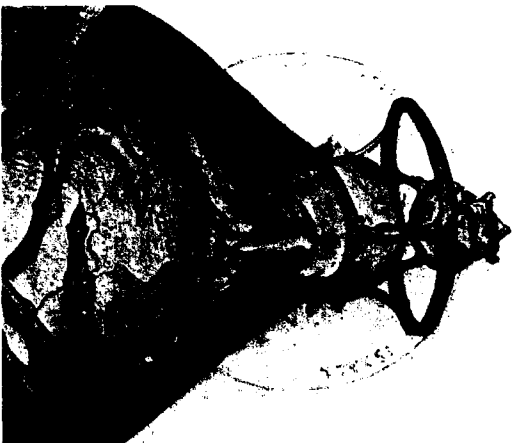


hands, and the most sacred sacrifice the blood that a man sheds for this earth. [...]

Neither western nor eastern orientation must be the future goal of our foreign policy, but an eastern policy in the sense of acquiring the necessary soil for our German people. Since for this we require strength, and since France, the mortal enemy of our nation,

inexorably strangles us and robs us of our strength, we must take upon ourselves every sacrifice whose consequences are calculated to contribute to the annihilation of French efforts toward hegemony in Europe. Today every power is our natural ally, which like us feels French domination on the continent to be intolerable.



Cartoon 2 Rothschild
Anti-Semitism was never a specifically German phenomenon. This 1898 French cartoon illustrates the pervasive myth that the world was in the hands of Jewish bankers, personified by James (Jakob) Rothschild.

Source: C. Leandre 1898

Geography versus Geopolitics

Isaiah Bowman
from *Geographical Review* (1942)

Yielding to some untoward bias, they entangle themselves in words, and confound themselves in subtleties.

(Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*)

The current discussion of German geopolitical writings involves the names, outlook, and reputation of certain American geographers, my own included. What was their position respecting geopolitics before general condemnation of Hitler and the Nazi program began? Did they foresee the evil consequences of German perversion of truth in the alleged new science of geopolitics which made use of the overlapping data of history, political science, and geography? It has recently been declared that American geopolitics was developed before it was taken up in Germany. The bad effect of this assertion touches more than personal or professional repute. It has given the question a national context.

Geopolitics presents a distorted view of the historical, political, and geographical relations of the world and its parts. It identifies no universal force or process like gravity. It is relative to the state to which it is applied. At least so say its advocates. Its arguments as developed in Germany are only made up to suit the case for German aggression. It contains, therefore, a poisonous self-destroying principle: when international interests conflict or overlap *might* alone shall decide the issue. Against "geopolitical needs" democracy opposes moral rights. Let us look first at the way in which this opposition arises.

THE MORAL BASIS OF DEMOCRACY

American democracy strives to achieve certain explicit purposes stated in a body of doctrine expressed in the first instance in our Declaration of Independence and subsequently in the Constitution with its amendments. It is at bottom the union of two principles (1) promotion of the general welfare through the consent of the governed and (2) respect for individual human rights. Doing evil things in the name of an alleged good cause is not the cornerstone of its philosophy. Democracy is an agreement upon purposes and a selection of means that a people's sense of justice approves. When the Reichstag in 1914 unanimously approved the German government's program, which had involved the violation of Belgian neutrality, it was expressing its sense of justice and giving its moral approval. By such approval it hoped to hasten the day of victory and peace. There you have also agreed purposes, a sense of justice, and moral approval! What was wrong with them?

Democracy starts with the individual. It believes in his general freedom to speak and act as he chooses provided he speaks the truth and acts so as not to harm the other members of his society: the natural and multiform "conflict of interests," greatly expanded in our complex modern societies, is resolved by laws passed by popular legislatures. There is no such thing in democracy as the worship of the state as an organism governed by "scientific" laws and rules applied by a dictator. On the contrary, it alleges that "the best society is that which increases spontaneity and life and variety" and that the state cannot itself produce an acceptable social life, it can only foster the forces which

produce it. We hold, with Lord Acton, that liberty is possible only where there are other centers of organization than political. The state needs the voluntary support of its many-sided people, and "its business is to safeguard by harmonious regulation the rich various life of voluntary associations in the state." Nonpolitical centers of organization in a democracy keep the public reminded of common purposes within a wide circle of diverse action and freedom. They promote lively and local discussion, independent thinking, and a richer context for majority decisions. [...]

The resulting democratic "culture" is not a thing imposed by government upon the individual or imposed upon other states by violence in the name of progress, or peace, or superiority, or the so-called "inevitable" of geopolitics. It is one of many cultures possible in a world at peace, each suited to the genius of its people and the limitations of its total environment, geographical, political, economic, and social. Each distinctive culture has grown up within a given environmental framework, that has left an indelible mark upon it. Both the richness and the peril of the modern world spring in part out of these circumstances.

THE BAD NEIGHBOR POLICY

It is the antithesis of voluntary cultural diversity, spontaneity, and respect for human rights and welfare that we find in the Nazi philosophy. The point of beginning with the German citizen today is the state; the line of his progress is violence to the individual; the goal of his policy is the enslavement of his neighbor. This is the bad-neighbor policy. We misrepresent German political thought if we suppose that the present war is merely a result of German reaction to the Treaty of Versailles. It is a result of German political and philosophical thinking and ambition for two hundred years. The Treaty of Versailles became a plausible pretext for reasserting an old philosophy. The record discloses that most republican leaders of postwar Germany gave only lip service to the principles of democracy and international cooperation. The solemn assurances given in October, 1918, when the defeat of Germany and her request for an armistice raised the question of democratic responsibility, lasted for fifteen years only. After that the government was no longer "free from arbitrary and irresponsible influence," and the promised responsibility of the Chancellor to the people came to an end?

Versailles gave German leaders new examples of the frustration of German aims to conquer the world. The Nazi political program has its roots in something very deep in German life and history: a way of rationalizing greed and violence. Nothing has so clearly revealed the essential primitiveness of the German theories of government as the history of political thought in Germany for the past hundred years. Its "laws" of nation growth, its recent "science" of geopolitics which assumes that "political events depend upon the soil," its assertion that "determining forces which dictate the course of states" carry over into a mystical state of mind where "science ceases and belief begins" (Kjellen) — these are among the doctrines that are separated from democracy by an abyss so wide that today only war can bridge it.

Can any informed person now suppose that German leaders had a tenderer philosophy? The power makers, the architects of the German state, expressed themselves clearly and often on this theme. Hear the testimony of Bismarck on Alsace and Lorraine. He is not speaking in 1871 but in 1895:

Their annexation was a geographical necessity. It is quite presumptuous to ask us to worry whether the Alsations and Lorrainers want or do not want to be German. That is none of our business.³

If "the fatherland stands for war," as Treitschke concluded, the doctrines upon which Nazism are founded follow naturally. One cannot understand either the present-day Germany or the historical Germany who does not take the trouble to get at the root of the irreconcilable differences between them and us. No one can see the depravity of Nazi geopolitics who thinks that it is merely another way of reading political history and the political map.

We fight today a crooked and evil philosophy armed, in the case of Germany, with continental power. A whole nation has been deceived and reduced to intellectual servitude by hokum. In our future plans and dealings we must take this fact into account. It has taken war, the concentration camp, the hostage killings, plundered Dutch, Belgian, Greek, and Polish peoples (among many), fifth-column technique, and all the rest to convince America how implacable and far-reaching are the means which the exponents of that evil philosophy are willing to employ. [...]

DANGERS OF MEIN KAMPF REALIZED

In the very period in which this cooperative enterprise was being pushed forward vigorously, another set of social and political values was in process of formulation in Europe. By 1933 when Hitler took over control of Germany these values were fully deployed and exploited and became the basis of his program previously set out in detail in *Mein Kampf*. The background of the related discussion within Germany is of vital importance to us, both now and in our future dealings with the German people.

Slowly and almost against their will the American people became aroused to Nazi dangers. At first we thought of security in terms of the mollusk. The hemisphere was our shell. When danger became obvious, the public search began for the meaning of Nazi designs in terms of German political philosophy and history. When successive treacherous blows fell within the Western Hemisphere we could not fight back in Europe only or Japan only. We had to fight wherever there was fighting: our commitments suddenly became planetary. We and our sons began to sail great-circle courses of thought and action. The whole "wide improbable atlas" was opened daily as our military situation tied every neighborhood, large and small, to the rim of the world. Hitler's design was world domination. We finally saw that our resistance must be as bold and far-flung as his design.

Thus all of us began to think geographically and to regard the map in terms of political ideas and systems. Port Moresby, Mayotte Island, and Dutch Harbor were regarded in terms that include all the lands and seas, the peoples and resources, the governments and ideologies that lie between. Suddenly we realized that even the remotest solitudes will not have their solitude restored after the war, and that victory this time means for America no resumption of something called "normal." We are obliged this time to think our way out as well as fight our way out of our international difficulties.

In the daily excitements that follow these realizations we are all strategists, statesmen, critics, and advisers. The boldness and imaginative quality that we urge upon our leaders find their counterpart in the rising flood of public comment on all international problems. This reflects commendable interest and enthusiasm in a free-speaking democracy. There is danger in it only when, under the guise of "science" or

institutional name or academic rank, wholly unsound and uncritical conclusions are set forth that purport to be based on "law," or reason, or trained judgment, or "the lessons of history." Geopolitics has migrated from Germany to America, not from America to Germany, and even the most ignorant and fantastic misconceptions and political immoralities have been widely disseminated in its name, and truth has been given spurious labels.

FOREWARNINGS RECALLED

[...] In 1934 there was published the third volume of a trilogy of books entitled *Macht und Erde* (Power and Earth), prepared by the Work Group for the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, founded by Karl Haushofer in 1924.⁴ Haushofer was a contributing editor. The first edition of my book on problems in political geography, entitled *The New World*, had appeared in 1921, and Maull, one of the authors of *Macht und Erde* states that the trilogy was prepared as the German answer to *The New World*. [...]

The method of my book was to deal realistically with the political problems of the postwar world. Its philosophy was one of gradualness of change by rational means. It interposed no ideological preconceived "system" between a problem and its solution in a practical world in which historical accident, not design only, had played so large a part. It sought to analyze real situations rather than justify any one of several conflicting nationalistic policies. Its morality was a responsive and responsible world association based on justice as given fully in the first chapter of the fourth edition (1928). Looking at the competitive world, deeply shaken by the colossal losses of the war, it emphasized the need for "experimentation in the field of cooperative [planning]."

It was this point of view that was the object of attack by the advocates of geopolitics in Germany. The word "rational" means one thing to us and the opposite to the German geopolitical school. For gradualness they would substitute violence. By cooperation they mean that the cooperator eats the coopee, on the theory of racial superiority. If there is to be a world association, a "new order," Germany must set its terms and impose its unique interpretation. If there is competition for resources and markets, the theory of *Lebensraum* gives Germany priority and justifies seizure. The

only political experiment that has united Germany is war.

Deeply disturbed by the rapid growth in Germany of the pseudo science of geopolitics and alarmed by its territorial theories and implications as displayed in widest panorama in the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*,¹ I attacked the school and its work in a group review in 1927. The review opens with the sentence "Political geography is still merely a term, not a science." Regional description and statistical and cartographic techniques are recognized as the special tools of the geographer in setting out the intimate life of communities. The review continues: "Some of the most important elements of culture seem not to get into the political geographies of continental Europe, namely, ethics, good manners, the elevation of fairness into a fine art, *cultured living*!"

Maull's *Politische Geographie* was specially selected for condemnation in my review because, as I then stated, "to put facts into a series, to invent mnemonic schemes is to achieve neither learning nor science."

[...]

In 1934 I said of doctrinaire writings in the international field in which geographical facts are marshaled to support political claims and philosophies:

If the economics of Poland collides head-on with the economics of Germany we cannot merely turn to the map and rearrange its parts as if we were free to plant supine peoples upon vacant territory. The historical commitment is there and we cannot ignore it.⁵

Why can we not rearrange the map at will if we are strong enough to enforce our will? We can if we accept Treitschke's doctrine: "The triumph of the strong over the weak is the inexorable law of life." If we believe that there is an inescapable compulsion in strength to assert itself to the advantage of its owner, then we move ahead remorselessly to do what greed suggests and power makes possible.

In my view the "geographical-basis-of-power" idea of Ratzel, as set forth in the first edition of his political geography (1897), is completely unsound. In Germany it has become a ritual, something that one believes, something useful because it fits the national ambition to conquer and govern in the name of *Lebensraum*, a concept that has been expanded from its earlier purely descriptive economic meaning to one that gives territorial expansion a pseudoscientific justification.

Thus expanded it has become one more catchword in the jargon of Hitler's National Socialism. The relations of land and society are not capable of such isolated "scientific" expression. Society is a growing complex. "We deal with rapidly developing and diverse human societies in relation to an earth of which we have an ever-expanding knowledge."⁶

In the face of this perversion of fact to philosophy I advocated the study of real groups of men rather than easy book generalizations about *monkind*. Whether we are dealing with geographic relations, demographic data, or economic statistics, we are only in the fact-and-tool stage of investigation so far as national states and national policies are concerned. Scholarship alone supplies certain definite imperatives in policy making, notably in the fields of conservation, law, and public health, to mention but three examples; but the policies that are adopted represent the people's lethargy or will, foresight or the lack of it, justice or injustice, and the power or powerlessness of leaders in shaping public opinion. A national policy is the "diagonal of contending varieties" of the people's thought and action. It cannot be otherwise under the rule of "consent of the governed." The concept of justice did not come out of a library, however important libraries are in conserving the concept and disseminating and expanding knowledge about it. The several fields of scholarship furnish in and of themselves no end philosophy of politics, no guaranteed political design. They can, however, suggest possibilities and dangers in the realm of political relations, choices, moralities, purposes, and powers, beginning with the record of human experimentation.

AN APPRAISAL OF GEOPOLITICS

I shall not attempt to follow the details of the German theories of geopolitics or further document their evolution . . . because a recent book is available that every citizen should read. It is *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* by Robert Strausz-Hupe. It appraises and reviews the philosophic background of German political thought. It is distinguished among recent monographs on the subject of geopolitics by the fact that its author demonstrates that he has read the German geographical and geopolitical writings which he analyzes! Moreover, he has an unfailing instinct for the weaknesses of the Haushofer school and its "science" of geopolitics.

Strausz-Hupe's most discriminating and useful remark is in the contrast he draws between the general ideas of Mackinder and the German political philosophy and its corresponding "system." Mackinder attempted to draw a lesson from history that might have implications bearing on state policies of the future.⁷ He described trends of power that England could not ignore. In adopting Mackinder's view, continues Strausz-Hupe, Haushofer pushed his geopolitical dynamics to the point of absurdity by seeking a fixed end to world strife through control of an Eurasian heartland. Neither Mackinder nor Haushofer had theories that could stand up to the facts of air power and its relation to industrial strength. Such is the fate of all prophets in this unpredictable world. I might add that the *mind* of man is still a more important source of power than a heartland or a dated theory about it. It is always man that makes his history, however important the environment or the physical resources in setting bounds to the extension of power from any given center at a given time.

Important is Strausz-Hupe's observation that the permanence of boundaries depends "less upon the geographic virtues" than upon international understandings about them. This is a quite different thing from the geopolitical contention by Maull that a frontier is only a hiatus between power-political conditions, that is, a mere abstraction. This is not science, either geographical or political. This is the brute assertion of a man on his way to an object defined by greed. The objective reality, concludes Maull, is the growing state and its dynamic life. As such "it defies international law and treaties." In contrast is our rule of law that treats stand until the parties in interest have negotiated a new instrument. [...]

GUARANTEE OF PERMANENT PEACE

[Postwar] dilemmas compel us to draw a wider circle around our national problems, now inextricably commingled with the problems of sixty other nations. English experience supplies a useful moral. Gladstone said in 1869 that England should have no joint interpreters.

England should keep entire in her own hands the means of estimating her own obligations upon the various states of facts as they arise; she should

not foreclose and narrow her own liberty of choice by declarations made to other Powers. . . .

England thought otherwise on the morning of September 3, 1939, when Neville Chamberlain reported that Germany had begun the invasion of Poland and announced: "We are at war." Intervention and withdrawal had marked the traditional policy of England in continental Europe. Thus we, too, occasionally emerge from our Western Hemisphere shell on the principle of limited liability only. This time we say that our emergence is permanent, that we must now make sure of our future, that we are only as imperishable as our resolution. These are polemical assertions, however. They are not inspired by divine revelations. Shall we be forever secure against "the restless forces of rebirth," or escape the weakening effect of blind reliance upon "democracy" as a magical doctrine?

The tremulous balance of international forces will vex us at the end of the war. We shall be confused and fatigued by the complexities and responsibilities in which war has involved us. We shall want things certain and simple again, we once called it "normalcy." There is no sure "science" to bring us out of these new depths of international difficulty. Geopolitics is simple and sure, but, as disclosed in German writings and policy, it is also illusion, mummery, an apology for theft. Scientific geography deepens the understanding. But, like history or chemistry, it has no ready-made formulas for national salvation through scientifically "demonstrated" laws. There are only two "laws" that will guarantee permanent peace in a world in which the choice lies between freedom and slavery, justice based on the doctrine of human rights, and the cooperative exercise of power to enforce justice.

NOTES

- 1 A.D. Lindsay, *The Essentials of Democracy*, Philadelphia, 1929.
- 2 Solito Wilson, October 20, 1918. In *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference* by Alma Luckau, New York, 1941, p. 144.
- 3 Address at Friedrichstrasse, April 24, 1895.
- 4 Otto Maull, *Das Wesen der Geopolitik (Macht und Erde. Hefte zum Weltgeschehen, No. 1)*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1936, p. 23.
- 5 Isaiah Bowman, *Geography in Relation to the Social Sciences* (Report of the Commission on the Social Studies, American