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J. K. Linn Jr.

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THE LEGACY OF GEOPOLITICS

Research paper written by Dr. John K. Linn, Jr.  
Naval Warfare Class of 1961

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## INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics was unknown to most people in the United States prior to World War II. Since then, however, it is well remembered as a system of scientific-like thought which the Nazis in Germany developed in support of their dream of world conquest. In fact, we in America began to use the term ourselves and even now continue to use it to a considerable extent. It is of interest, therefore, to consider what, of all this business of geopolitics that was so ballyhooed by the Germans before and during World War II, remains to us today as something really valid that we, too, can properly use in carrying out our national strategy.

A casual encounter with the subject of geopolitics gives rise to certain impressions. For instance, many of the profound-sounding utterances of geopolitics appear to be little more than truisms, things that a grade-school child should be able to tell you. Many a pronouncement of geopolitics is made without any demonstration of the reasons leading to it; it smacks of sweeping generalization. It appears to be a fairly simple matter to attach a geopolitical explanation to almost any fact or phenomenon in history or current affairs. One becomes quite struck at times by a certain mystical aura assumed by geopolitics, as if it were some sort of oracular institution presided over by high priests of its own.

Impressions like these and further reflections lead to some more serious questions. Is a separate system of geopolitics really appropriate, or could not all the explanations offered by geopolitics be just as cogently presented in the frames of reference of the other more established scientific disciplines from which geopolitics has been hybridized? Does geopolitics gain or lose meaning with the seeming reduction in size of the world and its approach to unity, where the situations of relationship between

nations and groups of nations become straitened by world organizations, lack of expansion frontiers, nuclear stalemates, etc.? Do events and circumstances of earlier times serve as valid analogies for the present time? Must not the study of the essentially two-dimensional concerns of geopolitics, such as the question of the relative values of land versus sea power, political boundaries, and economic self-sufficiency, give way to a consideration of such three-dimensional matters as are manifested in developments with respect to air power, ballistic missiles and outer space devices?

Again, how scientifically sound are the views of Mackinder and his followers regarding the "heartland" as the seat of control of the "world island" and ultimately of the world? Do these views receive any sort of confirmation in the present situation of the Soviet Union or the Sino-Soviet Bloc, or are we being misled by fears and imaginings in our minds? Finally, what is the proper relationship between geopolitics and strategy, and where do "war geopolitics" and "geostrategy" fit into the picture?

This study is prompted by a number of questions like the foregoing, but the main question with which it deals is: Does geopolitics have a positive value that is not already possessed by the older established disciplines of geography and political science, or would it be better if we omitted it from respectable discussion as being merely a hybrid pseudo-science and a source of too much confusion? We cannot here elaborate in detail the whole content of geopolitics or the history of its development, which can be readily found in various references. We shall, however, attempt to assess geopolitics for what it essentially is and to this end must go to some extent into the historical context of the rise of geopolitics.

An effort will be made, incidentally, to discriminate among different existing meanings and

interpretations of the term "geopolitics" and fix on a general meaning which can be consistently used in any consideration of the merits of the subject for further pursuance. It is, moreover, hoped that this study will point the way to the consideration of a proper role for geopolitics, or something analogous to geopolitics, in support of national strategy, with particular regard to the place it might take in conditioning our leaders and the public for the proper determination and execution of said strategy.

## THE LEGACY OF GEOPOLITICS

### CHAPTER I

#### SUMMARY HISTORY

There is no question but that the main impetus to the rise of geopolitics as a subject of wide study and discussion was provided by the movement which came into being in Germany after World War I, centered around the activities of the famous retired-army-officer-turned-professor, Maj. Gen./Dr. Karl Haushofer (1869-1946). The question rather is: would geopolitics be anything more than a little-known oddity of scholarly interest fostered by Rudolph Kjellén (1864-1922), the Swedish political scientist who first devised the term, had not the Germans, led by Haushofer, taken over the concept and adapted it to their use?

We need to go back farther than Kjellén, however, to understand how the ideas of the state embodied in geopolitics came into being. Even in ancient times we can trace attempts by philosophers (Aristotle, Lucretius), geographers (Strabo) and other writers to account for the influence which geographic factors such as climate, soil, food and topography play on men and nations. Following the Middle Ages, with the rise of the modern national state and the revival of interest in science and the humanities, we find further attempts to relate natural environment and political power, initially in the same vein as the classical writers.

It is in the nineteenth century that we find the specific source of the theory of the state as an organic being which has seemed so fundamental to geopolitics. During that century we note in geography, as in other fields, an extensive search and inquiry into facts, and the development of scientific explanations

of these facts based on careful and thorough analysis. The outcome of these investigations was a determination of the main effects of man's geographic environment on his culture and civilization, with the further result that geography advanced from a descriptive accounting for the environment alone to a formulation of principles governing the relationships between the environment and the enviroined—between geography and humanity.

Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) was the last of a series of nineteenth century scholars who evolved the school of thinking in which geography and human society are treated together under one heading. He gave this school of thought, or this branch of science, which compounds the sciences of geography, anthropology, and political science, the name of anthropogeography. Inevitably he, like certain of his precursors in this field, touched on matters that were later to become identified also as matters of geopolitics. He dealt, for instance, with the conditioning effects of the oceans, pointing out the importance of a maritime orientation in the development of human civilization and culture in the various continental lands of the world. Though not original with Ratzel, the matter of space (*Raum*) received thoroughgoing treatment at his hands as being essential to the existence of peoples and as playing a significant role in world politics. In his conception, the world was an organic unity, and not only man, but the state, was a part of this organic whole; the state was a living organism tied down to a land area which both served to mark its identification and to condition its character (form of government, type of society, etc.). According to Ratzel, moreover, there is a constant struggle for existence on the part of states in the face of the natural conditions attending their lands; there is also a continuous conflict among states resulting in the overcoming of smaller states with lesser advantages by larger and more resourceful states.

With this cursory review it can be seen that much of the groundwork of geopolitics was worked out for the Germans of Haushofer's school ahead of time by geographers whose primary interest was in finding a naturalistic explanation of the phenomena of human geography. It is of interest to note that Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914) had a similarly deterministic approach in his findings concerning the maritime orientation of the politically predominant nations of the world. A close parallel may be observed in two treatments of the Mediterranean Sea as an important factor in world history—those by Mahan and Miss Ellen C. Semple (1863-1932), an American student of Ratzel's. Ratzel himself gave considerable attention to Mahan's work, but differed in concluding that continental land power would ultimately prove stronger than sea power.

In the early part of the twentieth century the tempo of the evolution of a school of geopolitics was quickened by the work of Kjell n. He was but one of many scientists then absorbed in the study and discussion of the views of the earlier proponents of geographical determinism. He was also but one of many engaged in theorizing about the nature of the state. He, like Ratzel, conceived of the state as a living creature or natural organism. According to Kjell n, however, the state possessed not only vital organs (frontiers, a capital, arterial lines of communication), but also the faculties of intellect and morality. Thus, where he departed from the anthropogeographic school was in his pointing out that the influence of the natural physical environment of geography does not fully account for the nature of the state. The state must be regarded as being capable of pursuing its own ends and purposes along the lines of certain "inexorable laws of progress." In the system of politics formulated by Kjell n, the term "geopolitics" was intended to cover only those aspects of the state related to its natural environment: location (topopolitics), form (morphopolitics), and region,



area and physical features (physiopolitics). To cover the other more intellectual and moral aspects, he made up four more correlative terms—ecopolitics, demopolitics, sociopolitics and cratopolitics (treating of the national economy, the people, the society and the government, respectively). This system permitted him to combine with the thinking derived from the anthropogeographic school the thinking that had been separately developed relative to economics, sociology and political science. The Germans of Haushofer's school later appropriated the term "geopolitics" but gave it a broader application and ignored the other four terms.

Prior to the rise of geopolitics, the English geographer, Sir Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947), had already expounded an interpretation of the struggle between continental and maritime nations for the domination of the world. His conclusions gave warning that a nation in the geographical position which the Soviet Union occupies today has, by virtue of this position, the potentiality of ruling the world. That the Germans acknowledged the correctness of his views is attested by Haushofer's long advocacy of a Russo-German military alliance to assure ultimate German ascendancy in the Eurasian continent.

It should not be overlooked that when the German school of geopolitics was established, there had been a century-long build-up of a sense of imperial destiny. The beginnings can be detected, for example, in the *Addresses to the German People* published in 1808 by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), noted educator and nationalist:

Thus are you of all modern peoples the one in whom the seed of human perfection most unmistakably lies, and to whom the lead in its development is committed. If you perish in this your essential nature, then there perishes together with you every hope

of the whole human race for salvation from the depth of its miseries.

Fichte's pronouncements became the bible of Prussian chauvinism and the sacred book of German foreign policy. Subsequently the philosopher Hegel continued and enlarged the concept of the totalitarian state. Nietzsche taught "a gross egotism, worship of one's own individual thought, a lifelong crusade to deify the superman who shall rule the earth—and the concept of leadership (Führerprinzip)." Treitschke glorified the Prussian state and canonized war as "an institution ordained of God." These and others provided stimulation to the German sense of destiny during a period in which Germany achieved victory over France and unification (1871) and attained status as a strong world power under the guidance of Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II up to World War I. The century-long idea of a *Mitteleuropa* (the Danube area) under German domination, first advocated in 1841 by Friedrich List (1789-1846), played no small part in conditioning German national feeling for support of the Nazi strategy.

Haushofer became established as an honorary professor of political geography at the University of Munich in 1919. He drew around him associates and followers who shared his views of geopolitics, and with them he founded in 1924 a journal, the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, which over the years came to embody a great portion of the literature developed on the subject. Many books and articles in other journals were also published. Haushofer himself was the leading figure in the research effort and published a considerable portion of the writings in his own name. Eventually practically all of the geographic facilities of Germany came under the sway of the geopoliticians and great numbers of field workers were pressed into the service of sending back data to be incorporated in the research carried on in many centers in Germany. The subject of geopolitics became

greatly ramified. Geopolitics was given a military application and the term "Wehrgeopolitik," probably best rendered as "geostrategy," was assigned to this extension of the term. Attempts were also made to apply geopolitical techniques to such sciences as psychology, medicine, and jurisprudence, with a resultant portmanteau labeling of these synthesized "geo-sciences" as "geopsychology," "geomedicine and "geojurisprudence."

The fundamental ideas embodied in the geopolitics of Haushofer's school, according to one analysis, are all concerned with space (*Raum*) and are five in number:

1. Autarky, the ideal of national self-containment in the economic sense.
2. Lebensraum, the right of a nation to ample room for its population.
3. Panregions, parts of the earth to which a nation stakes particular claims for domination with a view to the exercise of an autarky not feasible within the nation's own borders.
4. The land power vs. sea power issue, with the conviction that the former, centered in the heart of the "world island" of Eurasia and Africa, will eventually prevail over the latter.
5. Frontiers as a temporary halt of a nation in its march toward world domination and as a factor which may serve as an excuse for renewing expansionist wars.

These ideas and the associated theories, programs for action, and propaganda found in the voluminous writings of the German geopoliticians, are generally

"drawn from several natural and social sciences, ranging from geology to psychology . . . They form a recurrent *leitmotiv* in these prolix and repetitious writings. When stripped of the ambiguities with which they are generally surrounded, they are seen to be presented in different versions, often mutually contradictory. All this is the antithesis of the spirit and method of science which the geopoliticians look upon as their guiding star, for natural science sets as its goal impartial search, accurate observation, lucid generalization, and precise formulation. Two of the five [ideas enumerated above] are applications of geographic theory, two others are proposals for world organization, and the fifth is a facilitating device."

The Nazis found in geopolitics a school of thought in sympathy with their political aims and seized upon it as a tool to further their aims in several ways. Geopolitics proved useful as a mode of justifying political action by the Nazis in the eyes of the intelligentsia and of the public at large within Germany and also in winning support, active or tacit, among many persons outside of Germany. It was built up as the basis of a powerful propaganda directed, first against the nearest neighbors of Germany on whom the Nazis had designs for annexation or conquest, then, when events reached the showdown stage, against the powers which became opposed to Germany. As a research effort geopolitics unquestionably provided much useful data concerning the geographical, and therewith the economic, political, and social—not to mention military—situations of the other countries with which Germany was confronted in her growth and expansion.

The contribution which geopolitics made in its proper sphere of suggestions or recommendations as to national strategy and policy are generally on the order of those ideas traceable to geopolitics which can be found in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, mostly in Chapter XIV. This book, first published in 1924, contains

reflections of an association which Haushofer had with Hitler through Rudolf Hess, one-time aide-de-camp of Haushofer's in World War I, who arranged for Haushofer to meet Hitler in 1923, later to visit him in prison. There is, however, no evidence of actual collaboration or direct participation by Haushofer in the writing of this document. Similarly, it would be difficult to prove any positive connection between ideas published in the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* and other works by the geopoliticians and the activities of the German nation under Nazi leadership, despite remarkable correspondences in many details. Haushofer praised the conclusion in August, 1939 of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union which he had advocated for years on geopolitical grounds, but it is debatable whether his advocacy of the agreement was a strong factor leading to its conclusion. Certainly his views did not count for much when Hitler broke this agreement in June, 1941.

In other countries during World War II we hear relatively little of geopolitics as such, even though some of those countries played key roles in the system of thought developed by the Germans of Haushofer's school. Italy functioned as the Axis partner in the center of Europe, with an orientation to the Mediterranean Sea, but in German eyes she appeared the weak sister of the alliance, ultimately to be cast aside or subjugated when Germany's main aims of world domination were fulfilled. Despite this disparagement of Italy, there was an Italian school of geopolitics of sorts. That is to say, a monthly journal was published entitled: *Geopolitica*, beginning in 1939, which imitated the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* and included reprints and translations therefrom. It had official sanction from Mussolini and there was, as manifested in it, a certain amount of original Italian activity concerned with geopolitical matters, mostly confined to the Mediterranean area.

Japan was of more particular interest to the Germans because of her position at the Eastern extreme of the Eurasian continent and the possibility of her establishing a new order of things in East and Southeast Asia parallel to that which Germany aimed to establish in Europe and Africa. Haushofer had a personal interest in Japan as a result of his pre-World War I sojourn there. He admired the Japanese and found in their history illustrations of the principles of geopolitics which he believed Germany should follow. As early as 1924 he wrote a book entitled *Die Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans* in which he championed the cause of Japan in the "spatial rivalry" for a Pacific region and predicted that Japan would probably win in this rivalry. He also introduced the idea of wars being started without formal declarations and being made "deadly, sharp and short" through the maximum use of the element of surprise. Later studies by members of his geopolitical school, notably one Klaus Mehnert between 1937 and 1940, gave attention to Hawaii and Pearl Harbor in a way that most interestingly anticipated the Japanese attack of December 7, 1941. The Japanese took an avid interest in geopolitics. The extensive use of German geopolitical writings and the slavish adoption of the German geopolitical terminology and concepts revealed in the Japanese press were typical of the close imitation by the Japanese of the Germans on scientific and military matters prior to and during World War II. The Japanese propaganda theme that it was necessary for Japan to expand her territory in order to accommodate her increasing population, with its obvious resemblance to the German doctrine of *Lebensraum*, illustrates this copying of ideas.

That the matter of geopolitics was studied to a considerable extent in the Soviet Union before and during World War II is indicated by the existence of extensive Soviet literature on the subject, of which the German geopoliticians took note. There is, unfortunately, little readily accessible evidence as

to the specific views which the Soviets may have had of the German geopolitical movement, or as to the particular trends which were manifested in the Soviet development of the subject in that period.

## CHAPTER II

### CARRY-OVERS

The impact of the geopolitics of Haushofer's school on geographical activities in the United States in World War II was commensurate with the effect obtained by the early successes of Nazi Germany in the war. As Americans became aware of geopolitics and the important part it played in the Nazi propaganda, they could hardly help but wonder if there was something in this geopolitics that gave the Germans a kind of superior insight into the relationships among the various nations. Respect for German scientific achievements of the past made them wary of dismissing this question lightly. But it was difficult to grasp the essence of the German geopolitics; its pronouncements were so often couched in confused, obscure, ambiguous language (very likely on purpose).

Close study revealed that the Germans with their geopolitics were indeed far ahead of other countries in an understanding of the bearing which geography has on world politics and war strategy, as well as in a detailed knowledge of the specific geography of various countries of the world, with particular reference to their economic and military potentialities. American military intelligence had previously been well aware of the importance of geography for military operations and for estimates of the capacity of various countries for supporting an extended war effort. But at the outbreak of World War II the United States found it had much catching up to do in acquiring and assembling the vast quantities of pertinent data. In short order it set about to do just that, with new comprehensive surveys of all the strategic areas of the world and original compilations of targeting information on enemy-held territories. The German geopoliticians must undoubtedly be counted a factor which led to the full-scale pursuit of this type of



research, which began in World War II and is still continuing apace on an enormous scale.

We are probably indebted to the German geopoliticians to some extent for specific techniques found to be characteristically used by them in their geopolitical work. The Germans made much use of special-purpose maps and charts, with peculiar devices designed to point up the features which the maps and charts were intended to display. The maps and charts were often reductions to simpler form of more comprehensive versions. Devices such as heavy lines, shading, cross-hatching, arrows, wedges, clamps, pincers and circles were used with striking effect to mark matters of emphasis and to represent geographic advance, penetration, encirclement, infiltration, alliances, and other movements and relationships of geopolitical forces. These and other similar techniques, of course, form a familiar part of the graphic display and visual aid techniques commonly used now throughout the United States, with additional embellishments of color, lighting and the use of special materials and forms. The use of these paraphernalia would undoubtedly have come about anyway, but the geopoliticians, as among the first users, must surely have given some impetus to it by demonstrating its effectiveness for educational and propaganda purposes.

The German geopoliticians have imparted some new terminology to our language. The best known word, given currency by Ratzel's disciples, then made into a slogan by the geopoliticians, is "Lebensraum," which has become fully established as an English word. "Geopolitics" is another word in the English language which, as noted in Chapter I above, we can similarly trace to its source through the German geopoliticians. Other words in English, as listed in Merriam-Webster's *New International Dictionary*, likewise owing their currency to the importance which the German geopoliticians attached to them, include: "geostrategy," "heartland," and "world island," the latter two having

been original with Mackinder. Some words previously established in the English language have come to have special connotations due to their association with geopolitics, e.g. "global" and "pivot."

Beyond such mere words, the German geopoliticians have undoubtedly transmitted to the minds of peoples in many parts of the world a way of thinking which reinforces nationalism among these peoples. Instead of just the Germans, the Italians and the Japanese, now it is any number of nations—some of them newly formed or recently made independent—that have, in studying their own situation in relation to the rest of the world, become conscious of their geographical limitations in terms of space and economic resources. Accordingly, where Germany and her Axis partners left off at the end of World War II, others have carried on. The representation of the need for more territory and access to sources of materials may be couched in different terms from those which Nazi and Fascist propaganda made so odious in the recent period of World War II. Nevertheless, the real struggle continues, intensified in the form of protestations against the unequal relationships connoted by colonialism and capitalism, with consequent demands for equality of opportunity and privilege. The present threat of communism is all the more potent for its having appropriated these themes as propaganda means for the advancing of its own cause.

In the scientific aspect, the German geopolitical movement served to awaken us forcibly to a realization of the importance of geography in relation to world politics. Regardless of how geographers of the old school resisted before World War II any idea of putting geography to use for state expansionist purposes, now there has come about a general acceptance of some purpose of geography other than the assemblage of facts for the mere sake of knowledge and enlightenment. World War II saw something of a flurry of activity in the United States in response to the stimulus

provided by the Germans. Efforts were made to inform people in the government and the public at large of the facts concerning the development and significance of the German geopolitical movement. Naturally enough there were also efforts to parallel what the Germans were doing, especially in the most constructive aspect of the geopolitical movement—research. The word "geopolitics" came into vogue overnight. Courses in "geopolitics" have at various times since then been conducted at a number of leading academic institutions. The War Department produced in 1944 a three-volume manual along geopolitical lines entitled: *Geographical Foundations of National Power*, and used it as the basic textbook for geographical studies in the Army Specialized Training Program. The Military Intelligence Division, G-2, of the War Department established an element in its organization bearing the designation of "Geopolitical Group." While the thoughts of many were thus occupied with applying geopolitical principles to the interpretation of events and the formulation of strategy in connection with the prosecution of the war, the thoughts of a few were turned toward the application of these principles to the designing of an international structure to be put into effect upon the conclusion of the war. A well-known effort along this line was the work of Nicholas J. Spykman represented in his *Geography of the Peace*, published in 1944. He advocated regional groupings, each under the direction of a dominant power, with a judicious apportionment of natural resources among the regions to provide a mutually compensatory balance.

In the period since World War II the German school of geopolitics has continued to have an effect on geographical studies and related pursuits. The particular geopolitics of Haushofer's school has been largely repudiated and discredited because of its prostitution of science for propaganda purposes. It committed many errors which in any objective review and analysis are readily apparent; it could only have thrived as it did on the nationalistic fervor which

Nazism stirred up in the German people. Attempts have continued, nevertheless, to identify and extract sound elements in the geopolitical system of thought, and further to develop approaches to the study of geography with its political and other sociological implications in a comprehensive and completely justifiable scientific system.

## CHAPTER III

### CHARACTERISTICS AND DEFINITIONS

In Chapters I and II we have traced the origin and rise of the German school of geopolitics and noted some evidences of its continuing effect in the post-World War II period. In the present chapter we shall review geopolitics in the various aspects it has presented to date in order to arrive at a determination of what it is in essence. Before discussing definitions it is well that we note some circumstantial and characterizing features.

First of all, we should not overlook the fact that geopolitics as a subject of study is peculiar to our times. The particular German school of geopolitics which flourished under the Nazis could only have had being in a time and setting in which a strong national state, professing a need for direct access to resources and markets outside its borders, was denied such access by surrounding states with crystallized forms of government in a static framework of international relations. There is an underlying principle here which can be associated with any brand of geopolitics, regardless of whether it is linked to one nation's aggressiveness or to plans for peaceful international co-operation. For there now is universal consciousness of the fact that each state forms a definite component of the world's structure, with an extension of territory, a limitation in boundaries, certain economic assets and deficiencies, and certain relationships with other states—all peculiar to that particular state.

It should be noted here that geopolitics has in the past exhibited an almost chameleon-like ability to vary itself in accordance with circumstances. For instance, Mackinder's views on the heartland underwent considerable modification from the time they were

first formulated in 1904 to the end of World War I (1919) and to the middle of World War II (1943). Weigert ably points out the variations in the relationships among Great Britain, Germany and Russia as among the conditioners of Mackinder's views at these various times and implies that the pronouncements of geopolitics are prone to be colored by current political considerations. One could likewise cite instances of variations in Haushofer's statements concerning, for example, the United States and sea power, which betray the influence that current political situations had on his thinking.

The fact that geopolitics is a synthesis of the two academic disciplines of geography and political science is a matter of interest. For geopolitics is not, as usually understood, the same thing as political geography, although it is, to be sure, a synthesis of essentially the same two disciplines, but of a different order. While political geography is primarily a geographical survey of the various forms of political organization in the light of all the factors affecting such organization, geopolitics has the main object of determining appropriate political action in the light of geographical factors. Naturally there is much overlapping of interest, but the emphasis is clearly distinct in each case. Some of the words originally invented in the same framework as "geopolitics," namely "topopolitics," "ecopolitics," etc., and the additional words introduced by Haushofer's school, notably "geopsychology," "geomedicine," and "geojurisprudence," give one pause; but there is inherently no lexicological reason why "geopolitics" cannot be a permanently acceptable word with a distinct meaning of its own. The questionableness of the term lies rather in the uncertainty of its definition and application.

An interesting question is this: Does geopolitics constitute a science? Kjellén, who coined the term, defined it as "the science which conceives the

state as a geographic organism or as a phenomenon in space." We need not, however, dwell on the merits of this particular definition. As we have noted, the term "geopolitics" has undergone a modification of meaning and application since Kjell n's time, and while his imputation of a scientific character to geopolitics might conceivably have proven justifiable in other circumstances, the question to be resolved now is whether the geopolitics that resulted from the efforts of Haushofer and his disciples was a science. Haushofer called geopolitics "the new national 'science of the state' (*nationale Staatswissenschaft*)" and spoke of "scientific geopolitics." His followers also called it "*Wissenschaft und Kunst*"—a science and an art. In the *Zeitschrift-f r Geopolitik* in 1928, the editors stated: "Geopolitics is the science of the earth relationships of political processes," but in the same statement went on to declare that geopolitics also partakes of the character of "an art, namely, the art of guiding practical politics." The consensus of scholars is that the German brand of geopolitics does not deserve to be classed as a science. Many scholars hold the term "geopolitics" in distinct opprobrium, because of its contamination by the German movement.

An interesting and valuable comparison between geopolitics and other ways of viewing relationships between human units and their geographical environment is to be found in a recondite study by Harold and Margaret Sprout: *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics*. Classifying geopolitics under the headings of environmental determinism and mild environmentalism, the author cites other approaches as being environmental possibilism, environmental probabilism and cognitive behaviorism.

a. Possibilism has found historical expression in a school which arose in France in the early part of this century in reaction against the deterministic school developing in Germany. The possibilists argued that within a given set of environmental factors man

had many choices of action. He even had the capability of modifying his environment, as demonstrated in modern technology. Man was not inevitably driven by conditions of his environment to prescribed courses of action. There were limitations, of course, within which his capabilities were practically confined. Analysis of capabilities, e.g. war or industrial, involves reasoning along possibilist lines.

b. Probabilism is explanation or prediction, by means of a generalized model, of the average, or typical, person's reaction to a given milieu. It normally reasons from general assumptions as to how decision-makers operating in a given physical and social milieu are likely to act and react. It often incorporates the view that international politics is a struggle for power and that foreign-policy decision-makers give highest priority to maximizing power. It tends to oversimplify the objectives of statecraft and frequently assumes that the analyst's own state seeks only security, whereas most of its adversaries are aggressive.

c. Cognitive behaviorism, influenced by Gestalt psychology, emphasizes the subjective aspect of man's apperception of his environment. Curiously, one statement of Mackinder epitomizes this approach: "The influence of geographical conditions upon human activities throughout history has depended . . . not merely on the realities as we now know them to be and to have been, but in even greater degree on what men imagined in regard to them."

The authors conclude their study with a consideration of the possibilities of integrating the foregoing hypotheses within the framework of a more general theory of explanation or of prediction. Explanation theory, as an approach to the problem of man-milieu relationships, combines features of possibilism, probabilism and cognitive behaviorism—all of the alternative hypotheses to those to which



geopolitics is subordinated. Explanation in terms of environmental determinism and environmentalism, however, is too vague and abstract to be of value, because it divorces the idea of the state from the human persons who take and execute decisions in the name of the state. Prediction theory depends even more than explanation on assumptions and less on definitely established factors; consequently the hypothesis of environmental determinism and its watered-down version, mild environmentalism, with their claims of certainty and inevitability, are simply incompatible.

Definitions of the term "geopolitics" show considerable variation. One definition makes it synonymous with political geography, but this is not what is generally understood to be the connotation of the term. An obvious, but not very useful, definition is the one that makes it the particular German school of geographical studies which was headed by Haushofer. Generalizing therefrom, however, it would be possible to call it a system of studies which purports to find considerations in geographical facts indicating courses of action which a state should take. This is, in fact, how Europeans generally regard geopolitics. Some political geographers have found good use for the term as a simple substitute for "applied political geography," in which a serious effort is made to study the natural environments of political states as universally applicable conditions and to derive impartial conclusions relative to policies to be worked out for these states by their governments or external organizations. Most people understand geopolitics merely to refer rather generally to national policy (either national security or foreign policy-wise) as affected by the natural environment and in relation to the rest of the world. Where the Germans differed from this was in using geopolitics as a means to promote the interests of their particular government, claiming that the natural environment determines the behavior of a state, as a form of living being or organism.

If we are to consider using geopolitics for our own purposes, we will probably have to be satisfied with the interpretation generally given to it, as indicated above, which merely recognizes that geographic factors have an effect on national policy, but which falls short of the deterministic view that a nation is compelled to act the way it does because of its environment. Whether geopolitics in these terms will ever become established as a science appears doubtful on the face of things.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

With the review in the foregoing chapter of the distinguishing features and identity of geopolitics, we are now in a position to consider what there is to geopolitics in the way of real and lasting value. We have seen that there is much that is all wrong about geopolitics. Yet there have been various scholars of high standing who found in geopolitics, even as evolved by the Germans during the Nazi regime, a new basis for the serious study of political states in relation to each other against the background of the geography of the world.

Before we begin to talk of geopolitics in any sort of favorable light, we need to clear away all the undesirable features with which it early became entangled. It would certainly be well to make a clean break with the whole idea which Kjellén, borrowing from Ratzel and other forerunners, wrote into his concept of the state and which Haushofer and his school eagerly took over, namely that of the state as a living organism. Not that comparing a nation with a living being or person is necessarily wrong. Lincoln at Gettysburg spoke of a new nation conceived, brought forth (by our fathers!) and dedicated, like a baby. Near the end of the Civil War, at his second presidential inaugural, Lincoln exhorted his countrymen to "bind up the nation's wounds." Franklin Roosevelt's address at his third presidential inaugural contained a curious treatment of a nation as a human being.

A nation, like a person, has a body—a body that must be fed and clothed and housed, invigorated and rested, in a manner that measures up to the objectives of our time. A nation, like a person, has a mind—a mind that must be kept informed and alert,

that must know itself, that understands the hopes and the needs of its neighbors—all the other nations that live within the narrowing circle of the world. And a nation, like a person, has something deeper . . . the spirit—the faith of America.

But these and other cases of likening a nation to an individual usually have a rhetorical purpose and need not be interpreted literally. In the geopolitical context, however, beginning with Kjellén, the concept of the state as a living organism lends itself forthwith to the philosophy of the totalitarian state. The related notion that nations are born, have a youth, become senile and finally die, similarly plays into the hands of ambitious dictators who attempt to extend their power at the expense of the established order.

All the other main features of the German brand of geopolitics, as noted in Chapter I above, likewise come in for a measure of condemnation. The argument for *Lebensraum*, which is linked with this organismic concept, can be shown to be a false one, as far as reasoning from population statistics is concerned. For, in fact, the acquisition of additional lands has never resulted in more than a meager reduction in the population of the supposedly overpopulated homeland. Much the same sort of judgment can be made of the principle of autarky for a nation and of the related principle of extended economic dominion over a wide region to ensure self-sufficiency in the "large-expanse economy" (*Grossraumwirtschaft*). As Strausz-Hupé says, "Germany and Japan could have obtained by universally accepted trading methods the raw materials and markets that *Grossraumwirtschaft* was intended to assure, and Germany had done a tidy business in the era of free trade preceding World War I."

On the matter of the argument over continental power as against sea power, the geopoliticians under Haushofer made grave miscalculations. They overlooked

the decided advantage of mobility possessed by Great Britain, not to mention the United States, in the form of sea power.

As for the idea that frontiers are mere resting points in a vigorous nation's expansion, although the Germans went to lengths to write a new system of international law to justify German aggression on the principle of *Lebensraum*, there is little likelihood that the world at large will in the foreseeable future tolerate such disregard for established boundaries. Since technology has made it possible for many people to achieve or to hope for betterment of their situation within their geographical confines, the *Raum* idea is obsolescent, though by no means obsolete.

In general, the criticism may be made of the geopolitics of the German school—and perhaps this is a danger inherent in any geopolitics—that too much emphasis was placed on natural factors, not enough on the importance of the human element, as between one section of the world and another. Haushofer did recognize variations in the human factor, but in practice he did not make sufficient allowance for it in his calculations. These and other mistakes greatly compounded the total error in the appraisal of the world situation made by the German geopoliticians.

The German school of geopolitics then can be summed up as a movement which served to lend support to the Nazi aggression scheme. It was a clever business. It helped mobilize popular thought in favor of the Nazi policies and tended to confuse those who were opposed. With ponderous pronouncements and catchy slogans, it gained among the Germans something of the power of a cult, if not a religion. But like many clever cults and false religions of the past, its cleverness was not enough to give it permanence and its falseness led to its inevitable doom.

What, then, remains to be salvaged and regarded as of lasting value from this fallen edifice? Even during World War II, the term "geopolitics" gained acceptability among many in the United States who recognized a certain validity in it insofar as it pointed up new factors in the study of international relations. Hitherto, the study of geography had been little more than a seeking of assorted facts concerning the various lands of the world *per se*. There had been little effort to relate these facts to the political facts of international relations. A few scholars, who were aware of the work of the Germans, though not in sympathy with its German nationalistic aims, did pioneer even before World War I in setting forth observations on the effects of geographical factors on international political affairs. These early efforts, carried out in sound, scholarly fashion, formed an impressive contribution to the sciences of geography and political science or their synthesis, political geography, and became the core of such a movement of geopolitics as there grew to be in the United States during the war. Because of their particular approach they can be classed as "geopolitical" in the sense with which we are concerned; but it is significant that they were produced essentially as contributions by geographers to geography or by political scientists to political science. With the flurry of wartime excitement relative to geopolitics in the German style now past and with the passage of ample time to reflect, it has been possible to throw much of the earlier geopolitical achievement into proper perspective as properly a part of one or another of the older established fields of study. What is good in geopolitics thus turns out to be little more than a part of one or more of these older disciplines.

Now let us turn to a consideration of some of the particular doctrines that have been classed under the heading of geopolitics other than those unworthy ones which have been condemned along with the German school

of geopolitics which fostered them. Principal among such doctrines which we should consider are those associated with the name of Mackinder. As noted in Chapter III above, Mackinder's heartland theory was not a firmly fixed one by any means, but was in fact influenced by varying political considerations. The effect it had was greatly amplified by the importance attached to it by the German geopoliticians, which it may be pointed out was in turn affected by political considerations. A most thoroughgoing critique of Mackinder's theory has been undertaken in Weigert et al., *Principles of Political Geography*. Here it is concluded that since the time of Mackinder's writings, in view of developments in communications capabilities not only on the Eurasian land mass but across the one-time Arctic barrier, the idea of an inner world island with its heartland and an isolated outer crescent including the North American continent is an oversimplification and an obsolescence. "As a glimpse of the globe or any world map not inspired by Mercator makes clear, the two 'mainlands' almost merge in their northern expanses. It is here that the land power and the land-based air power of the North American nations and of the U.S.S.R. are now maneuvering for positions in anticipation of a possible major conflict."

The conclusions of the earlier writers on the sea power-versus-land power issue have undergone a thorough review, too. In general, the criticism against them is that they are further instances of oversimplification. As we have noted in Chapter I above, Mahan and Ratzel both found in sea power a highly significant factor in history. Mahan, on the other hand, argued that historical evidence pointed to the necessity of strong sea power in support of imperial purposes. Ratzel, on the other hand, saw indications of the gradual demise of sea power with its ultimate overthrow by land power. Mackinder took this European view and incorporated it in his warnings of the potential advantage which might be realized by a power controlling the heartland.

Spykman took issue with Mackinder in his interpretation of the position of the lands surrounding the heartland. Mackinder called them "marginal lands" and believed that they were doomed to be completely dominated by the power in the heartland. Spykman, however, relabeled them "rimlands" and pointed out that historically Great Britain and Russia have usually opposed each other with a number of other members of these rimlands allied with them on one side or the other, or else they have joined in an alliance with each other in opposition to a rimland power, e.g. France or Germany, which tried to gain control over the whole continent. The marginal lands or rimlands form a power element in their own right, with their power partaking of both the forms of sea power and land power. "Emphasis on the land power-sea power conflict meant even before the advent of air power a gross oversimplification, as it is the accessibility to both sea and land and the power deriving from it which gives the marginal regions growing importance. In the second half of the twentieth century, the impact of air power makes a new appraisal of the marginal lands mandatory, in their relationship to the heartland as well as to other areas."

The prevailing view which scholars hold of Mackinder today is summed up in the following statement:

H.J. Mackinder presented nearly half a century ago a thesis of world power analysis and prognosis which for better or worse has become the most famous contribution of modern geography to man's view of his political world. Mackinder's interest and purpose, it may be noted, were primarily political and practical and it is not surprising therefore that his hypothesis is much less firmly grounded than, for example, his more academic and geographic analysis of the foundation of Britain's sea power in the relationship of Great Britain to "The British Seas."



Thus, as we have seen, the central views of those who have been most highly regarded or who have achieved the greatest notoriety in the geopolitical movement are largely ignored or discredited today. The few sound scholars willing to wear the label of "geopolitician" have envisioned something slightly different from what, looking at the matter carefully, we now understand to be geopolitics. Most others in their place would today consider their activity to be a part of the functions, perhaps a bit extended, of geography or of political geography proper. "Geopolitics" is a convenient handle—more convenient, especially in its adjectival form, than, say, "political geography" and "politico-geographical"—but it has been made fairly worthless as a term having a precise significance. The following statement is a sample of the current attitude toward geopolitics of many in the academic field:

The analysis of national power represents a distinct area of convergence, not only of geography and political science, but also of economics, anthropology, and psychology. It would seem well to identify this area of joint interest with a clear and simple name, such as "power analysis" rather than to obscure it by the all-embracing term, geopolitics, the origin of which is steeped in error, exaggeration, and intellectual poison.

But while we may conclude that geopolitics in the form in which it was identified and known in its heyday under the Nazis is now, to all intents and purposes, dead, it would be wrong to ignore one element of the movement which is still with us and very much alive today: this is the aspect of its being a basis for nationalistic propaganda. It made full use of homespun metaphors and vivid symbols which could be readily comprehended by the average citizen. It played upon the feelings of dissatisfaction and the desire

for a better lot latent in every individual. All the time that it represented itself as a serious scholarly effort it was in reality a somewhat disguised propaganda mechanism. The main real justification that German geopolitics had for itself was the fact that it supported the Nazi government's purposes of national aggression. Remove the earmarks of the German organization and you have in this brand of geopolitics a straightforward propagandea effort of a type not unfamiliar in the world today.

It is not without interest to compare the German geopolitical movement with the world communist movement centered in the U.S.S.R. Gyorgy in 1944 observed:

Geographical materialism [referring to the German geopolitical movement] is a twentieth-century "spatial" version of earlier, Marxist methods. The interpretation remains the same, only instead of explaining political and historical phenomena in terms of economics, geopolitics considers them in terms of space. History, according to this conception, consists of endless fights among states for political and spatial survival, while states themselves are predetermined and measured by only two standards, power and territory. Following in the footsteps of Marxist economic determinism, geographical materialism completely ignores all social, human, and cultural values.

The element of conflict is also present in both ideological systems, the emphasis alone showing the divergences. Followers of Marx speak of a class struggle, whereas the Haushoferites attempt to describe a conflict of youthful, dynamic, and strong versus aged, static, or weakened nations. The feeling of an impending catastrophe fatal to the present-day structure of society is

equally shared by both schools. For the Marxists this catastrophe heralds the coming victory of the proletarian revolution and the formation of a giant proletarian state. Geopolitics interprets the catastrophe as a world-wide struggle among space-swallowing and space-resisting states, leading eventually to a redivision of the earth among the few triumphant proletarianized giant states. Capitalist society and an integrated, more or less normalized family of nations of pre-World War I vintage are, in either case, definitely predestined to come to an end.

Interesting comparisons have also been drawn between the geopolitics of the German school and the creed of Manifest Destiny which flourished in the period 1830-1860 and continued to have an influence down to the end of the nineteenth century. Mahan's stimulation of American interest in sea power may be said to have resulted in an extension of the Manifest Destiny "geopolitics," which had previously been mainly continental, into an overseas frame of reference.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

It is ironic that we continue to hear so much of geopolitics today, seeing that its validity has been denied by leading figures in the scholastic world. Geopolitics is not dying out. It evidently comes naturally to many government officials, lecturers and writers dealing with national strategy to make sweeping references to the subject of geopolitics, with casual allusions to the world island and the heartland and the issue of sea power versus land power. Even scholars go along with the tide. What does this mean?

Perhaps the explanation is to be found partly along the line that we need a simple theory to guide us. For even though we may realize that a highly simplified explanation of things is apt to overlook many important points in this complex world, yet it is human nature for us to welcome a theory that reduces matters to a simple set of issues with us on one side and our enemy on the other. The communists, like the Nazis, have simplified matters along the lines of haves-versus-have-nots, capitalists-versus-workers, and the like. It may well be that, where we encounter difficulties in competing with the communists with respect to their economic materialism, we find ourselves in a more comfortable position with respect to something like the geographic materialism represented in geopolitics, without the trappings of the German school. This might help to explain why it is fashionable, in comparing the relative power postures of the United States and the Soviet Union in the world today, to adduce the terminology and concepts of geopolitics. Since Nazi Germany was able to make things simple for its people this way, perhaps we are fortunate in that, by adopting the same general principle, with a substitution of countries and areas, we have gotten a ready-made clarification of our present situation in the simplest terms.

Whether or not the foregoing rationalization explains why geopolitics stays with us, the important fact is that it is still here. This is not necessarily a bad or wrong thing. We do need to beware of the danger that we might place too much stock in such a simple explanation of matters. Our knowledge of the experience of the German geopolitics and our own relatively sane attitude, however, should guard us from making miscalculations of the magnitude of those which the Germans made. In any case, we do need something—and it is entirely possible that geopolitics, in a suitable form, could be that something—to give us a lucid and compelling justification of our position in the world, comparable to the way it helped the Germans.

The specific content of the geopolitical doctrines which we use must be different. We do not care about *Lebensraum*. We are not concerned with autarky for any region except the world-wide one consisting of all the Free World—in other words, uninhibited trade and mutual assistance on a global scale. Talk of frontiers can be only in terms of the iron curtain, bamboo curtain or any other type of barrier between the Free World and the communist bloc. There will still be the sea power-land power issue, complicated, however, by the growing importance of air power and space technology. Above all, we must assiduously avoid the highly deterministic view that the state is a living organism which must respond involuntarily to the forces exerted upon it by its environment.

An acceptable body of geopolitical-type doctrine for us would begin with a recognition of the conditioning effects of geographical environment on a political state. It would further acknowledge the importance of the fact first emphasized by Mackinder that the world has become in modern times a closed system. It would then proceed to consider how the needs of the peoples of the world can be most appropriately met by judicious allocation of the real

estate and means of livelihood available in the world. A most essential consideration today is that it also must take into account the aid which technology can provide in improving the lot of peoples everywhere.

Strausz-Hupé in 1942 stated:

But if our reading of history does not deceive us there is another alternative [to the system of power spheres which arose after the eclipse of the League of Nations or a system of approximately symmetrical regional areas each dominated by a great power]. Modern technology is subtly changing the pattern of expansionism as we have known it. According to Ratzel, space is a power which would prove superior to all other powers; the Mackinders and Haushofers, notwithstanding considerable difference of opinion, have substantially accepted his dogma, and the history of the past appears to reflect the ascendancy of the regional super-state. Modern technology, however, is revolutionizing our concepts of space, and the very exigencies of modern technology, with its demands on the economic resources of the *whole* globe, bid fair to drive men's thoughts about the world's political organization into yet untried channels.

He went on to point out one such channel as being the "obliteration of tariff barriers," in which is implicit "the mutual acceptance of the idea of the world's economy being truly one." He referred to "an increasing sense of the real mission of the United States in this age to put an end to the era of rampant expansionism and to clear the decks for an order which will be universally beneficent and universally secure." He considered that the United States should use "its great size, space deepness, and resources, its possession of all the geographical prerequisites of land,

air and sea power" to exercise "beneficent leadership" in establishing a new and universal order.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY

In the Introduction to this paper we set out to examine geopolitics with certain questions in mind. We have examined the subject and in the course of doing so found answers or indications of answers to these questions. The main question with which the paper was concerned was whether geopolitics has validity as an independent subject of research in the academic sense, and the answer we have arrived at is No.

We have seen that many of the geopolitical concepts which have been most highly publicized, including the well-known ones of Mackinder, are scientifically unsupportable; for the most part they have owed their origin and continued existence to political considerations. The basic motivation of geopolitics is political, not scientific, and insofar as it seeks to put a deterministic interpretation on the effect of geography on man, through the attribution of an organic nature to the state, or the like, it lends itself to totalitarian and aggressive purposes.

Geopolitics persists in our time as the caption of a point of view which seems to make clear our relationship to the rest of the world. Its simplicity has much appeal for us, as it has had for others. If we avoid the worst errors into which the German geopoliticians fell, it may be that geopolitics will over the years prove to have a positive value for us as well.

We might make good use of a modified geopolitics-type doctrine which recognizes that geographical factors do have an effect on human society, that the ecumene of the world is finite, and that steps can be taken to redress imbalances in natural resources



between one part of the world and another to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

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BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Mr. John K. Linn, Jr.

SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS: Foreign Language

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: Gettysburg College, A.B., 1939  
Yale University, Ph.D., 1950  
Naval War College,  
(Naval Warfare Course) 1960-61

DUTY ASSIGNMENTS:

Dept. of Defense	Analyst	7/50-6/60
G-2, War Dept.	Intelligence Officer	4/42-9/46