

## Mackinder's Heartland Theory: Historic Rivalry and the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

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### Abstract

*This paper analyzes the Heartland Theory historically and determines that it is still remarkably relevant with regard to rivalry between the two Great Powers: China and the US. In fact, China's gigantic BRI project has given the Heartland Theory a new stimulus and drive. The paper also assesses the US rivalry with regard to Russian-German challenges to it, along with the technological changes that transpired in the last 117 years, since the theory was first affirmed. The final outlook in terms of the theory is that the primary struggle and rivalry of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be between the US and China over the BRI, since failure of the BRI would almost by default be viewed as a victory for the US in terms of retaining its solitary superpower status over China. The reason for this is that without the success of the BRI China would remain vulnerable to the choke point of the Straits of Malacca and the might of the US Navy in the South China Sea. Contrary to this scenario, a prosperous BRI would give Beijing the huge advantage to thwart US encirclement designs and thus unite Eurasia geo-economically against US interests. This*

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*scenario has been described as a nightmare by American elites, especially with the accelerated decline of the USA due to the pandemic. Therefore, it is virtually inevitable, regardless which party is in power, that future US strategy is directed towards terminating the BRI.*

**Keywords:** Heartland Theory, Belt and Road Initiative, US, China, Russia, Great Powers Rivalry.

### **Russia and the Eurasian Pivot of the Heartland Theory**

Mackinder divided the world into Sea power versus Land power as two main geographical powers. He termed the preponderant side the “ring of bases” which linked the sea powers Britain, US, Canada, Australia, Japan, and South Africa into domination of the world’s oceans along with their commerce power. This ring of prevailing sea-powers was shielded against threats from the land powers of Eurasia, which Mackinder referred to as the gigantic continent.<sup>2</sup> Mackinder argued, however, that sea-powers were on the decline, due to economic and industrial progress, leading to simultaneous prominence of terrestrial powers.<sup>3</sup>

This led him to sound the warning that if the Russian Empire was able to expand past the terrain of Euro-Asia and gain access to the gigantic resources there to build a naval fleet, “the empire of the world

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<sup>2</sup> W. F Engdahl, “Behind the Anglo-American War on Russia,” *Global Research, Williamengdahl.com*, September 11, 2018, Available at: <http://www.williamengdahl.com/englishNEO11Sep2018.php> (accessed on 2 January 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Torbjorn L. Knutsen, “Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, and the Heartland Thesis,” *Journal of The International History Review*, Vol.36, no. 5(2014), 835.

might then be in sight.” Ominously Mackinder indicated, “This might happen if Germany were to ally herself with Russia.”<sup>4</sup>

Mackinder recognized the potential colossal geopolitical repercussions of the then new Russian Trans-Siberian Railway linking the vast territory of Russia in Moscow at Yaroslavsky Vokzal, across all Russia around 6,000 miles to Vladivostok on the Pacific, and consequently admonished his high profile British listeners, “the century will not be old before all Asia is covered with railways,” creating a vast land area unconquerable to the naval fleets of the British and later, the US-Americans.<sup>5</sup> The Trans-Siberian Railway<sup>6</sup> was complete by 1916 but stopped at Vladivostok beginning in Moscow.<sup>7</sup>

### **British Empire was secured via Heartland Theory by keeping Germany and Russia at Bay**

Since that prophetic 1904 speech, the world has witnessed two World Wars that were primarily targeted at wrecking Germany and its perceived geopolitical threat to Anglo-American hegemonic aspirations, as well as shattering any peaceful initiative of a German-Russian Eurasia.<sup>8</sup> On behalf of British rulers Mackinder asserted an ideology of dominance via his dictum: ‘Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the heartland commands the

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<sup>4</sup> Engdahl, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), a railroad connected to the Trans-Siberian Railway in East Siberia and the Russian Far East, became the last large Soviet industrial project. It was constructed in the 1970s and finish in the 1980s, reaching into Mongolia and China; stopping in Beijing. Anton Bendarzsevszkij, “100 Years of the Trans-Siberian Railway,” *Geopolitika*, February 22, 2018, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.hu/en/2018/02/22/100-years-of-the-trans-siberian-railway/> (accessed on 5 January 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Anton Bendarzsevszkij, “100 Years of the Trans-Siberian Railway,” *Geopolitika*, February 22, 2018, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.hu/en/2018/02/22/100-years-of-the-trans-siberian-railway/Bendarzsevszkij> (accessed on 5 January 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Engdahl, Ibid.

World Island; Who rules the World Island commands the World.<sup>9</sup> His Heartland was the “pivot area” consisting of the core of Eurasia, while all of Europe and Asia is the World Island.<sup>10</sup> This theory conceptualized the great British, and later Anglo-American anxiety of an upcoming land power capable of connecting Eurasia, which disadvantaged the naval powers.<sup>11</sup> The fear was that Russia and Germany could form a kind of union or alliance; they would then constitute an “unconquerable fortress,” as Mackinder’s premonition warned. This alliance would be formidable because Germany would supply the technology and capital while Russia would unleash its vast strategic resources including its manpower. According to the theory, this effective collusion would lead to the rise of these two seemingly unstoppable land powers.

When Germany was caught in a two-front war during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War it tried to extricate itself by supporting the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which occurred in 1917. German intelligence put Lenin into a closed Train towards Moscow in order to foment a violent Revolution to overthrow the Czar. The idea was to make sure that the new Russia, led by Lenin, would no longer be interested in fighting against Germany on the eastern front.<sup>12</sup> Russia had suffered humiliating losses in this war and one of Lenin’s promises was to get Russia out of this terrible

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Dale Scott, “The Real Grand Chessboard and the Profiteers of War,” *Global Research*, December 25, 2013, Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-real-grand-chessboard-and-the-profiteers-of-war/14672,%202009> (accessed on 10 January 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Matt Rosenberg, “What is Mackinder's Heartland Theory?,” *Thought Co.*, September 10, 2018, Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-mackinders-heartland-theory-4068393/> (accessed on 10 January 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Pepe Escobar, “Back in the (Great) Game: The Revenge of Eurasian Land Powers,” *Consortium News*, August 29, 2018, Available at: <https://consortiumnews.com/2018/08/29/back-in-the-great-game-the-revenge-of-eurasian-land-powers/> (accessed on 12 January 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Pearson, *The Sealed Train: Lenin's Secret Journey from Switzerland to Russia to start the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 12.

war.<sup>13</sup> In the end, Germany was still defeated, and Russia experienced a violent Bolshevik revolution.

By 1919, as the Versailles Peace Treaty negotiations were ongoing, Mackinder “urged the creation of a tier of independent states to separate Germany and Russia, much along the lines finally imposed by the peace treaty.”<sup>14</sup> His prophetic predictive capability was uncanny, as his 1919 book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* warned of a chaotic Germany that would result in dictatorship. In 1924, cognizant of World War I, he published his prudent theory that foreshadowed the Atlantic community, which engendered after the Second World War, and became a military fact with the establishment of NATO. “In his hypothesis he argued that the power of the Eurasian heartland could be offset by Western Europe and North America, which ‘constitute for many purposes a single community of nations.’”<sup>15</sup> Some observers also credit him with anticipating the rise of Hitler, although this is refuted by Crone.<sup>16</sup> After Germany and Russia had suffered immensely in World War I, their political systems became radicalized because of it; therefore, fascism began its reign in Germany and communism became the political system of the Soviet Union (SU). This led to both of them being declared almost universally as outlaw states by all Western countries; they thus saw it in their mutual interest to cooperate with each other, which led to the 1922 Rapallo Treaty in which Germany exchanged technology for resources with the SU. This rapprochement policy worried the Anglo-American establishment and it made sure that it failed. Since it was mainly about economic and military strengthening of both Germany and the Soviet Union; Germany was offered capital

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, eds., *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: the heartland theory then and now," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2-3 (1999), 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

from the US via the Dawes Plan, which made it change its course, while the Red Scare in the West and especially in the US made the SU into an ideological enemy of capitalistic, democratic, and pluralistic Western countries.<sup>17</sup> Mackinder was not only seen as a prominent geographer but also as the father of Geo-Strategy of his time and beyond. He was part of a closed circle of individuals that pledged their lives towards maintaining the British Empire. When, in 1904, Halford Mackinder's dictum was announced the power of Britain was already declining, especially with regard to a rising Germany. Germany was the China of its day, at the turn of the last century; it was seen by Britain as a revisionist power that challenged Britain for hegemony in mainland Europe. Just like China is busy in its enormous BRI project, even before WWI, Germany had an ambitious plan to build the Berlin-Bagdad railway. It started building it from 1903-1940. It is thus no coincidence that in 1904 a British counter strategy was developed. The Berlin-Bagdad railway was seen as a threat to British influence and also US interests,<sup>18</sup> just as the BRI today is perceived for the US, as it would have connected the energetic German economy to the immensely oil rich Middle East.

There is evidence that Anglo-American strategy was to embroil Germany, the rising power of that era, in a big war.<sup>19</sup> WW I served this strategic agenda, as Germany was faced with a two-front war between the UK, France, and later the US in the West and Russia in the East. When Germany was starting to win this horrendous war, the US transferred two million fresh soldiers into the slaughter in 1917, thereby tipping the scales in favor of the (Anglo-American) Entente

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<sup>17</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Amerikanischen Kriege: Verschwörung und Krieg in der US-Außenpolitik*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.(Tübingen: Grabert Verlag 2003), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur P. Maloney, *The Berlin-Baghdad Railway as a cause of World War I* (Virginia: Centre for Naval Analyses, 1984), 3.

<sup>19</sup> G. Docherty and J. MacGregor, *Hidden history: The Secret Origins of the First World War* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2014), 48.

alliance. This event, more than any other, led to the German defeat, which subsequently led to a disarmed Germany. But a disarmed Germany, as all powers knew, was only a temporary solution, and hence Germany started a second attempt to reassert itself.<sup>20</sup> At the Versailles conference in 1919, British Prime Minister Lloyd Georg even stated that if the Versailles Treaty is not revoked or modified there will be another war in 20 years,<sup>21</sup> hence in 1939, which was the exact year that WW II started.

A defeated Germany gave Britain some respite, but this condition was unacceptable to the leaders of Germany, and it would not last. So, the Western powers became apprehensive when the Hitler-Stalin Pact was announced on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1939. The massive alliance between a huge Soviet resource juggernaut and a rapid technically advanced industrializing Germany was seen as a disastrous outcome of power politics of the 1930s in Eurasia. And predictably an Anglo-American Alliance swung into action once the UK was threatened with military defeat, first in Dunkirk and not much later during the aerial battle for Britain, in the summer of 1940.<sup>22</sup> It must be realized that the Berlin-Bagdad railway project was completed in 1940,<sup>23</sup> however; WW II abolished it.

After WW II, Germany was not only divided but the US driven Marshal Plan and NATO organization were imposed on a defeated West Germany. The purpose of NATO was best summarized by its initial Secretary General Hastings Ismay, when he declared its mission was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans

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<sup>20</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Amerikanischen Kriege*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Grabert Verlag, 2003), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Des Griffin, *Descent into Slavery* (Clackmaras OR: Emissary Publications, 1996), 117.

<sup>22</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Amerikanischen Kriege*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Trupener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 316.

down.”<sup>24</sup> This was again in line with the Heartland Theory, as the US abruptly ended its WW II alliance with the Soviet Union that was crucial in defeating NAZI Germany, once this was accomplished. It then took the lead in not only ostracizing the Soviets from the West but made sure that a new German-Soviet-Russia rapprochement was prevented. This can be seen especially when a rejuvenated West Germany via its economic miracle, began the Ostpolitik<sup>25</sup> in the late 1960s. West Germany sought to have better relations with the Soviet East Bloc nations as well as with the SU. This led to predictable stern warnings from Washington and covert action and sabotage.<sup>26</sup>

There is also a covert history of Anglo-American intrigues other than war to prevent the rise of Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. These go back at least to the Rapallo Treaty of 1924, when Germany and Russia opted for closer economic and military cooperation. Throughout the Cold War, whenever Germany tried to establish economic relations with the SU, Washington would intervene in order to sabotage such relations. This occurred during the failed 1978 oil pipeline deal between Germany, the Soviets and Iran<sup>27</sup> and is still ongoing in the current US attempts to use sanctions against the Nordstream2 pipeline project between Germany and Russia, which is set to deliver Russian gas to Germany.<sup>28</sup> With regard to the Sino-Russia challenge to the US’s hegemonic status it has not been able to successfully sabotage these efforts as the Anglo-Americans simply

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Hurowitz, “What is NATO for?” *Washington Examiner*, July 25, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Ostpolitik is a German term for (West) Germany’s policies toward the East meaning mostly East Germany and the S.U.; it’s a rapprochement policy that aimed to get the required energy resources from this part of the world, while trying to maintain manageable and decent relations with East Germany.

<sup>26</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Amerikanischen Kriege*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Johanna Ross, “Why Joe Biden Will Continue the US War on Nord Stream 2 till the Bitter End,” *Info Brics*, February 26, 2021, Available at:

<http://infobrics.org/post/32870/> (accessed on 20 January 2021).



don't have the same leverage against these nations. Nonetheless, they continue to sanction Russia, while doing what they can to prevent China's BRI project from becoming a success story.

The Heartland Theory was also employed in the Cold War, as it was not just about containing East Bloc Socialism/Communism; it was also to prevent any alliance or union between West Germany and the SU. Whenever West German leaders made advances towards Moscow, like Willy Brandt or Helmut Schmidt in 1978, Washington threatened them with, among other things, taking away their nuclear umbrella, thus leaving Germany's security exposed to the Red Threat.<sup>29</sup>

### **China and Russia as Part of the Heartland Theory**

Shrewdly Mackinder also asserted that a union or alliance of Russia and China would create another unconquerable fortress.<sup>30</sup> Most of China occupied a portion of what Mackinder called the "inner crescent," a semicircular territory bordering the Heartland, but which had access to the sea. Mackinder advised the strategists of his day to "no longer think of Europe apart from Asia and Africa." "The Old World," he wrote, "has become insular, or in other words a unit, incomparably the largest geographical unit on our globe." He called that geographical unit the "World-Island" and "Great Continent," and warned the insular powers that they must "reckon with the possibility that a large part of the Great Continent might someday be united under a single sway, and that an invincible sea-power might be based upon it."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> F. P. Sempa, "Is China bidding for the Heartland? Beijing doesn't have to choose between Land and Sea Predominance. It could have both," *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

After World War II, as the Soviet Union had conquered most of Eastern Europe and in the 1950s allied itself with China, Raymond Aron worried in his book *The Century of Total War* that “Russia has in fact nearly achieved the ‘world island’ which Mackinder considered the necessary and almost sufficient condition for universal empire.”<sup>32</sup>

### **The demanded division of Germany and Europe via Heartland Theory halted Soviet ambitions in Europe in 1942**

When *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was published again by 1942, the crucially influential US *Foreign Affairs* journal requested Mackinder, in 1943, to provide his insights on geopolitics concerning an anticipated allied victory in WW II. In “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” Mackinder elucidated how a defeated Germany needed to be contained. In the West, he proposed France must be constituted as a bridgehead, while the UK’s island should serve as an unsinkable aircraft carrier, finally a backup of manpower, industry, and agriculture needs to be established on the US’ East coast as well as in Canada. With regard to the East, in terms of Germany, Mackinder gave a stern premonition: If “the Soviet Union emerges from this war as conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land power on the globe.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1945, when annihilation of NAZI Germany was accomplished, Mackinder’s Theory foreshadowed the emerging East-West confrontation that would quickly morph into the Cold War. When the US’s elite tried to manage affairs with the Soviets, East Coast academics scrutinized Mackinder’s work, while policymakers listened to them. Mackinder’s ideas even reached the doyen of the strategic and diplomatic community George F. Kennan, who was to become the architect of the US’s Containment policy throughout the Cold War. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1947, Halford Mackinder died and six days later, on

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> P. Tinline, “The father of geopolitics,” *New Statesman*, January 30, 2019.

the 12<sup>th</sup> of March US President Truman announced his Truman Doctrine,<sup>34</sup> which requested US \$400 million from Congress to counter and suppress any uprisings in Greece and Turkey.<sup>35</sup>

Even before this occurred, the US's power elite along with the UK knew that this potential Heartland had to be contained as the Soviets (Russia) had established a protectorate over Eastern Europe including East Germany, thus the Containment policy of the Truman administration was quickly implemented surrounding the entire East Bloc Socialist countries with different treaties that were military alliances.<sup>36</sup>

The crucial importance of West Germany was shown by the fact that on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1955 it was incorporated into NATO<sup>37</sup> and subsequently only 8 days later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1955 the Soviet Union countered this move with its Warsaw Pact treaty organization.<sup>38</sup>

### **The US Led Neo-Liberal Order after the Cold War**

With the sudden demise of the SU, at the very end of 1991, notions of US Unipolarity and hegemony were commonplace and for roughly a decade the US remained not only the sole Superpower, but its ideology in the form of neo-liberal capitalism based on massive and extensive privatization and deregulation coupled with 'democratization' reigned virtually unchallenged in terms of other ideologies.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Mansur Khan, *Die Geheime*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Helga Haftendorn, "Germany's accession to NATO: 50 years on," *Nato Review*, June 1, 2005, Available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2005/06/01/germanys-accession-to-nato-50-years-on/index.html> (accessed on 8 February 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Gerard Holden, *The Warsaw Pact: Soviet Security and Bloc Politics* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989), 138.

Francis Fukuyama's article released in the summer of 1989, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, was even about the future being all about democracy and 'free trade' based capitalism and was thus called *The End of History*. Fukuyama, who worked for both the State Department and Rand Corporation, was overly optimistic that once consumerist capitalism and democracy reign, humanity would have reached its highest potential, and hence, global historical evolution would simply end.<sup>39</sup> In his analysis he relied heavily on a shallow interpretation of Hegel and Plato.

However, history tends to be rather unpredictable; the initial changes made by Russia, in the early 1990s, towards privatized and deregulated capitalism coupled with some form of democracy would soon grind to a halt and be replaced by so-called managed democracy and authoritarianism. The irony is that Putin as an authoritarian ruler remains very popular in Russia.<sup>40</sup> As for China (BBC, 2018),<sup>41</sup> it never decided to democratize, seeing such a move as a dangerous liability, while its form of capitalism remains firmly state controlled, with socialist tendencies not entirely abandoned.

In December 2007, the Great Recession struck the US, due to its own reckless policies of brazen banks deregulation that gave credit to virtually anyone that wanted to turn their homes into cash real estate balance sheets. Interest rates were set deliberately low in order to

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<sup>39</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "Biography," *Stanford University*, November 2020, Available at: <https://fukuyama.stanford.edu/> (accessed on 8 February 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Holly Ellyatt, "Russians give Putin the chance to stay in power until 2036 after historic vote," *CNBC*, July 2, 2020, Available at:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/02/russia-vote-victory-for-putin-who-could-now-stay-in-power-until-2036.html> (accessed on 8 February 2021).

<sup>41</sup> G. Williams Domhoff, *Myth of Liberal Ascendancy - Corporate Dominance from the Great Depression to the Great Recession* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 32; Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production - Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (Pluto Press, 2011), 13.

encourage consumer credit binge consumption.<sup>42</sup>

China was one of the few countries that escaped the impact of this huge recession, which according to experts could have easily resulted in a global depression and was thus often seen as having the safer economic system with more growth producing capacity, while simultaneously also gaining in growth rates vis-à-vis the US.

### **The Economic Rise of China as Challenging US Hegemonically established World Order**

As predicted by the Heartland Theory, a meaningful alliance between Russia and China was a nightmare scenario for the US power elites. Should this occur, the US would face an “unconquerable fortress,” however, far less in military terms than in terms of economic power.

China has grown from an underdeveloped country during the Mao Era, into the US's primary economic competitor. The share of China's global GDP since 1992, rose from below 1% to 16%. At the same time, the US's possession of world GDP declined in 1992, from 26% to 24% in 2017.<sup>43</sup> According to the IMF's 2019 ranking, the US's global GDP accounts for 23.6% of the world's share while China's is 15.5% of the world.<sup>44</sup>

However, it can be convincingly argued that going by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of GDP is a more accurate assessment, and when this is done China is clearly the biggest economy in the world with a

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<sup>42</sup> Ryan Hass, “Why Has China Become such a Big Political Issue?,” *Brookings*, November 15, 2019, Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/why-has-china-become-such-a-big-political-issue/> (accessed on 8 February 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Caleb Silver, “The Top 20 Economies in the World, Ranking the Richest Countries in the World,” *Investopia*, Dec 24, 2020, Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/#countries-by-gdp> (accessed on 10 February 2021).

GDP (PPP) of US \$23.52 trillion to the US's US \$21.44 trillion.<sup>45</sup> If compared at PPP then China overtook the US back in 2013, and is now 25% bigger than the US economy.<sup>46</sup> Equally important is the fact that China's growth rate is still well above the US's at 6.4% in 2019, while the US's was 3% in 2019.<sup>47</sup> While the pandemic drastically slowed economic growth globally, it was China that not only managed to overcome the pandemic but also took an impressive lead economically when compared to the rest of the world. China is the only major economy that boasted ending 2020 with a 2.3% growth, while the rest of its main economic competitors show steep declines for the US and EU, of 25% to 35%, and 10% to 15%, respectively.<sup>48</sup>

Indicative of this accomplishment is the fact that at the end of 2020, China's production and services were restored to 100%.<sup>49</sup> A report by the BBC even predicts that due to the pandemic China is set to surpass the US economy by 2028; this would mean that it would accomplish this five year earlier than usually forecasted. The report stated that due to China's skillful handling of the pandemic it has boosted its relative growth compared to the US and EU for the coming years. "The Covid-19 pandemic and corresponding economic fallout have certainly tipped this rivalry in China's favor."<sup>50</sup> Beijing's share of the world economy jumped from a mere 3.6% in 2000 to 17.8%

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Edie Purdie, "Tracking GDP in PPP Terms Shows Rapid Rise of China and India," *World Bank...Blogs*, October 16, 2019, Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/tracking-gdp-ppp-terms-shows-rapid-rise-china-and-india> (accessed on 10 February 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Brenda P. Wenning, "China vs. U.S.A.," *The Patriot Ledger*, Dec 23, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Koenig, "China – Leading to World Recovery – And Beyond," *Global Times*, March 12, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Chinese economy to overtake US 'by 2028' due to Covid," *BBC News Service*, December 26, 2020, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55454146> (accessed on 10 April 2021).

currently and it will become a "high-income economy" by 2023, according to this BBC report.

Future predictions are also clearly favoring China over the US in growth rates, as the Chinese economy is estimated to grow by 5.7% annually until 2025, and 4.5% annually from 2026-2030. While in the US even after 'a strong post-pandemic rebound in 2021', the US economy will only grow by about 1.9% annually from 2022-24 and then slow to 1.6% in the years afterwards.<sup>51</sup> Shocking are the numbers of jobs wiped out due to the pandemic in the US, as a recent report put this number at 74.4 million people that became unemployed since the pandemic struck.<sup>52</sup> These citizens are also running out of money. Put into perspective this means that out of a total population of 331 million about 22% are now jobless. This is around the same as during the Great Depression of the 1930s, where, at its height, about 24.9% were unemployed.<sup>53</sup>

Overall, the assessment is that the pandemic for the US economy is a much bigger blow than for China's; this is also indicated by the macro-economic numbers, where the US economy fell by 2.3% in 2020, while China's expanded by 2.3% during the pandemic.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Root and Lena Simet, "United States: Pandemic Impact on People in Poverty Current System Leaves Needs Unmet; Lasting Reforms Needed," *Human Rights Watch*, March 2, 2021, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/united-states-pandemic-impact-people-poverty> (accessed on 18 February 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Greg Iacurci, "Unemployment is nearing Great Depression levels. Here's how the eras are similar — and different," *CNBC*, May 19 2020, Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/19/unemployment-today-vs-the-great-depression-how-do-the-eras-compare.html> (accessed on 18 February 2021).

<sup>54</sup> Evelyn Cheng and Yen Nee Lee, "New chart shows China could overtake the U.S. as the world's largest economy earlier than expected," *CNBC*, January 31<sup>st</sup> 2021, Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/01/new-chart-shows-china-gdp-could-overtake-us-sooner-as-covid-took-its-toll.html> (accessed on 18 February 2021).

Even more dismaying is that US infrastructure is many decades behind China's. US infrastructure is in a dire state, as the ASCE (American Society of Civil Engineers') 2017 Infrastructure Report Card gave the US infrastructure a D+ grade, which was the same grade it received in 2013.<sup>55</sup> The ASCE has calculated that some US \$4.5 trillion need to be spent by 2025 to repair the nation's highways, bridges, roads, dams, airports, schools, etc.<sup>56</sup> If one looks at the two Great Powers the pictures that emerge could hardly be more diametrically opposed to each other: On the one hand there's China, a nation that has been the most populous country on earth whose economy was charging ahead, for 30 years, at nearly double digit GDP numbers. Visitors say that if you visit China and then come back to the same urban areas six months later you won't recognize the area anymore as there are almost constant building projects ongoing 24/7. China's (urban) airports, harbors, ports, shopping malls, roads, hospitals, and even bus terminals are mostly all new and state of the art.

When one looks to the US, we see old airports barely managing affairs; no wonder the state of aviation in the US received a D grade from the ASCE. The energy sector even scored a dismal D+, as it is out of date. Roads got a D as well, drinking water a D grade, as many of the millions of pipes delivering the water are almost 100 years old. Alarming schools get a D+ rating. The public's system for transportation gets a D-, as per the ratings by the ASCE.<sup>57</sup> While China boasts brand new maglev (electro-magnetic) trains that attain amazing speeds; the US's Amtrak trains look like they are from the 1950s and operate accordingly. An assessment is therefore simple: China is

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<sup>55</sup> The ASCE issues its reports every 4 years.

<sup>56</sup> Cadie Thompson and Mark Matousek, "America's infrastructure is decaying — here's a look at how terrible things have gotten," *Business Insider*, February 5, 2019, Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/asce-gives-us-infrastructure-a-d-2017-3> (accessed on 25 February 2021).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



modernizing at breakneck speed, while the US is hopelessly lagging behind in virtually every category of vital infrastructure. And on top of that China is laying roads, bridges, ports, and railways all across Eurasia. How could leaders of the US then not fear that their nation is bound to become more and more irrelevant in terms of power and influence in the near future?

### **Decline of US's Hegemonic Status and US Strategy for Re-Establishing its Hegemony**

At this juncture, the view that the era of American hegemony is coming to an end became increasingly popular even in the US itself.<sup>58</sup> Scholars and experts have suggested this may mean the downfall of rules-based liberal global order, which was constructed by the US, after the Second World War.

It is, therefore, not surprising that while the Great Recession plagued the Obama Administration, it decided on a crucial shift in its strategy. In 2011, President Obama as well as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that far too much treasure had been spent fighting wars based in Afghanistan and Iraq in the global war against terror, while the real threat to the US came from the Pacific region.<sup>59</sup> The Pacific region was a thinly disguised way of meaning China. A gigantic reallocation of resources and the US Navy is now devoted and shifted towards China. China was now seen not as a Strategic Partner, as during the Clinton administration, but as a Strategic Competitor.<sup>60</sup> This

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<sup>58</sup> Alfred McCoy, "American Hegemony Is Ending With a Whimper, Not a Bang," *The Nation*, January 29, 2021, Jonathan Kirshner, "Gone But Not Forgotten: Trump's Long Shadow and the End of American Credibility," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.100, no.2(2021), 27.

<sup>59</sup> Mansur Khan, "The Making and Coming of the Second Cold War – US Foreign Policy towards China," *Margalla Papers*, Vol. XVII, no.1 (2013), 190.

<sup>60</sup> R. Baum, "From "Strategic Partners" to "Strategic Competitors": George W. Bush and the Politics of U.S. China Policy," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, no.2 (2001), 213.

strategy has remained constant regardless of party affiliations since the Democratic administration left office, Donald Trump from the Republican Party has not only continued it, but arguably exacerbated it.

In Donald Trump's national security strategy doctrine of December 2017, he labeled China a strategic "competitor," and blamed China for upholding a "repressive vision" while following economic aggression designed to weaken the US. While this national security strategy contained a range of generalized threats, most of the doctrine's criticism was aimed at China and Russia, which are labeled as "revisionist" powers trying to 'shape a world antithetical to US values and interests.'<sup>61</sup> President Trump exclaimed after issuing the NSS: "This strategy recognizes that, whether we like it or not, we are engaged in a new era of competition, ... We ... face rival powers, Russia and China, that seek to challenge American influence, values and wealth."<sup>62</sup>

The national security strategy is required by law; it is seen as a blueprint for the US diplomatic and military leadership as they plan, among other things, how to confront global threats. Since Ronald Reagan every president has contributed at least one, but noticeable is how Trump's focus is far more deeply grounded in economic issues, while also taking a tougher position on China. In fact, he made sure that economic warfare is the main strategy to be used against China, as the US fights for retaining its preeminent status in the world, by asserting: "Today, we are declaring that America is in the game and America is going to win, ... For the first time, American strategy recognizes that economic security is national security."<sup>63</sup> The main argument Washington uses to convince people is that the US-Chinese

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<sup>61</sup> Demetri Sevastopulo, "Trump labels China a strategic 'competitor': Beijing accused of pursuing policies of economic aggression to weaken US," *Financial Times*, December 19, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

relationship is unfair and 'out of kilter.'<sup>64</sup> It's based on accusations that China has violated patent laws and stolen secrets, which disregard those historically rising and developing nations, have done this, including the US with regard to the UK, after it declared its independence.

However, Trump's trade war turned out to be a fiasco, as it espoused an autarchic America First stratagem initiating an expensive trade war with China. Mutually intensifying tariffs in a two-year period harmed the US economy to such an extent that Trump relented, in effect admitting defeat in January 2020, by signing an agreement that repealed the most excessive US duties for China's unenforceable promise to purchase more US products.<sup>65</sup>

Almost adding insult to injury, China would, in November 2020, lead 15 Asia-Pacific states in signing an economic partnership, which promised to engender "the world's largest free-trade zone, encompassing 2.2 billion people and nearly a third of the global economy."<sup>66</sup>

As if that was not demeaning enough, only a month later Xi Jinping accomplished 'a geopolitical coup' by obtaining a landmark accord with EU leaders for the closer incorporation of their financial services. It gives EU banks easier access to Beijing's market, in effect drawing Europe much closer to China. It was seen as such an affront by Washington that Jake Sullivan, President Biden's National Security Advisor, publicly told NATO allies first to consult with the new administration before they sign the deal, but they simply ignored Washington. "Indeed, this treaty is arguably the biggest breach in the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred McCoy, "American Hegemony Is Ending With a Whimper, Not a Bang," *The Nation*, January 29, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, Section 11.

NATO alliance since that mutual defense pact was formed more than 70 years ago.”<sup>67</sup>

It would be difficult to downplay the shocking impact of these two deals on the power status of the US. As indicated in a January 2021 article by *The Nation*:

...those two agreements will give China preferential access to nearly half of all world trade (without even factoring in the still-developing Belt and Road project). In a diplomatic masterstroke, Beijing exploited Trump’s absence from the international arena to negotiate agreements that could, along with that Belt and Road Initiative, steer a growing share of the Eurasian continent’s capital and commerce toward China. In the years to come, Beijing’s inclusiveness could well mean Washington’s exclusion from much of the burgeoning trade that will continue to make Eurasia the epicenter of global economics.<sup>68</sup>

Former US Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchell for European and Eurasian Affairs revealed, in a Senate hearing, the real reasons of the Anglo-American sanctions and orchestrations against the Russian Federation and China. These show that allegations of Russian involvement in the US elections are merely propagandistic deception, used to divert attention away from actual US geopolitical strategy. Unsurprisingly, his honest exposure was censored by the State Department. His remarks make him almost a Mackinder pupil, by admitting:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, Section 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Section 13.

Contrary to the hopeful assumptions of previous administrations, Russia and China are serious competitors that are building up the material and ideological wherewithal to contest US primacy and leadership in the 21st Century. It continues to be among the foremost national security interests of the United States to prevent the domination of the Eurasian landmass by hostile powers. The central aim of the administration's foreign policy is to prepare our nation to confront this challenge by systematically strengthening the military, economic and political fundamentals of American power.<sup>69</sup>

### **US Economic Warfare against Russia and China**

Since the Anglo-American elite fought two World Wars in order to sabotage the covering of all of Eurasia with railways, it would be naïve to believe that they will permit China's development of an even more gigantic 'railway' project. History is repeating itself here and with regard to Russia, once again. The US's orchestrated Ukraine coup of 2014 February was clearly aimed at constructing a deep division between Russia and Germany, because; at this juncture Ukraine constituted Germany's primary energy pipeline connecting the industry of Germany with Russia's gas. Once again plenty of German exports ranging from machine tools to automobiles and hyper-speed trains are required to construct the resurgent Russian economy quickly, which was altering the geopolitical balance of power in favor of an evolving German-Russian based Eurasia. This outcome is obviously perceived as a loss for Washington's establishment.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Engdahl, "Behind the Anglo-American War on Russia.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 2<sup>nd</sup> Heading, 5<sup>th</sup> Section.

The student of Mackinder and founder of *Stratfor* George Friedman exposed the fears of the US in an interview back in 2015, when he stated: "...the most dangerous potential alliance, from the perspective of the United States, was considered to be an alliance between Russia and Germany. This would be an alliance of German technology and capital with Russian natural and human resources."<sup>71</sup> In his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 21 August 2009, Wess Mitchell gave a surprisingly candid proclamation of actual US geopolitical strategy via Russia. In fact, it was so honest that the *State Department* swiftly expunged the original version on their website. Here is the gist of the non-sanitized version summarized by author F. William Engdahl's article *Behind the Anglo-American War on Russia*:

Now Wess Mitchell's admission that the US strategic policy is to 'prevent domination of Eurasia by hostile powers' tells Russia and tells China, had they had any doubts, that the war is about a fundamental geopolitical contest to the end over who will dominate Eurasia—it's legitimate inhabitants, centered around China and Russia, or an imperial Anglo-American axis that has been behind two world wars in the past century. Because Washington mismanaged the Russian "Reset" that was meant to draw Russia into the NATO web, Washington today is forced to wage a war on two fronts — China and Russia — war it is not prepared to win.<sup>72</sup>

Political and Geostrategic analyst F. William Engdahl summarizes what is at stake for US Grand Strategy with regard to the Heartland Theory:

What the world has experienced since that forewarning 1904 London speech of Mackinder is two

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 2<sup>nd</sup> Heading, 6<sup>th</sup> Section.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Last Paragraph.

world wars, primarily aimed at breaking the German nation and its geopolitical threat to Anglo-American global domination, and to destroy the prospect of a peaceful emergence of a German-Russian Eurasia that, as Mackinder and British geopolitical strategists saw it, would put the “empire of the world” in sight. Those two world wars in effect sabotaged the “covering of all Eurasia with railways.” Until, that is, in 2013 when China first proposed covering all Eurasia with a network of high-speed railways and infrastructure including energy pipelines and deep-water ports and Russia agreed to join the effort.<sup>73</sup>

This means that what was once *the* Siberian Railroad Project at the turn of the last century, and the Berlin-Bagdad Railway project is now the BRI initiative of China with the notable difference that the BRI is far more ambitious than both of those 20<sup>th</sup> century projects combined.

As asserted, the Anglo-American power elite will wage war against this project, in a different fashion than during the last two centuries (1896-1940). The reason for this is simply that technology has advanced to such a level that fighting kinetic wars doesn't make much sense anymore between developed nations as they are too destructive, but there exists far more destructive technology on all sides of the Great Powers: US, Russia and China. One could thus argue that the atomic balance of terror has been replaced by another balance of terror, which is partially based in next generation technology, known as Full Spectrum Dominance, including proxy terrorism.

Back in 1997, the prominent Geo-strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski warned his audience what was at stake in his book *The Grand Chessboard*:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 2<sup>nd</sup> Heading, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Section.

In that context, how America 'manages' Eurasia is critical. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania (Australia) geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as accounts for 60 per cent of the world's GNP and about three- well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia fourths of the world's known energy resources.<sup>74</sup>

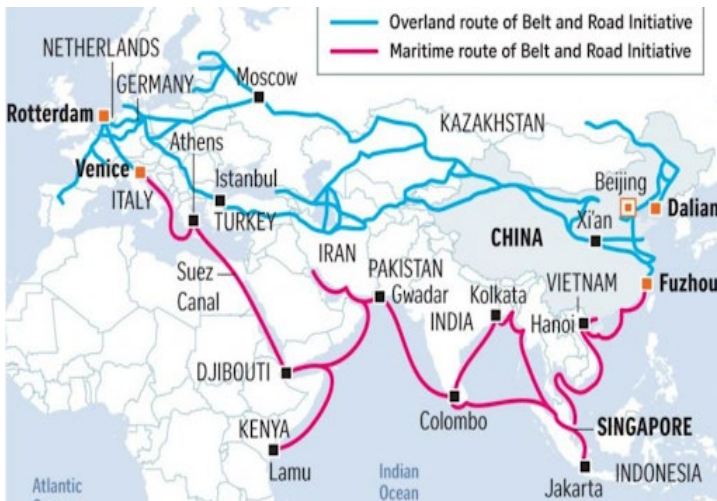


Figure: 1.1. China Belt and Road Initiative Map

Source: Asia Green Real Estate<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 31.

<sup>75</sup> "The Belt-and-Road initiative and the rising importance of China's Western cities," *Asia Green Real Estate*, Available at: <https://www.asiagreen.com/en/news->



This map depicts how the completed BRI would cover and connect all vital parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa, where the overwhelming number of resources (both material and human) reside, including the most crucial trade routes and global markets, only excluding the US as a market. The Chinese leaders expect that by the year 2049, which is also the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Communist founding of the PRC, that the BRI would be fully implemented.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It was no coincidence that Halford Mackinder asserted his Heartland Theory in 1904, in a then secret meeting, because; he was reacting to the Berlin-Bagdad Railway project, which started one year earlier in 1903. Already in 1919, with a defeated Germany at Versailles, Mackinder advocated “a buffer of Eastern European states between Germany and Russia, and, more alarmingly, a wholesale population switch.”<sup>76</sup> This was merely an early version of NATO and US Containment strategy, which at the time couldn't be realized.

However, today the stakes are much higher for the US's power status, as the BRI dwarfs the old German attempts at traversing railroads over a limited stretch of Eurasia. Completion of such a gigantic project is seen as an almost mortal threat by the US's power elite. As explained, US Grand Strategy has, for at least the last 120 years, been dedicated to preventing any such consolidation of the huge power potential of Eurasia. As the US is already suffering from a prolonged gradual economic decline, primarily due to the rapid rise of China over the last 40 years, and recently due to the devastating effects of the pandemic, any further erosion of US global power and influence is completely unacceptable to Washington's plans for

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[insights/the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-rising-importance-of-china-s-western-cities](#) (accessed on 8 March 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Phil Tinline, “The father of geopolitics,” *New Statesman*, January 30, 2019.

sustaining its world dominating ambitions. The biggest and immediate fear for Washington is that a world with a BRI would make the US more irrelevant, especially in terms of economic power and influence. The map clearly displays that world trade would shift even further away from the US towards Asia (primarily China, Japan and Russia) and the EU (primarily Germany and France). Therefore Trump declared a geo-economic war between the US and China in NSS 2017,<sup>77</sup> and sanctioned Russia.

The only sector where the US still maintains an impressive lead is the military, as it outspends the next 10 countries on defense combined.<sup>78</sup> But this is definitely a mixed blessing, because despite the fact that the US won the Cold War against the economically isolated SU, China is totally integrated into the world economy and a major war between the US and China would simply be too devastating for both economies, as they are huge trading partners, despite Trump's failed trade war against China. In fact, the US is still China's number one trading nation, and while China is the US's third biggest trading partner, this last ranking is deceptive because all top three US trading nations are in the 14% portion trading category,<sup>79</sup> which makes these US trading partners so close that it would be more appropriate to speak of three very closely situated number one trading nations for US

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<sup>77</sup> "Breaking the Mould: Trump's China Policy," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, February 2018, Available at: <https://isdsp.se/publication/breaking-mould-trumps-china-policy/> (accessed on 18 March 2021).

<sup>78</sup> Peter G. Peterson, "U.S. Defense spending compared to other countries," *Peter G. Peterson Foundation*, May 13, 2020, Available at: [https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053\\_defense-comparison](https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison) (accessed on 18 March 2021).

<sup>79</sup> "Top Trading Partners - March 2021," *Foreign Trade*, May, 2021, Available at: <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/toppartners.html> (accessed on 24 March 2021). Workman Daniel, "China's Top Trading Partners," *World's Top Exports*, 2021, Available at: <https://www.worldstopexports.com/chinas-top-import-partners/> (accessed on 24 March 2021).

trade. Also, China is the US's second largest financier for its debt burden, after Japan.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, the US still has the advantage when it comes to technology, but even here its once revered position is quickly being challenged and eroded by China, as it has mastered reverse engineering, and due to the general transfusion of technology in an interconnected and globalized world, China is rapidly obtaining vital technology from the advanced nations, even despite the pandemic.

All these factors make it ever so imperative for the US's power elite to believe in the Halford Mackinder Heartland Theory, as they know, almost intuitively, that the US cannot allow itself to be isolated from Eurasia, since that would make it increasingly more irrelevant in terms of its power projection and global economic ranking. For the sole remaining Superpower then, the only choice is to thwart, sabotage, and demolish the BRI challenge, as it can hardly summon its own strength anymore, due to its hollowed out industrial base and the pandemic.

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<sup>80</sup> Kimberly Amadeo, "Who Owns the US National Debt?" *The Balance*, April 30, 2021, Available at: <https://www.thebalance.com/who-owns-the-u-s-national-debt-3306124/>. (accessed on 24 March 2021).