

# Political Geography into Geopolitics – The Geopolitics of Decline

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## Abstract

This article is dealing with the reasons for usage and development of Geopolitics in Germany between the two World wars. Hitler's ideas for German expansion are viewed as influenced by German geopolitics main figures and their ideas. German geopolitics in this work is represented as an attempt of strategic, valid and consistent manner of assessing its major international geopolitical aspirations. It was not only about ensuring survival in an extremely volatile geographic location but attempted to affect its immediate neighbors as well as the alignment of nations throughout the world's regions. The practical outcomes of imperial, geostrategic, and Nazi foreign policy plans were imminent. Hitler's ideas stemmed from his conception of racial struggle and the natural consequences of the need for German expansion. Germany desired a more equitable distribution of wealth and territory within the international system.

For many of the greatest empires, geography is often the destiny, and Germany at this critical and turbulent period of time was not an exception.

**Key words:** Germany; geopolitics; world wars; political climate; discourse;

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## 1. Introduction

It would be nice if Plato was among us, and the State is really led by the scientists. Unfortunately reality is too cruel. Reactions of every post war society are similar. What better example could we find but glorious Germany? In Germany effects of the First World War were tremendous.

War gets Germany to defeat – sudden and unexpected. The end of the War was marked with several revolutionary changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Habsburg, Hoencelor and Ottoman Empires were forgotten as well as the Roman. Political and social structure of almost half of the Europe depended on United States of America. It was the time of insecurity and fear in all Europe east of Rajna. In Germany, where people met new victims that peace treaty and reparations asked for, this condition lasted for five long years.

That was the time when Hitler for the first time gets his aura of politician. It was December of 1918 when he arrived in Munich.

Political atmosphere was unstable and overreacted in one or other way uttermost in the town that will soon become geopolitical Mecca. Of course it was the long journey for Hitler to even hear about this science. Someone would say the destiny always finds its strange way. This man could lose nothing if he tries to destroy the whole world in which he never managed to find his adequate place.

But by using exactly Geopolitics he could get everything. Important thing was to turn direction of the events on his own behalf. With his undoubted instinct he saw an opportunity that he could never find before. However, it must not be allowed to neglect an important fact: if Oprah was not Oprah, Hitler was not Hitler indeed. What were the factors that have been operative in producing a chain of events in Germany during the interwar years, including geopolitics, finally leading to another war?

## 2. Rise and Fall of “Democratic Experiment”

Much has been written about political climate in Germany after 1918. No one can say it was not exciting. Revolution (1918/1919) was a consequence of spontaneous movements. That was the reason why Weimar republic tried to be characterized as improvised democracy. The basic problem in coming two decades was that the main impression, not only in politics, but

in opinion of common people was particularly related to previous German failure and all its depressing consequences. It was sort of “inner rejecting of the peace”. Finding possible solutions of the problems was searching the blame in those who caused poverty and misery. Period of serial political murders and attempts followed. Versailles treaty was one of the greatest burdens of young republic, not only because of its particular stipulations but mainly because of moral blame on Germans.

The real revolution in Germany was inflation; it destroyed not only money and property but also belief in property and significance of the money. Passion of Hitler attacks on corrupted “by Jewish imposed” system, rancor with which he assaulted Versailles entity and republican government started to found echo in misery and desperation of common people. “Hitler was certainly the greatest demagogue in the history” (Balok, 1978, p. 59).

Basis of his success lay in his personal energy. His genius understood of what could be done by using propaganda and finding the right way to do it. No matter his hard life path, he could never be able to do what he has done alone. Who were those people with whom Hitler started his odyssey in Munich? One of the most important was Ernest Rem. A man that in his own memoirs mentioned his only thought and desire: “To become a soldier”. It was not easy for him in Rajhsver. He had to quit in 1923. Still, he maintained his close relationships with military authorities and more than anyone else meritorious for making S.A. squads. Beside him there were two more ex. officers (Balor, 1978, p. 68).

Rudolf Hes, son of a German salesman, born in Alexandria. He was seven years younger than Hitler, with whom he served at the same regiment for a while, before he became pilot of military air forces. He considered politics very seriously; he lunched and deeply admired Hitler. As a student he was rewarded for his essay “What should be a mean to lead the Germany to its old Glory”. His professor’s name was Karl Haushofer. That was the way for Hitler to get known with geopolitical ideas and theory. Rudolf Hes was promoted to Hitler’s personal secretary and loyal follower.

The meeting between Hitler and Haushofer happened in 1923. Rudolf Hes introduced them at Munich’s Landsberg prison after abortive putsch. Not only that Hitler read Geopolitics works but he also tried hard to present them as his own. Herman Gering was bearer of “Pour le Merrite”.

He becomes commandant of S.A. squads. Gotfrid Feder was engineer with liberal ideas of economics and destroying "slavery to the interests".

**Figure 1:** European Map



**Source:** Balok (1978)

He influenced Hitler tremendously. It has been said for Hitler that he trimmed his unforgettable mustache using his pattern. Dietrich Ekart, journalist, poet and writer, eager nationalist with antidemocratic and anticlerical reasoning, racist and thrilled adept of Nordic folklore and approved adversary of Jews. Alfred Rozenberg, German origin and refugee from Baltic city Reval. He was an architect by profession, and he enabled Hitler to come across with Russian refugees conceived antagonist bolshevism and Jews. What a great companionship they were. Unsuccessful attempt of the putsch in 1923 was not a failure for Hitler. He used negotiations for propaganda forum of his ideas and got minimal jail punishment. In Landsberg am Lech he dictated his first volume of *Main Kampf* where he mentioned Rudolf Hes. The ghost of the inflation finally disappeared in 1924, but economic growth and relative inner peace were only illusion. German people were finally aware. They did not have czar,

money, Alzas, fleet or colonies any more (Mann, 1986, p. 121).

### 3. Geopolitics at the Main Scene

*Who talks about victories? To survive, that is the main thing*  
(Rainer Maria Rilke)

On a cold London evening in January 1904, Sir Halford Mackinder, the director of the London School of Economics, "entered" an audience at the Royal Geographical Society on Savile Row with a paper boldly titled "The Geographical Pivot of History." Twenty years later, in 1924 the term Geopolitics was used in Germany for the first time. It was the year when German geographer Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) founded an Institute for Geopolitics and established the journal "Zeitschrift für Geopolitik" in Munich – five years after the end of the First World War. That was the most important person for development of German Geopolitics. He had a goal: to orient strategy of widening "life space" towards East Europe.

Geopolitics becomes scientific. At the time German Geopolitics represented "Wiissenschaft und Kunst" (science and art). It was seducing and promising . . . For German scientists it was not only the use of spatial and earth perspective but the synthesis of history, economy, politics and natural sciences (Civila, 2004, p. 27).

Haushofer made powerful propaganda together with geographers: O. Maul, H. Hesinger, E. Obst, H. Lautenzah, and other scientists, among them his son Albert, E. Balne, W. Siewert, C. Ross, J. Kuhn, R. Henning, K. Vowinckel (Grčić, 2000, p. 39; Civila, 2004, p. 27). However ideas were not original and the science was not their invention. American middle century idea: "Manifest destiny" (1830 – 1860) represents the oldest and the main geopolitical idea. It was the program and desire of consequential peaceful spreading and conquering a whole north – American continent. It was not founded on militarism. Not for pacifist reasons. America did not have strong opponents at great continental expanses.

It also did not have powerful military forces. Manifest destiny presumed spreading that will gain to form a natural – geographic unit and be boarded by natural borders. In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, admiral Alfred T. Mahan's ideas of oversee expansion were added to that far particularly continental orientation. Manifest destiny has supervened from

the practice but has never been accepted in the United States of America as official politics (Gašparović, 1966, p. 115). Haushofer's father Max taught economic geography at Munich Polytechnic, was a close friend with Friedrich Ratzel, a professor at the University of Leipzig (Haushofer V). Friedrich Ratzel (1844 - 1904) was the first to provide a political vocabulary that articulated and justified nationalist desire for space.

Influenced by geographic determinism and social Darwinism, historians and war theoreticians in his "Antropogeographie" he changed Ritzers "geological synthesis" with "biological synthesis": *Blut and boden*. His most famous work was "Politische Geographie,,. For Ratzel space was not a common physical category but living space. "The State is a living organism, and therefore cannot be contained within rigid limits - being depended for its form and greatness of its inhabitants, in whose movements, outwardly exhibited especially in territorial growth or contraction, it participates" (quoted in Curak 2002). As well as the organism, every great state needs space in order to survive. Struggle for living space is nothing else but struggle for surviving.

The need for ever increasing space of the state is what he called *lebensraum* - living space. Two factors are essential for constitution of the state: position (*die Lage*) and space (*der Raum*). Every politics even national one must be juxtaposed to spatial geographic politic if it wants to succeed. Using his idea that state is above national organism ("super organism") he wanted to overcome German fragmentation and political - territorial paltriness of Europe. State and soil make together one unity "organischen zusammenhang". *Grossraum* (large space) states were to become world powers. Progress and human history changes are the result of contest between different cultures. German territorial base was small compared to United States, Russia and China.

The only possible way for Germany to achieve *lebensraum* was overseas territorial expansion. Although he neglected significance of linguistic, religious and cultural factors, Ratzel was the first who gave the scientific character to researches of existence and functioning of the states. However, Ratzel considered political geography as only one part of geographic disciplines (Gašparović, 1966, p. 33).

These concepts were discussed and debated by Ratzel and Max Haushofer, while Karl accompanied them on walks, outings and social and economic affairs. That was the reason why Karl was immersed in these issues from an early age (Haushofer V). Using Ratzel analogies Swedish

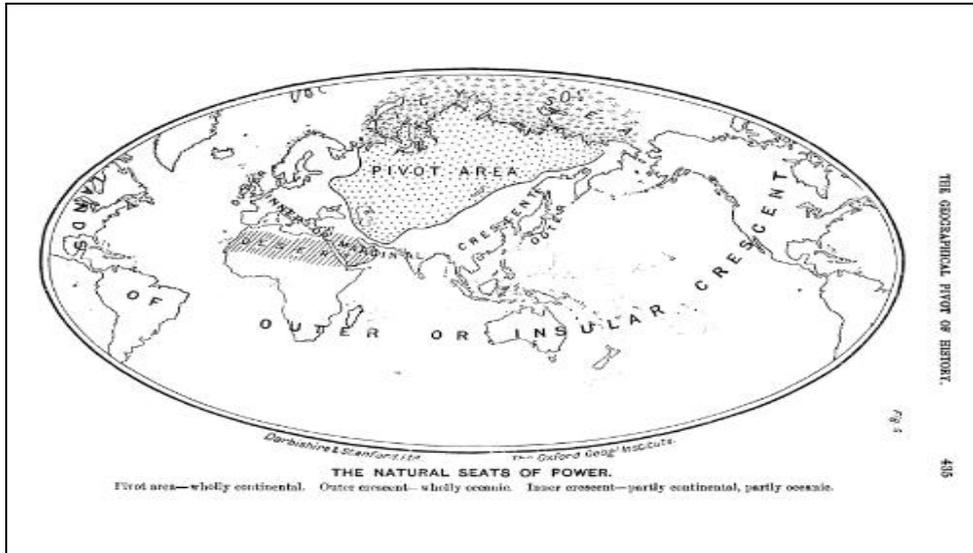
political scientist Rudolf Kjelen (1846 – 1922) developed main postulates of geopolitics. He was the one who coined the neologism “Geopolitics” in 1899. Kjelen tried to establish systematic science about the state or politics. His ideas were also organic theory of the state and deterministic significance of the space.

Geopolitics is actually politics that has been practiced by state organs and political institutions in certain geographic space. In his view, state is concentration of specific power that acts in international space. Still, for Kjelen geopolitics was only part of much wider Theory of the State. Haushofer entered the Bavarian Army in 1887. “After graduating from the Cadet School and War Academy he was commissioned and joined his field artillery regiment”. He was promoted to a general staff officer in 1896, three years after marrying his Jewish spouse Marta. They got two children: Albert (1903) and Heinz (1906).

Meanwhile Sir Halford J. Mackinder in 1904 revolutionized geopolitics with the Heartland thesis. British geographer and cartographer Sir Halford Mackinder (1861- 1947) represents (with above mentioned Admiral Mahan) the school of thought in a period of global closure.

He scripted “international politics” as a three-scene conflict: pre-Columbian, Columbian, and post-Columbian. He used series of maps to show production of global space. Mackinder final map was “The natural Seats of Power”, which is actually the most famous map in the whole geopolitical tradition.

**Figure 2: Mackinder's Concept of the World Island**



**Source:** Geographical Journal (1904)

His geopolitics theatrical production of the illusion of order in an all-encompassing three-scene spatial spectacle was named “Geographical Pivot of History”. The main idea was his identification of *pivot - area* or territory of *heartland* which meant control of eastern - central Europe as possible world domination. After First World War he redefined his former vision, and in 1919 he formulates his three famous ideas (Quoted in Ćurak, 2002, p. 104):

- Who controls East Europe, controls Heartland
- Who controls Heartland, controls World island
- Who controls World island, controls the World

However his perception was too imperialistic and perhaps too British, suppose that was the reason for him to miss an important thing - western civilization in general would be challenged in a coming century. Captain Haushofer was posted to Japan with the Bavarian Military Mission in 1908. He traveled through Mediterranean, Suez Canal, Ceylon, Singapore, was in Burma, Japan, China, Korea, Manchuria and Siberia. He admired Japanese culture and managed to understand Nippon’s imperial impulse for demographic driven Lebensraum. Haushofer saw similarities between Japan and Germany. In 1910 he was back in Bavaria. Thanks to his East Asian experiences he published four works. (Quoted in Dorpalen, 1942):

- *Geographische Grundlagen der japanischen Wehrkraft* (1919)

- *Dai Nihon* (1903)
- *Der deutscher Anteil an der geographiscen Erschliessung Japans* (19014)
- *Der politischen Parteien in Japan* (1914)

Those prescribed him academic honors at University of Munich. In 1913 he completed his doctoral dissertation on Japan. When War erupted in August 1914, for most of the Germans it represented a sort of salvation and releasing of long-term insecurity. Haushofer was at the Western Front at the very beginning. However, no one could ever predict the outcomes of the war. The beginning of the end started with defeat of the German ally Bulgaria. German empire and Austria - Hungaria send their offer for making truce to American president Wilson. On November 1918 weapons were silent. Karl Haushofer, Major at the time, was back to Bavaria with his tired troops. As situation stabilized he was back at University of Munich teaching geography and military history.

It was 1921 when he attained a professorship. After 1933 some of the scientists disapproved and some of them even left Germany when “*Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik*” became propaganda of Nazi ideas. Geopolitics entered all pores of the new society. Beside maps and propaganda paroles geopolitical education entered all classes of primary school. The goal was to make every citizen to think about society in national spirit.

German geopolitics divided space on the one which is totally occupied by Germans, one in which other existing ethnical groups and one where Germans were minority but because of their racial and cultural superiority they have every right to dominate. Haushofer soon becomes president of German Academy of Sciences. Activities of his Institute for Geopolitics were:

- Reasoning of external German politics in direction of penetration at the east towards Russia (Teufelsgurtel – devil fascia), Ukraine (so called: German India) and Middle East (Drag and Osten);
- Imposing of German hegemony in central (Mitteleuropa) and Eastern Europe consisted of parts of states (Klainsstaattengerrumpel);
- Reasoning of “fair” character of that doctrine, for establishing “eternal” world ranking with Germany ahead.

Space meanings were:

1. Autarky- If there are no conditions for developing economy in a certain place and the state has other potential for development than widening towards spaces with recourses is necessary. Hitler's famous "blitz krigs" obviously relied on autarky.
2. Lebensraum- As explained before state has its needs. Lebensraum is one of the most important for its surviving. Perpetration plan towards East was contained of making state block. German Rajh would of course be situated in the middle, with Check, Moravska, Austria as inner parts. Round about that hearth there would be Baltic States, Poland, Hungarian, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Ukraine, south Rour and Kavkaz States. That was the imagined confederation of German Rajh. Important baseline was also widening of national culture.
3. Pan areas- They would prescribe making several great items in which great powers should have significance. Their directions are north – south, so that all climate zones can be included – recourses.

Using Mackinders patterns and above shown map, Haushofer made modifications:

- Pan America (USA ahead)
- Pan Asia (eastern Asian developing sphere with Japanese leadership)
- Euro Africa (Germany as pivot)
- Pan Russia (auxiliary pan area, until Germany masters this region, with Russian and India domination)

Inner tendency was consequently conquering of the whole world.

4. Borders- Ingredient of Nazi ideology was overtaking Ratzel law of spatial growth of the state: "Border is a peripheral organ of the state, carrier of its growth". It is hard to determine when to stop the widening. Especially if taken into consideration that pan areas contained idea of solicitude of the whole world, it is obvious that States that are expanding would be hard to stop.
5. Proportion of shore and sea- Although German new order should recline on great shore mass, Mchinders *Rimland* idea – "the immense arc of sea and shore running from the Baltic, thru Eastern Europe, The Middle East, and India and to South China and Sea of Japan" was accepted with enthusiasm. Germany is situated in the Middle of Rimland exactly in the part that enables easy pass to the Heartland. Connection of Rimland and Heartland would make possible the control of World Island. Beside the shore, powerful

state must be widening over sea. German Geopolitics considered see was not separating but connecting. Haushofer often quoted Ratzel: “Step over sea is the most significant event in history of any nation”. (Ćurak, 2002, p. 108; Gašparović, 1966, p. 122). Haushofer was pleader of German – Soviet pact and then suggested great continental Eurasian coalition. Future will show - it never happened.

#### **4. Back to Reality**

This tremendous development of German Geopolitics could only lead to the war, but let us back in the reality and try not to neglect domestic enthusiasm for German colonialism and German anti-Semitism in the preceding years.

After Dawes plan, foreign capital started to arrive in the country. Hasty modernization was accused for disappearance of traditional values. On international scene German minister of foreign affairs Gustav Stresemann managed to abrupt stanch position. Agreement with Soviet Union and allies and acceptance of Germany in League of Nations in 1926 settled foundation for external reconciliation. French occupation of Rajna area was terminated in 1925. Hitler party NSADP was once again founded in that same year.

An international success of young democracy was not enough to predispose significant number of followers. Since 1923, during ten years, eleven different cabinets were changed, parliamentary powers were continually attenuating, and struggle of different political directions for leadership caused alienation of democratic state. It referred especially on German youth. 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1930 was the date when NASP gets most of the votes.

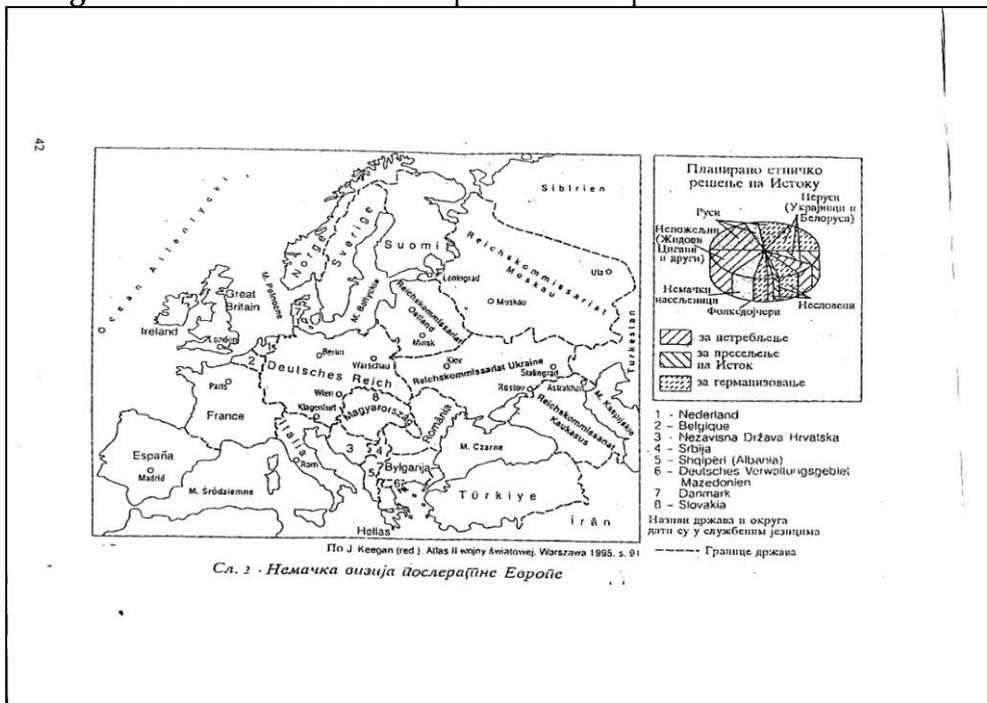
Nationalist’s circles seemed to start playing their role. But to talk about Nazi movement as a party means to come into danger and misunderstand its real character. It was not a party in demographic sense but open conspiracy against the State.

Weimar republic was characterized as “society of antediluvians”. Great deal of political radicalization conducted among young Germans. Contrarieties even more deepened with beginning of world economy crises. Confrontation that emerged from changes of insurance for unemployed in March 1930 meant fall of the great coalition and it actually

terminated parliamentary system. Till the end of 1932 unemployment of youth was quarter of total six millions. On 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1936 Hitler's youth was declared as State youth. National Socialism has done everything to rear perfect elite of the future.

Economic ascent mainly happened not thanks to hard working Germans but due to incitement of weapon industry. Industry and military forces (Wehrmacht) got an assignment - to make all necessary preparations for war. Steps that led to physical destroying of Jews were much more than traditional anti-Semitism required. It would probably never be possible to understand how coming events could ever happen in the middle of Europe and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to all the above, German interwar society was not highly traditional and above all highly cultural environment. It was frightened and eager.

Figure 3: German Vision of the postwar Europe



Source: Grčić (2000)

## 5. Conclusion

Discourses are important. They determine the choices countries make and follow through history. However they cannot explain the State behavior. Nothing completely is able to do such a thing. It is always result of a “million” different reasons. Nazis obviously took the most significant elements of Geopolitics and used them for achieving their goals. Geopolitical ideas become official political views. Teaching about space took its central place. What was the destiny of the most important Geopolitics’ German figure? Poor Haushofer, maybe he could predict consequences of his work were not possible to be artless, but he could not predict his own guilt. He becomes disfavor of national socialistic party in 1938. So in vain was his statement at Nurnberg process that everything he wrote after 1933 he done under the pressing. It was too late. However, he was liberated due to three circumstances: his age and weak health; lack of enough evidences that he was an actor of some violence or crime; consideration that ideas are not to be judged. He committed a suicide in 1946 (Grčić, 2000, p. 44).

Numerous factors were necessary for the beginning of disaster in the previous century. Only some of them were: tremendous experience, work and efforts of great scientists, years and years of strategic planning, propaganda, ambition of an inevitable fool, and last but not the least, the common people that became executors.

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