, but the Greater Britain vision assumed that these regions would become much more extensively populated and industrialized. With this future development in mind, Mackinder referred to Canada as 'the economic centre of the British Empire'.[47] Hopes for extensively developing these vast regions were based on a belief that technology was overcoming climatic constraints.[48]

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[42] Edmund Burke, 'Observations on the Late State of the Nation', in vol. I, *Works* (Boston, MA: Charles Little and James Brown, 1839).

[43] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 62.

[44] Ibid., p. 62.

[45] Ibid., p. 227.

[46] Mackinder cited in Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 68. Also see: Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966).

[47] Mackinder cited in Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 68. In a letter to the London *Times* Mackinder says: 'Canada was essential to the Empire. If all North America were a single Power, Britain would, indeed, be dwarfed. That great North American Power would, of necessity, take from us the command of the ocean.' cited in Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 40.

[48] Halford J. Mackinder, 'The Scope and Methods of Geography', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 9 (1887), pp. 141–60.

In order to realize these possibilities created by technology, Seeley and Mackinder believed a far-reaching restructuring of British institutions both within the British Isles and in relations with the settler colonies was necessary. Material conditions only create possibilities; their realization required a carefully conceived and executed programme of social and political change. To realize the possibility of a Greater Britain they proposed a programme of 'imperial federation' or 'liberal imperialism' with four main parts: (1) separation between the 'settler colonies' and the 'rule of Britain among alien races', (2) federation between the United Kingdom and the settler colonies, (3) a system of tariff preferences to economically integrate Greater Britain, and (4) a programme of social democratization and expanded welfare.

The first part of the Greater Britain plan rested upon the distinction between the members of the British nation and the 'alien' peoples under British rule. The former would be linked more intimately; the latter would eventually gain independence. The British Empire (minus India and tropical Africa) was peopled by members of the 'British Nation' that had emigrated from the British Isles.[49] Employing the fashionable metaphors of the time, Seeley labelled the relationship between the settler colonies and the British Isles 'organic' and thus enduring, while the rest of the empire was 'mechanical' and thus easily sundered. Similarly, Mackinder distinguished between the 'the federation, loose or close, of several British commonwealths, and the maintenance of British rule among alien races'.[50] In speaking of 'alien races' Mackinder meant group identities based on linguistic and cultural as well as biologic 'racial' similarities. Despite the fact that India was the 'Crown Jewel' in the British Empire, Seeley and Mackinder both assumed that India would become independent and that British resistance to an Indian independence movement would be doomed to fail.

The second pillar of the Greater Britain agenda was 'imperial federation'. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a myriad of schemes under the general label 'imperial federation' for reorganizing the British Empire were developed.[51] Although the phrase 'imperial federation', as Edward Freeman, the Oxford historian of federation, pointedly observed, was something of an oxymoron,[52] the core idea of 'imperial federation' was that the relationship between the British Isles and the white settler colonies would be equalized. Both Seeley and Mackinder believed that federative measures were necessary in order to prevent a recurrence of the American War of Independence in other settler colonies. Although details varied, a key feature of the Greater Britain vision was the creation of a parliament for the British nation in which all citizens would be equally represented. A corollary was that parts, particularly the distant ones, would have complete self-governance for local issues.

The third part of the plan to realize a Greater Britain was tariff protection, or 'imperial preference'. The tariff question was not discussed by Seeley, but became an important concern for Mackinder. Originally a supporter of free trade, Mackinder

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[49] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, Part II, chs. 2–6 concerning India.
[50] Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, p. 346.
[51] For an exhaustive catalogue of proposals, see: Seymour Cheng, *Schemes for the Federation of the British Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).
[52] For Freeman's views and their impact see: M. D. Burgess, 'Imperial Federation: Edward Freeman and the Intellectual Debate on the Consolidation of the British Empire in the 19th Century', *Trivium*, 13 (1978), pp. 77–94.

converted to the cause of tariff protection in the early years of the new century, part of what the historian George Dangerfield called the 'strange death of Liberal England'.[53] The gradual abandonment of the principle of 'free trade' by Britain in the late nineteenth century was in large measure a response to the rise of efficient industrial competitors on the continent, particularly Germany.[54] It is notable that Mackinder's response to the rise of German competition was that Britain should adopt its own version of Friedrich List's neomercantilism.[55] Mackinder's rejection of the principle of complete 'free trade' was also related to his belief that the unregulated operation of market forces would lead to the overspecialization of regional economies and the concomitant loss of balance, diversity and local initiative.[56] In defence of local difference and some measure of local autonomy, Mackinder was willing to abridge the strong cosmopolitanism so characteristic of nineteenth century British liberalism.

The fourth part of the plan for realizing a Greater Britain was the expansion of government welfare and the democratization of society.[57] Mackinder, who coined the term 'man-power',[58] thought Britain's most important weakness was her relatively small population. He argued that the best measure of a population's contribution to a state's power potential was a multiple of quantity and quality. What Britain lacked in quantity would have to be compensated by advantages in quality. This meant Britain needed to extensively overhaul her internal class and education system. The neglect of mass education, health, and welfare resulted in the inefficient use of Britain's human resources. As a member of Parliament Mackinder supported a broad array of measures aimed at making education more universal and more oriented toward practical skills, as well as measures, including the minimum wage, to protect and enhance the labouring classes, whose low wages, poor housing, 'bad morals', intemperance, and lack of education impeded a maximum contribution to society.[59]

Mackinder's defence of these early measures of the British welfare state contrasts with the claims of subsequent critics that Britain was unable to maintain its world standing because spending for welfare measures consumed too much national

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[53] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn, 1961).

[54] For an analysis of Greater Britain schemes in the context of nineteenth century world political economy, see: Michael Doyle, 'Greater Britain', ch.11, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986). Also see: Ross S. J. Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry, 1875–1914* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933).

[55] The influence of List in Mackinder's thinking is most apparent in Halford J. Mackinder, *Money-Power and Man-Power: The Underlying Principles rather than the Statistics of Tariff Reform* (London: Simken-Marshall, 1906).

[56] On the importance of provincialism and local initiative for liberty Mackinder wrote: 'But as liberty is the natural privilege of an island people, so wealth of initiative is characteristic of a divided people. Provinces which are insular or peninsular breed an obstinate provincialism unknown in the merely historical or administrative divisions of a great plain; and this rooted provincialism, rather than finished cosmopolitanism, is the source of the varied initiative without which liberty would lose half its significance'. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, p.15. For discussion of illiberal elements in Mackinder's thinking, see: Geroid O Tuathail, 'Putting Mackinder in his Place: Material Transformation and Myth', *Political Geography*, 11 (January 1992), pp. 100–18.

[57] For an excellent history and analysis of the social aspects of Liberal Imperialism, see: Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform, English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895–1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).

[58] This phrase is first used in the contemporary sense in Halford J. Mackinder, *Money-Power and Man-Power* (London: Simken-Marshall, 1906).

[59] For Mackinder's ideas on social reform see: W. H. Parker, 'Patriot and Imperialist', *Mackinder*, pp. 57–82.

wealth.[60] Mackinder supported these social welfare investments not primarily for humanitarian reasons, but in order to enhance Britain's potential as a world great power. The choice for Mackinder was not between 'guns and butter', but between consumption by the upper classes and investment in the lower classes' productive potential. While Mackinder thought that 'democracy does not think strategically', he also thought that social welfare and democratization was a strategic imperative rather than a strategic liability.

Mackinder's programme for mobilizing the entire population into efficient producers and responsible citizens was a more modest version of the claim made by many about the extreme value of collectivist domestic arrangements in the new world era. Mackinder's plan was a slower motion and more peaceful version of the national mobilization that also figure so prominently in Ivan Bloch's vision of industrial war[61] and General Luddendorf's vision of 'total war'.[62]

How strong would this Greater Britain be in comparison to the two already established World Great Powers? Seeley expected that a 'Greater Britain' would be the rough equivalent to the United States, and 'far stronger'[63] than Russia because of the ethnically heterogeneous character of the Russian population. For Mackinder a Greater Britain would be comparable in strength '… with a potential United States of Europe and the actual United States, and with other great agglomerations which are not, perhaps, immediately upon us, but are yet looming on the horizon'.[64]

According to the logic of the Greater Britain programme, the most important forms of adjustment were internal. However, the construction of this more extended nation-state would take time, until the resources of her far-flung possessions could be developed and the internal coherence of the British system improved. Until these developments took place, Britain would be vulnerable. During this period Britain must engage in a holding action:

The whole course of future history depends on whether the Old Britain beside the Narrow Seas have enough virility and imagination to withstand all challenge of her naval supremacy, *until such time* as the daughter nations shall have grown to maturity, and the British Navy shall have expanded into the Navy of the Britains.[65] [my emphasis]

The task for British diplomacy and military strategy was then to avoid defeat and dismemberment until these slower processes of internal growth and reform could bear fruit. If only Britain could hold out until the development of the vast interiors of Canada and Australia were complete, the Greater Britain would be a world power with both the coherence and the mass to survive in the global era.

Geography vs British national integration

The vision of a Greater Britain was never realized. In the century after Seeley and

[60] For a discussion of the various theories of British decline, see: Paul Kennedy, 'Why Did the British Empire Last So Long?' *Strategy and Diplomacy* (London: Fontana, 1983).
[61] Ivan Bloch, *The Future of War* (Boston, MA: Ginn & Co. 1902).
[62] For discussion, see: Hans Speier, 'Ludendorff: The German Concept of Total War', in E. M. Earle (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 306–21.
[63] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 62.
[64] Mackinder cited in Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 73.
[65] Halford J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), p. 358.

Mackinder wrote, the white settler colonies increasingly went their own ways and forged their own states and foreign policies, and increasingly developed distinct national identities, leaving only the pale shadow of the British Commonwealth.[66] But it is inaccurate to say that the programme of Liberal Imperialism failed, because it was never fully tried. But formidable barriers stood in its way. Many of the problems with the Liberal Imperialist Greater Britain programme were spelled out by H. G. Wells during the Coefficient meetings and subsequently published in his essay 'Imperialism and the Open Conspiracy'. The core of Wells' objections was that the Greater Britain schemes were based on a fallacious reading of geography, a contention that subsequent developments have confirmed.

The central assumption of the Greater Britain scenarios—that Canada and Australia would become extensively industrialized and populated—remains unrealized. Australia and Canada are underpopulated relative to their size due to climatic factors. The major barrier to the greater habitation and development of Canada is its cold climate, and the major barrier to the further development of Australia is absence of water in its vast interior. Enduring climatic realities have not been overcome by technology, and would have precluded Canada's and Australia's playing a major role in a Greater Britain.

Mackinder's misreading of the climatic constraints upon Australian and Canadian development parallels his errors concerning the Heartland interior of Eurasia. As several generations of geographers have pointedly argued, Mackinder consistently over-estimated the power potential and role in world order of the interior of Eurasia.[67] By underestimating *climatic* constraints on agriculture, urbanization and industrialization, Mackinder arrived at an inflated estimate of the mass of men and material available to a Heartland state.

Seeley's and Mackinder's hope and expectation that the new space-spanning technologies of steam and electricity would overcome positional liabilities and limits appears even more erroneous. Seeley's notion that the Ocean would be for Britain what canals were for Venice is a profoundly misleading analogy because it ignores the basic geographic fact that the Ocean bordered on all coastal territories, not just those in British control. Although these inventions greatly reduced the effective distance between all parts of the world, they did not make all parts of the world equally distant from each other. Neighbours are still neighbours, and the liabilities and advantages of relative proximity remain. The implications of this seemingly simple insight for the viability of the Greater Britain programme are numerous and almost entirely negative. Contrary to their hopes, the relative positions of the British Isles and the white settler colonies, of the white settler colonies and the United States, of the British Isles and the rest of Europe remained powerful obstacles to the creation of an enlarged British national state.

Despite the advances in transport and communication in the nineteenth century, Canada, Australia and New Zealand remained many days of travel from the British Isles, and their destinies have been shaped by their relations with more proximate neighbours. Because of these vast distances and different neighbours, the objectives

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[66] For a discussion of competing views of the nature of the British Commonwealth, see: Hedley Bull, 'What is the Commonwealth?' *World Politics*, 11 (1959), pp. 577–87.

[67] In particular, see: W. H. Parker, *The Superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union Compared* (London: Macmillan, 1972); and George Cressey, *Soviet Potentials: A Geographic Appraisal* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1962).

of Britain's overall world strategy tended to collide sharply with the interests of the settler colonies. Australia and New Zealand strongly opposed the appeasement of Japanese interests in the Far East and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, fearing that Japanese gains would further strengthen the greatest regional threat they faced.[68]

Positional factors also reduced the probability that Canada would play its central role in a Greater Britain. The dominant fact of Canadian political existence is proximity to the United States. Like the Australians, Canadians felt that the overall Empire's need to remain on friendly terms with the United States had led British statesmen to appease the United States at the expense of their immediate interests. And because 90 per cent of Canada's population lives within a hundred miles of the United States along a three thousand mile border, it is not surprising that Canada has grown closely interconnected with the United States in the twentieth century.[69]

A second great positional problem in Seeley and Mackinder's strategy was Europe. If the new space-spanning technologies could effectively abolish the distance between the British Isles and Australia, then what would be the effect on the English Channel and the effective distance to the Continent? Although Mackinder pointed with alarm to the rising Russian and American colossi, it was Germany, situated across the Narrow Seas, that mounted the greatest challenge to Britain's naval supremacy. It seems unlikely that two states whose vital centres were in such close proximity could really be World Great Powers without constant friction. The fact, painfully evident in retrospect, that Europe's continued prominence and peace depended upon some enduring form of Anglo-German union or alliance, eluded Seeley and Mackinder. It is notable that Mackinder, who so frequently built upon Friedrich List's mercantilist ideas, did not follow the great German political economist's prediction and advocacy of an Anglo-German condominium.[70] At the core of these Greater Britain schemes was a basic unwillingness to confront Britain's positional proximity to Europe.

The third great position-related impediment to a Greater Britain was the United States. Both Seeley and Mackinder recognized that the United States would come to play a major role in the twentieth century, and both insisted that Britain should remain on friendly terms with the United States, but neither seem to have thought very extensively about how the emergence of the United States as a world Great Power would affect the prospects for a Greater Britain. In retrospect the British relationship with the United States was pivotal in Britain's survival against the

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[68] On the dissatisfaction in Australia and New Zealand to the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902, see: I. H. Nish, 'Japan and the Ending of the Anglo-Japanese Alliances', in Kenneth Bourne and D. C. Watt (eds.), *Studies in International History* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967). For the general difficulties in melding imperial and colonial interests, see Franklyn Arthur Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885–1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

[69] For analyses of the problems of Canada in imperial federation, see: William T. R. Fox, *A Continent Apart: The United States and Canada in World Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 45–6.

[70] List, *The National System of Political Economy*, pp. 487–8. In 1846 List went to England to promote his idea of a German-British alliance and presented extensive memoranda to high British officials. He was rebuffed, and returned to Germany to commit suicide. For discussion, see: E. M. Earle, 'Adam Smith, Alexander Hamilton, Friedrich List: The Economic Foundations of National Power', in E. M. Earle (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 117–54.

German onslaught, and both Canada and Australia have come into closer military, economic and political association with the United States.[71]

Faced with these unfavourable underlying material realities, the federative and state-building institutional reforms had little chance of success. The programme of imperial federation, perhaps necessary to avoid violent independence movements such as severed the thirteen American colonies from Britain in the late eighteenth century, would have given nearly free reign to all the centrifugal tendencies of the settler colonies. Furthermore, the local autonomy envisioned in the federation agenda was sure to conflict with the demands of the imperial preference, for each of the settler colonies had economic interests which often diverged sharply from those of the British Isles. The effort to build a Greater Britain into a world great power on federative principles made the task even more demanding. It is one thing to build a nation-state of the Bismarkian continental type, but it was quite another to construct such a state on the principle of federation.

The imperial preference, which might have made sense had the settler colonies been contiguous, collided with several realities. As H. G. Wells noted, the British Empire run on mercantilist lines would bring Britain 'into conflict with every people under the sun'.[72] First, comparatively little of the trade of the British Isles was with the settler colonies or even the empire,[73] so making the empire more autarkic would have required a major restructuring of world trading patterns. Second, a system of imperial trade preference would have led to economic conflict with the United States. Americans viewed the 'sterling bloc' of the 1930s as a major impediment to American exports, and as Britain became militarily and economically dependent on the United States during World War II, the Americans pressured to dismantle it. Third, the attempt to keep German and continental manufactures out of the extended empire was a major source of German grievance,[74] and fuelled the German belief that German survival required a German dominated 'pan-region' or 'great space' in south and east Europe and Africa.[75]

Overall, it is clear in retrospect that Seeley's and Mackinder's analyses of the prospects for a Greater Britain had a critical flaw: an exaggeration of the ability of technology to overcome facts of geography, particularly climate and position. Given the absence of favourable material opportunities, their programme of institutional reform had little hope for success. Ironically, the renowned geopolitician Mackinder proposed a British strategy flawed by its misreading of geographic and technological forces. But in the final analysis the fact that a Greater Britain failed to emerge actually confirms the accuracy of the environmental materialism of Mackinder's

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[71] For Anglo-American relations, see: William Archibald Dunning, *The British Empire and the United States* (New York: Schribner's Sons, 1914); Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States 1895–1914* (New York: Athenaeum, 1968); D. Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[72] H. G. Wells, *Joan and Peter* (London: Cassell, 1918), pp. 223–4.

[73] '… almost 70 per cent of British emigration (1812–1914), over 60 per cent of British exports (1800–1900) and over 80 per cent of British capital (1815–1880) went to regions outside the formal empire'. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 154. For further analysis, see: Doyle, *Empires*; and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London: Penguin, 1968).

[74] For an analysis of these problems, see: Kennedy, 'Why Did the British Empire Last So Long?' *Strategy and Diplomacy*, p. 215.

[75] John O'Loughlin and Herman Van Der Wusten, 'Political Geography of Panregions', *Geographical Review*, 80 (1990), pp. 1–19.

work because the basic principle of unity in the Greater Britain was not material necessity, but national sentiment. The idealism of his project is plainly stated in *Britain and the British Seas*: '… the end of her history must depend on the ethical condition of her people, on their energy, knowledge, honesty, and faith'.[76] Greater Britain was a vision of national idealism, of sentiment working against the grain of the material constraints and opportunities of the twentieth century.

Wells' anticipation of an Anglo-American greater synthesis

A second solution to the impending crisis of Britain's world's position was for Britain to unite or integrate with the United States. The earliest proposals for Anglo-American union date to the late eighteenth century, and were advanced as solutions to the political crises that led to the American independence movement.[77] In the late 1860's the vision of Anglo-American reunification was given wide currency by Charles Wentworth Dilke, who argued in his best-selling travel book, *Greater Britain*, that the division of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' was artificial, that the United States was in reality a 'Greater Britain' rather than a separate nation, and that Canada was less British than the United States.[78] It is symptomatic of the shift in British attitudes towards the empire and the nation-state in the later Victorian period that Dilke's clever expression for America came to be employed, as we have seen, to describe the English-speaking colonies still in the British empire.

At the turn of the century H. G. Wells emerged as a powerful spokesman for the idea that Britain's future lay in some merger or union with the United States. Although today Wells is best remembered as the author of classic science fiction and a pioneer futurist, he also ranks among the most astute analysts of the emerging world politics. Wells was a man of Herculean energy, author of more than one hundred books, and he held elaborate and innovative, and sometimes deranged, ideas about virtually every public issue of his era. Wells was also much more widely known and read than any of the other global geopoliticans or materialist world order prophets of the twentieth century.[79] The breadth and originality of Wells' world order prophecies were unmatched by any writer of the era. The most distinctively Wellsian predictions concerning the emergence of world political organization, which he dubs a 'new republic', have had far-reaching influence on world order speculation and theorizing. However, the quantity and influence of Wells' writings on the world federal state have overshadowed his earlier work, the widely reviewed book, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress on Human Life and Thought* (1902), in which he sketched a world future dominated by several large political-economic unions rather than a complete world

[76] Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, p. 358.

[77] Julian P. Boyd, *Anglo-American Union: Plans to Preserve the British Empire, 1774–1788* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941).

[78] Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1869). For discussion of Dilke, see Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism*. Twenty years later, Dilke's new book, *Problems of Greater Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1890), was about the issues of British imperial organization rather than Anglo-American relations.

[79] For an outstanding treatment of Wells' world unification visions and his influence, see W. Warren Wager, *H. G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961).

union. His 'pre-Wellsian' views in *Anticipations* are a variant of the arguments about scale and material factors being made by many of his 'geopolitical' contemporaries.

In *Anticipations* Wells described in some detail the emergence of a world order in which only a handful of larger entities would survive. There is, he says, 'the need for some synthesis ampler than existing national organizations'.[80] He identified 'five movements of coalescence' on the contemporary scene: Anglo-Saxonism, the Pan-German movement, Pan-Slavism, a union of the Latin peoples, and a union of the 'Yellow Races'. Wells considered the prospects for these various movements and concluded that only three unions appear likely to succeed: an Anglo-Saxon union, a European union, and an Asian union. The success of the European unification would impede both the Slavic and Germanic aspirations. (Although Wells here attached great importance to racial and linguistic groupings, he later became a vigorous critic of racial theories and racially-based politics.)

Concerning Europe, Wells observed that '… geographical contours, economic forces, the trend of invention and social development, point to a unification of all Western Europe'.[81] But Wells did not believe that European Union would be achieved under the leadership of Germany. He expected Germany to mount an effort to unify Europe, but he predicted that the German empire and German aggression 'will be either shattered or weakened to the pitch of great compromises by a series of wars of land and sea'.[82] In Wells' view, the limitations of Germany's prospects are directly linked to its internal political tradition: '… the intensely monarchical and aristocratic organization of the German empire will stand in the way of the synthesis of greater Germany'.[83]

The more probable model for European unification was to be found in 'Swiss conceptions, a civilized republicanism'.[84] Voluntary association, spearheaded by the 'rational middle class' would prevail over the older forms of political association. Wells was unwilling to specify exactly how long the process of integration would require, since the rate of consolidation depends 'entirely upon the rise in general intelligence in Europe'.[85] But Wells did predict the conclusions of this process in the early twentieth century and expected a European confederate republic to be 'increasingly predominant over the whole European mainland and the Mediterranean basin, as the twentieth century closes'.[86]

Wells was also 'inclined to believe' that 'a great synthesis of the English-speaking peoples' would occur. The 'head and centre of the new unity' would be in the 'great urban region that is developing between Chicago and the Atlantic'.[87] This union would have a powerful fleet, and Wells writing at the zenith of British power, observed: 'These things render the transfer of the present mercantile and naval ascendancy of Great Britain to the United States during the next two or three

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[80] Wells, *Anticipations*, p. 269.
[81] Ibid., p. 274.
[82] Ibid., p. 280.
[83] Ibid., p. 278. For recent analyses of this issue, see: David Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and the World Order, 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Peter Stirk, 'Carl Schmitt's *Volkerrechliche Grossraumordnung*', *History of Political Thought*, 20 (Summer 1999), pp. 357–74.
[84] Wells, *Anticipations*, p. 280.
[85] Ibid., p. 281.
[86] Ibid., p. 280.
[87] Ibid., p. 283.

decades a very probable thing …'[88] Wells also expected this 'greater synthesis' to administer the territories of the British Empire, and possibly to include Scandinavia. The greatest obstacle to this union was the 'want of stimulus', but the 'renascence of Eastern Asia', and the German fleet would push the North American and British parts of the Anglo-Saxons together.

Once these 'larger syntheses' form, how would they interact with each other? Wells only said that '… if these [higher syntheses] do not contrive to establish a rational social unity by sanely negotiated unions, they will be forced to fight for physical predominance in the world'.[89] In effect Wells held that the three giant syntheses will have to either develop a structure of peaceful relations or fight for world hegemony.

Like the Liberal Imperialists, Wells was convinced that the ability of regimes to transform themselves would ultimately determine success in the struggles of the twentieth century. Internal restructuring mattered more than any other variable for Wells. No particular location or technical capability would be as important for world political success. Wells advanced a detailed list of the reforms he believed were necessary:

The nation that produces in the near future the largest proportional development of educated and intelligent engineers and agriculturists, of doctors, schoolmasters, professional soldiers, and intellectually active people of all sorts; the nation that most resolutely picks over, educates, sterilizes, exports, or poisons its people of the abyss; the nation that succeeds most subtly in checking gambling and the moral decay of women and homes that gambling inevitably entails; the nation that by wise interventions, death duties and the like, contrives to expropriate and extinguish incompetent rich families while leaving individual ambitions free; the nation, in a word, that turns the greatest proportion of its irresponsible adiposity into social muscle, will certainly be the nation that is most powerful in warfare as in peace, will certainly be the ascendant or dominant nation before the year 2000. In the long run no heroism and no accidents can alter that.[90]

Here Wells raised his somewhat frightening and eccentric programme for social change into an avenue for world political success. This prognostication turns the adage 'the future belongs to the efficient' into a philosophy of history. But Wells' key insight here is that modern warfare would be total warfare, where the line between combatant and civilian would be erased and where the successful state would effectively socialize the means of production: 'a practical realization of socialistic conceptions will quite inevitably be forced upon the fighting state'.[91] Like Ivan Bloch, Wells foretold with uncanny accuracy the character of industrial age warfare.

In *Anticipations*, Wells' treatment of the 'greater synthesis' remained prophetic and descriptive, never issuing into an actionable programme. But in a 1929 essay 'Imperialism and the Open Conspiracy', Wells contrasted the programme of the liberal imperialists with his own strategy to build upon the cosmopolitanism of the British Empire:

Our imperial diffusion gave us enormous advantages for scientific and educational work, for intellectual variety in uniformity, and for every sort of exchange. The essential task, therefore,

[88] Ibid., p. 287.
[89] Ibid., p. 269.
[90] Ibid., p. 230.
[91] Ibid., p. 202.

of the Empire was to think, teach, intercommunicate, and unify. So we might shadow forth and guide and dominate the greater unification before mankind. The only line of development was through the systematic perfection and realization of a liberal ideology, that would unite first the Empire and at last the world in a common world aim. … [There should have been] a sustained effort to lower the barriers about the Empire and develop alliances in the direction of federal association, a frank and friendly disposition to financial and economic co-operations and amalgamations with foreign, and particularly with American, German, and French groups, and a friendly and helpful attitude toward the propaganda of cosmopolitan ideas and the reconstruction of education on cosmopolitan lines.[92]

As a general strategy this programme left much to be desired. It is more a mind-set and a set of goals than a full-fledged programme. But its basic thrust is clear enough: Britain should extend the cosmopolitan world system that had emerged in the nineteenth century. To achieve this, Wells believed a programme of anti-nationalist ideological and cultural education was needed as well as an economic internationalism of the sort that Kautsky labelled 'ultra-imperialism', and that the United States has pursued in the post-World War II period.[93]

A far more programmatic version of Anglo-American union was advanced by the American journalist Clarence Streit during the 1930's and late 1940's.[94] Observing the rise of the Axis powers during the 1930's, Streit proposed a 'union of the democracies', particularly the United States and Great Britain, whose combined resources would be more than adequate to deter aggression and maintain a relatively free world market. In the late 1940's, in response to the emerging threat of Communism and the Soviet Union, Streit again proposed a formal merger between the remaining democracies, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Unlike Dilke and Wells who had envisioned unions based primarily on shared language and culture, Streit focused upon democratic institutions and free-market economies.

Unlike Dilke's and Wells' speculations and proposals, Streit's programme for a union between the liberal democracies was systematically promoted by an organization, the Atlantic Union Committee, and gained the active backing of a surprising number of influential citizens during the late 1940's.[95] Led by the triumvirate of Owen Roberts (an associate Justice of the US Supreme Court), William Clayton (Under-Secretary of State and one of the chief architects of the Marshall Plan), and Robert Patterson, (Secretary of War between 1945 and 1947), the Committee gained widespread credibility. In late 1949 five European foreign ministers (Morrison of Great Britain, Stikker of the Netherlands, Lange of Norway, Van Zeeland of Belgium, Sforza of Italy) endorsed a federal union of the Atlantic democracies. In North America, Estes Kefauver, Senator from Tennessee and future Presidential candidate, introduced a Senate Resolution calling for Atlantic Union and worked extensively to gain backing for it, and the Senate of Canada passed such a resolution with only one dissenting vote. Despite these efforts, full political union between the Anglo-American

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[92] Wells, *Open Conspiracy*, pp. 11 and 21.
[93] Karl Kautsky, 'Ultra Imperialism' [1914], *New Left Review*, 59 (Jan/Feb. 1970).
[94] Clarence Streit, *Union Now* (New York: Harper & Row, 1940); Clarence Streit, *Union Now with Britain* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941); and Clarence Streit, *Freedom's Frontier: Atlantic Union Now* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).
[95] Wesley T. Wooley, 'The Rise and Fall of the Atlantic Union Committee', ch. 6, *Alternatives to Anarchy: American Supranationalism since World War II* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 101–32.

democracies was not achieved, although these efforts undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of regional international organizations such as NATO.

Conclusions

The contrast between the vision of the Greater Britain and the Anglo-American Greater Synthesis raises troubling and significant insights about national groupings and their relations to states. Conventional wisdom holds that the nation, and states built around nations, have become ever more basic and central to world order as the twentieth century has unfolded and that the coincidence of states and nations has grown.

Seeley and Mackinder had discerned a British nation within the British Empire and concluded that survival lay in the enhancement and integration of this core group. But as the twentieth century draws to a close, the scattered parts of Seeley and Mackinder's British nation each have their own states. And as time passes and historical experiences diverge, each of these distant pieces of the British nation may evolve into distinct nations. The national grouping ruling the greatest empire at the beginning of the century was unable to achieve effective integration into one state. In at least this one case, it seems that geographical separation has proven more powerful than national sentiment, even national sentiment backed by one of the most powerful states. Another incongruity between state and nation appears to exist in the relationship between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Wells predicted that the English-speaking parts of the British Empire and the United States would become unified. Although Wells thought of himself as an enemy of nationalism and prophet of cosmopolitanism, the criteria he used to define this 'greater synthesis'— language—is commonly used to define a national grouping. Despite his rhetorical anti-nationalism, Wells was a prophet of national union. Even after two centuries of formal state independence, there are minimal linguistic, cultural, or political differences between the peoples in the United States and Canada, and the differences between the Americans and the British are certainly not great compared to other areas of the world. Clarence Streit's call for a federal constitutional union between these peoples would seem to be a call for 'national self-determination', which is striking for its absence. These three countries look suspiciously like one nation divided into three states.

If the citizens of the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States are judged to be members of one nationality, then several of the important events of twentieth century Great Power politics are cast in a new light. The coalitions between these states and their peaceful relations in the twentieth century may be the product of national affinities. If this is the case, then it may be an error to attribute the North Atlantic 'pacific union' to democratic regime-type as many have done. If the citizens of these three English-speaking countries are judged to be members of one nation, then the dominant political and military actor on the world stage in the twentieth century is this multi-state nation.

A second important lesson to be drawn from these debates over the future of Britain facing the perils of the twentieth century concerns the scope of grand strategic choice. Much of the debate over contemporary foreign policy occurs over

menus of alternatives defined by realist grand strategy. But the policies seriously contemplated by the proponents of these debates were more significant than those laid out in recent realist discussions of grand strategy. When one compares the scope of policies actually discussed with those that are listed in the realist register of grand strategy alternatives, two criteria of selection never explicitly justified can be discerned: realist grand strategies take the identity of the actor as a given and rule out alternatives that compromise the continued autonomous existence of the state. The debate between the Liberal Imperialists and the Greater Synthesizers was about the fundamental issues of political identity and difference that realist theorists of inter-state politics take as given. And the Greater Synthesizers were proposing a merger between the United Kingdom and the United States that would effectively extinguish the British state apparatus as an autonomous entity. Even though this merger was proposed as an expression of the essential unity and common purpose of the peoples of the two states, such a merger would have meant corporate suicide for the state apparatuses itself. It is notable in this regard that contemporary realists, who draw so heavily on analogies between economic actors and states, show no interest in discussing mergers between states, despite the prevalence of mergers in the corporate world. The discovery of these hidden selection criteria raises the possibility that our conception of grand strategy can be expanded to include a fuller range of alternatives, some of which may come in handy as the peoples of the world cope with cascading interdependencies.

A third lesson of these debates is about the impact of geography upon the formation of political unions. Despite their many differences, both the advocates of a Greater Britain and a Greater Synthesis envisioned that Great Britain's destiny was to be found in a closer union with peoples across thousands of miles of ocean rather than the few miles of the English Channel. Although Britain's alliance with the United States in the two great wars against Germany was perhaps decisive in preserving British independence, the most important forces shaping Britain's fate continue to emanate from Europe rather than across the Atlantic. The movement towards European integration operating since World War II has not yet produced a European state, even a federal one, and it may never do so. But should such a union ever be consummated, it seems unlikely that Great Britain could long remain outside it. Over the longer term it seems clear that whatever the ties of language and culture across the ocean, Great Britain's fate is more closely bound by geographic proximity to the continent.

Fourth and finally, the role of federal union in the narrative of international liberalism deserves greater appreciation and investigation. The recent attention to Kantian democratic peace theory has almost completely eclipsed the innovation of federal republican union adumbrated by Montesquieu and articulated in the American Constitution of 1787. In contrast, Seeley and Mackinder, concerned with the animating problematic of republican theory and practice since antiquity (how to combine republican internal forms with sufficient size to survive in competitive inter-state systems) viewed federalism as an innovation needed for free governance to survive in a globalizing system dominated by continent-sized units. Looking back across the titanic military struggles that have punctuated the first global century, what should stand out most for liberals is not the democratic zone of peace, but rather the harsh fact that all democratic states owe their survival, largely or entirely, to the first, and so far only, liberal superpower made possible by federal union.