

Why Geopolitics?

Karl Haushofer

from *The World of General Haushofer* (1942)



While the theoretical foundations of Geopolitik were laid only in recent times, its practical application – the instinctive sense for geopolitical possibilities, the realization of its deep influence on political development – is as old as history itself. Geopolitical vision inspired daring leaders who guided their people along novel never-before-traveled roads. Powerful new states emerged because their creators, with the sensitivity of the true statesman, understood the geopolitical demands of the hour. Without such insight, violence and arbitrariness would have charted the course of history. Nothing with lasting value could have been created. All structures of state which might have been erected would sooner or later have crumbled into dust and oblivion before the eternal forces of soil and climate.

To be sure, the powerful will of a great and strong man may tear masses and nations away from soil-bound existence into roads other than nature had provided for them. But such actions are short-lived. In the end every people will sink back into its accustomed ways: its lasting earth-bound traits will eventually win out.

GEOPOLITIK AS EDUCATION IN STATECRAFT

Although our eyes can not penetrate the darkness of the future, scientific geopolitical analysis enables us to make certain predictions. Should we not therefore attempt to explore the field of Geopolitik more fully than we – and especially our diplomats – have thought necessary? To pose the question is to answer it. Our statesmen in particular ought to familiarize themselves with all those aspects of politics that can

be determined scientifically before piloting the destiny of state and nation into the mists of the unknown future. Jurisprudence and political science, which have been considered the sole prerequisites of education in statecraft, do not provide adequate training. A sound knowledge of geography and history is just as important. Above all, our future leaders must be schooled in geopolitical analysis.

Only this can give them the needed realistic insight into the world picture as it presents itself from day to day. Not by accident is the word "Politik" preceded by that little prefix "geo." This prefix means much and demands much. It relates politics to the soil. It rid politics of and theories and senseless phrases which might trap our political leaders into hopeless Utopias. It puts them back on solid ground. Geopolitik demonstrates the dependence of all political developments on the permanent reality of the soil.

A whole body of literature has grown around this thesis. For the Alpine countries, Ratzel has traced the interdependence between politics and geographical environment in his *Alps as the Center of Historical Movements*. Krebs has given us an equally valuable work in his *Contributions to the Political Effects of Climate* in which he reveals the connection between lack of rain, aridity, and social and political unrest in East Asia. Kjellen, in his *Problem of the Three Rivers* (Rhine, Danube, Vistula), has shown us how the unhappy fate of Central Europe is inseparably tied up with the course of these rivers. And H.J. Mackinder, in his "Geographical Pivot of History," has attempted to review the entire world geopolitically and to forecast in 1904 what would happen between 1914 and 1924.

Why did our leading statesmen fail to see what this student of geopolitics realized as early as 1904?

Most likely because they lacked geopolitical training. In spite of excellent legal education and great administrative experience, they were unable to realize the effects of political-geographical trends. "Geographical ignorance may cost us dearly," warned Sir Thomas Holdich, one of England's most experienced students and drawers of boundaries.

GEOPOLITIK AND PRACTICAL POLITICS

Geopolitik has come to stay. We arrive at this conclusion from the fact that its application is gaining a growing following all over the world, while disregard of its teachings becomes increasingly dangerous. Some political successes can doubtless be attributed to geopolitical groundwork, among them the skillful selection of such English bases as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Penang. The reorganization of the Australian Commonwealth and the foundation of its new capital, Canberra, are likewise the result of geographical considerations. Geopolitically, even the choice of Tsingtao was a good one, provided one considers the establishment of a German base in China as geopolitically justifiable.

THE MISSION OF GEOPOLITIK

Geopolitik will serve our statesmen in setting and attaining their political objectives. It will present them with the scientific equipment of concrete facts and proven laws to help them see political situations as they really are. As an exact science, Geopolitik deserves serious consideration. Our leaders must learn to use all available tools to carry on the fight for Germany's existence – a struggle which is becoming increasingly difficult due to the incongruity between her food production and population density.

For our future foreign policy we therefore need Geopolitik. We need the same thorough training in this discipline as developed by England – though not under that name – with one-sided purposefulness, as adopted by France [in the *Institut de France* and the *Ecole de Politique*], and as it is beginning to be used by Japan. Geopolitik is a child of geography; whoever takes up its study should therefore be trained geographically. To teach it requires first-hand knowledge; teachers of Geopolitik must know from practical experience not only the country they are teaching about but also the

one in which they are teaching. We must, moreover, study Geopolitik with a view to the present and future rather than to the past. As a nation governed by lawyers, we Germans have been too much under the influence of the *lex lata* [the law as it exists as opposed to the *lex ferenda*, what the law ought to be]. We considered politics more in terms of dead history than of living science: we looked back rather than ahead. In this manner we lost contact with the future. Making retrospective instead of precautionary future politics, we were left out of the realignment of the world when it occurred at the turn of the century.

This policy was doomed to failure. *Ducunt volentem, nolentem trahunt* [Only those who are willing are guided by fate; the unwilling ones are dragged]. Nowhere does this maxim of Roman wisdom apply more truly than in the realm of politics. We learned our lesson.

[...] Germany must emerge out of the narrowness of her present living space into the freedom of the world. We must approach this task well equipped in knowledge and training. We must familiarize ourselves with the important spaces of settlement and migration on earth. We must study the problem of boundaries as one of the most important problems of Geopolitik. We ought to devote particular attention to national self-determination, population pressure, living space, and changes in rural and urban settlement, and we must closely follow all shifts and transfers of power throughout the world.

The smaller the living space of a nation, the greater the need for a far-sighted policy to keep the little it can still call its own. A people must know what it possesses. At the same time, it should constantly study and compare the living spaces of other nations. Only thus will it be able to recognize and seize any possibility to recover lost ground.

"We must see foreign nations as they really are, not as we would like them to be." This occasional remark of Erich von Drygalski [Haushofer's academic mentor and thesis supervisor at the University of Munich] has served me as a beacon in my geopolitical work. Let us not stake our future foolishly on one card, let us not choose allies which others – better trained geopolitically – have considered doomed a half-century earlier. By prudent, courageous analysis of our world-political situation we shall always be able to preserve our sacred soil from shameful defeat. The admonitions "see what is," and "keep away from

whatever our national honor cannot tolerate," are the pilot lights of our voyage. They are modest enough and even hardly sufficient to help our ship of state gain the open sea.

And yet – "I have neither men, arms, munitions, nor instructions [...]," the future commander of France's Army of the North wrote desperately to the Chief of National Defense on October 21, 1870. A victorious

enemy was pressing him in front, and he was standing with his back against the wall – neutral Belgium that was already within gun range. Yet half a century later his grandsons stood east of the Rhine in a defenseless Germany, masters of the world's third largest colonial empire. During those fifty years France had taken up the study of geopolitics!

Eastern Orientation or Eastern Policy?

Adolf Hitler

from *Mein Kampf* (1942)

There are two reasons which induce me to submit to a special examination the relation of Germany to Russia: 1. Here perhaps we are dealing with the most decisive concern of all German foreign affairs; and 2. This question is also the touchstone for the political capacity of the young National Socialist movements to think clearly, and to act correctly.

[...]
If under foreign policy we must understand the regulation of a nation's relations with the rest of the world, the manner of this regulation will be determined by certain definite facts. As National Socialists we can, furthermore, establish the following principle concerning the nature of the foreign policy of a folkish state:

The foreign policy of the folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied in the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation's population and growth on the one hand and the quantity and quality of its soil on the other hand.

As a healthy relation we may regard only that condition which assures the sustenance of a people on its own soil. Every other condition, even if it endures for hundreds, nay, thousands of years, is nevertheless unhealthy and will sooner or later lead to the injury if not annihilation of the people in question.

Only an adequately large space on this earth assures a nation of freedom of existence [...]

Germany today is no world power. Even if our momentary military impotence were overcome, we should no longer have any claim to this title. What can a formation, as miserable in its relation of population to area as the German Reich today, mean on this planet?

In an era when the earth is gradually being divided up among states, some of which embrace almost entire continents, we cannot speak of a world power in connection with a formation whose political mother country is limited to the absurd area of five hundred thousand square kilometers.

From the purely territorial point of view, the area of the German Reich vanishes completely as compared with that of the so called world powers. Let no one cite England as a proof to the contrary, for England in reality is merely the great capital of the British world empire which calls nearly a quarter of the earth's surface its own. In addition, we must regard as giant states, first of all the American Union, then Russia and China. All are spatial formations having in part an area more than ten times greater than the present German Reich. And even France must be counted among these states. Not only that she complements her army to an ever-increasing degree from her enormous empire's reservoir of colored humanity, but racially as well, she is making such great progress in negritization that we can actually speak of an African state arising on European soil. [...]

Thus, in the world today we see a number of power states, some of which not only far surpass the strength of our German nation in population, but whose area above all is the chief support of their political power. Never has the relation of the German Reich to other existing world states been as unfavorable as at the beginning of our history two thousand years ago and again today. Then we were a young people, rushing headlong into a world of great crumbling state formations, whose last giant, Rome, we ourselves helped to fell. Today we find ourselves in a world of great power

Defense of German Geopolitics

Karl Haushofer

from *Total Power: A Footnote to History* (1948)

Although not the originator of the technical term "geopolitics," nevertheless I have rightly been considered as the leading exponent of its manifestation in Germany. [...] The manner in which German geopolitics came into being is, by the same token, the justification for its appearance as a subject of higher teaching from 1919 onward: it was born of necessity. [...] It would be an inhuman and impossible demand to expect that a German scientist could disregard the inadequacy of the distribution of living space in central Europe, which had occurred in those times as a result of its overdeveloped industrialization and urbanization. To this must be added the dismemberment of central Europe by frontiers that could not last long and which, consequently, were geopolitically unjustifiable. For these reasons my book *Frontiers*, as well as other publications, was written.

What seemed most lacking in the resumption of the educational process for the training of German youth after the war was the capability to think in terms of wide space (in continents) and the knowledge of the living conditions of others, namely of oceanic peoples. This broadness of thought, limited by a continental narrowness as well as by smallness in its world vision, became narrow-minded and lost in a welter of trivial controversies. It was cut off from the energizing breath of the sea and robbed of its overseas connections. [...] The knowledge, therefore, of the great ways of life that were essentially sea-minded – the British Empire, the United States of America, Japan, the Dutch East Indian Empire – was then even more inadequate than was the knowledge of the Near and Middle East, Eurasia, and the Soviet Union.

Therefore it seemed necessary for German geopolitics to provide knowledge about the empires that are spread over all the seas and about the Indo-Pacific space. By that means a counterweight was created against the pressure from within during the period 1919 to 1933. Later, this sense of pressure, under the tension of internal party conflicts, unfortunately served more and more to overshadow and obscure this necessary knowledge of other lands. In meeting this obligation the faculty of foreign sciences of the University of Berlin also served, together with the only Institute for Political Geography that existed in all Germany. This was directed by my son, Professor Albrecht Haushofer. There never was any institute for geopolitics in Munich. [...]

No normal understanding man of any other nation can deny that a German scholar also, after such a laborious career and with every aspiration for objectivity, should have the right to stand at the side of his people with all his mental power. This he does because of the findings in his domain of knowledge, because of conclusions arrived at honestly and legitimately in such a struggle for existence as prevailed during the years from 1919 to 1932.

Although I never claimed as my own the principle: "My country, right or wrong," in its complete consequences, nevertheless it has to be admitted that the borderline is easily crossed between pure science and practical science in such times of extreme tension. Therefore it happened (slipped in) that I occasionally overstepped those borders. This I also admitted and regretted openly to the interrogators: it was recognized on their part also that from 1933 onward I could work

only under pressure, since my oral and written expressions were subject to four types of censorship.

Since the interrogators acknowledge that, in comparison with the United States conception of "legitimate" geopolitics, German geopolitics worked its way up to a balance of knowledge 60 to 70 per cent of which could be generally accepted as valid science, an exact differentiation will likewise have to be made between all that was printed about geopolitics before 1933 and after 1933.

If my whole scientific working material had not been broken up and in part carried off at the beginning of May by [the US army] I could point to numerous lectures, dating from the years 1919 to 1933, which correspond in their development, for example, with Scheme II "Methodology" of a course on geopolitics of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in use there on 1 July 1944. Among my requisitioned papers was the collected and fully developed groundwork of my lectures.

All that was written and printed after 1933 was "under pressure" and must be judged accordingly. How the effects of this pressure (in which Rudolf Hess, who tried rather to protect, did not participate) eventually worked out can be proved by nearly three years either of imprisonment or of limitation on freedom imposed on my family, also by my own confinement in Dachau concentration camp, the murder of my eldest son by the Gestapo on 23 April 1945, the severe control over and later the suspension of the *Journal of Geopolitics*. In the Third Reich the party in power lacked any official organ receptive to or understanding the doctrines of geopolitics. Therefore they only used and wrongly understood catchwords which they did not even comprehend. Only Rudolf Hess, from the time when he was my pupil, before even the NSDAP [Nazi Party] ever existed, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Von Neurath, had a certain understanding for geopolitics without being able to apply it successfully. [...]

Those theories, originally deriving from Friedrich Ratzel (*The Earth and Life: Political Geography, Anthropogeography*) and from those who continued his theories in the United States (Semple) and in Sweden (Rudolf Kjellen), were formed to a larger extent from sources among English-speaking peoples than from continental peoples. They were presented to German circles in the form of the principle: "Let us educate our masters."

Mahan, Brook Adams, Joe Chamberlain [...]. Sir

Thomas Holdich (*The Creator of Frontiers*). Sir Halford Mackinder (*The Geographical Pivot of History*). Lord Kitchener (1909), later [Isaiah] Bowman (*The New World*, and other writings) were the basic inspirers of my teachings and were quoted again and again. [...]

Imperialistic plans of conquest were never favored, neither by me in my writings nor in my lectures. As in my book on frontiers I also protested against the crippling of Germany through the border decisions of the Versailles Treaty, so in my public lecture activities I stood up for the Germans in South Tyrol. I welcomed the incorporation of Sudeten German territories, but I never approved of annexation of territories alien to our people and which had no German settlements.

I always regarded dreams of such annexations as dangerous dreams and therefore disapproved them.

The fact that thousands of German settlers were repatriated to Germany at much expense and suffering through VDA [Association of Germans Living Abroad] under my leadership, proves in the best manner that at that time, in any case, an occupation of those territories was not planned or, at least that the desirability of such an occupation was not known. If National Socialism had revealed, by the way it published its ideals in the early years of its development, that they included the conquest of alien-blooded peoples and their territories, it would have brought about its own retirement from power. This I stressed on every occasion, among others on 8 November 1938, and I opposed such plans of conquest. I believed in the promise of saturation made in 1938.

A truly equitable determination of frontiers which would satisfy everybody and which does not impose hardships on parts of any people is practically impossible because of the immense complicated overlapping of border languages and economic centers that have developed in the course of time, especially in eastern Europe. I, therefore, as well as my son Albrecht, and others of my pupils and co-workers tried in long discussions, without success, to work out completely just and lasting principles for such a delimitation of borders. In that, my efforts always were focused on the task of not creating irredeemable in any form. Therefore it is self-evident that the charge of planning conquest, including carefully worked out maps to infiltrate into continents, such as South America, was manufactured from thin air. In such matters the sensation-loving press was raving without let or hindrance, even using detailed forgeries of maps. [...]

The book *Mein Kampf* I saw for the first time when the first edition was already in print. I refused to review this book because it had nothing to do with geopolitics. For me, at that time, it seemed to be one of the many ephemeral publications for purposes of agitation. It is self-evident that I had no part in its origin and I believe I am protected against the suspicion of participation, mentioned in the yellow press, if one makes a scientific comparison of my style of writing and the style of that book. I never saw Hitler alone. The last time I saw him was in the presence of witnesses on 8 November 1938, and I then had a sharp disagreement with him. From then on I was in disgrace. Since Rudolf Hess's flight in May 1941 I was exposed to the persecution of the Gestapo which ended only at the end of April 1945 with the murder of my eldest son because he shared the secret of 20 July 1944 [the plot against Hitler's life]. He also was in contact with English-speaking peoples. My friendship with Rudolf Hess had its origin in 1918 and is, in common with his attendance at my lectures at the University, four years older than the foundation of the National Socialist party. I saw Hitler for the first time in 1922, when he was one of the many popular platform orators who were then mushrooming from the overheated soil of the German people and from the multiplicity of societies and political movements. [...]

From autumn 1938 onward was the Way of Sorrow for German geopolitics. The individual fate of father and son is illustrated by my imprisonment and his death. This happened within the framework of the suffering of "political science" in all central Europe under the pressure of the autocracy of one party down to the misuse and misinterpretation [of geopolitics] by state officials. Despite all that, German geopolitics had originally – from 1919 to 1932 – goals quite similar to American geopolitics.

In the program of geopolitics, on its first appearance, one finds a statement saying that it aspired to be "the geographical conscience of the state." It should then, for instance, have demanded in 1938 that Germany be satisfied and grateful for the solution reached at Munich. When I actually tried to put this

into effect – after my return from Italy and when I finally reached the head of the state on 8 November 1938 – I fell into his disfavor for it and never saw him again. Until that date, therefore, this representative of German geopolitics may well regard himself as a legitimate pre-defender, even in the sense of American geopolitics. The goal of German geopolitics originally had been, in common with legitimate American geopolitics – to achieve the possibility of excluding disorders in the future, like those of 1914 to 1918, through mutual understanding of peoples and their potentialities to develop on the basis of their cultural foundations and living space; also to obtain for minorities the highest measure of justice and politico-cultural autonomy – as was the case in Estonia, for instance, and for a time seemed to be accomplished in Transylvania.

This presupposed a geographically correct picture of the world; it required mutuality, moreover, and respect of one nationality and race by others as well as recognition of the human right to "personality." It demanded the highest degree of indulgence and tolerance, of which my lectures and activities were replete, for instance, from 1919 to 1932. [...]

In the memorandum which was written as answers to the questioning of General Eisenhower's staff and which lay before the interrogators, I specified in detail that an international geopolitics could become one of the best means to prevent future world catastrophes. It would have to be built on a lively exchange of ideas and persons, of professors, teachers, assistants, and students.

In the spirit of its name and by the political art of its leadership it could restore to due honor the "sacrament of the earth," the holiness of the soil which supports humanity. German geopolitics, between the earthquakes of 1914 to 1919 and from 1938 to 1945, endeavored to build a road toward this exalted goal.

Granting that errors and mistakes accompanied the course of geopolitics, they can be turned to profit by the wisdom of that saying in the English language: "All human progress resolves itself into the building of new roads."