



The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess

By Holger H. Herwig



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Karl Haushofer, a Bavarian general and professor, is widely recognized as the “father of geopolitics.” In 1945 the United States sought to put him on trial at Nuremberg as a major war criminal for being “Hitler’s intellectual godfather” and the true author of *Mein Kampf*. In this definitive biography, noted historian Holger H. Herwig assesses the fiction and reality behind these claims. Making comprehensive use of Haushofer’s previously unavailable private papers, Herwig analyzes Haushofer’s geopolitical concepts, his relations with his student Rudolf Hess, and his mentorship of Hitler and Hess at Landsberg Prison in 1924. Herwig offers unique insights into Haushofer’s crucial behind-the-scenes influence in providing the Nazis with his theories of *Autarky* and *Lebensraum*, the rationale for Germany’s control of Europe and the world. This riveting book ends with Haushofer’s final verdict on himself: “I want to be forgotten and forgotten.” But the author concludes with the admonition that the “demon” of *Geopolitik* demands much closer scrutiny in this new age of geopolitics.

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Editorial Review

Review

Herwig's objective is to give an accurate picture of Haushofer and his brand of geopolitics. Herwig notes that Haushofer's geopolitical mentors included Ratzel; Mahan; Kjellen, who coined the term *geopolitics* in 1917; and Mackinder, who viewed geography merely as an aid to statecraft. Herwig covers Haushofer's role in 'educating' Hitler while he was confined in Landsberg Prison. Hitler's reading included historians Ranke and Treitschke, Marx and Nietzsche, military theorist Clausewitz, Bismarck, and social Darwinist Chamberlain. Questions considered are whether Haushofer was a National Socialist in spirit and how Hitler's race version of geopolitics differed from Haushofer's traditional imperialist power politics version. Haushofer's assessment of his life's work is also related to why he was not tried as a war criminal at Nuremberg, though the newspaper propagandist of National Socialism, anti-Semite Julius Streicher, was. Finally, the significance of the term *demon* in the title, taken from a poem by Haushofer's son, is explained: the social Darwinism of Haushofer's brand of geopolitics, not part of contemporary writings, provided a vocabulary for Hitler's planned aggression. Geopolitical concepts, seeded at Landsberg, grew into a twisted policy application of Haushofer's Geopolitik. (CHOICE)

Ideas matter, and sometimes with terrifying force. *The Demon of Geopolitics* is a new masterwork from the foremost English-language historian of twentieth-century Germany. It is a meticulously researched work that provides a fresh perspective on the geopolitical intersection of strategy and politics in the Third Reich. Herwig's subject is Karl Haushofer, a professor whose relationship with leading figures of mid-century Germany had a shadowy but undeniable influence on their march of conquest. Herwig carefully dissects the relationship between Haushofer's scholarship and Germany's politics, while never losing sight of Haushofer's complex and compelling personal struggles. The result is a nuanced telling of the tragedy of the life of this officer, professor, and gentleman, marred by hubris and vanity. (Col. Edward Kaplan, USAF Academy)

An excellent piece of research and writing. This significant work depicts the important influence Karl Haushofer had on the geopolitical approach of Hess and Hitler, breaking the seal on the Aladdin's lamp of former geopolitical thinking. (Gerhard P. Gross, Bundeswehr Center for Military History and Social Sciences)

Herwig's work uses newly available sources and an unmatched command of the literature to offer convincing answers to the enduring enigmas surrounding Karl Haushofer and the Third Reich. Rich in fascinating detail—not merely on Haushofer's relationship with Hitler and the Nazis but on the byzantine intricacies of the interwar Munich cultural milieu as well—this book refutes the sensationalists and arrives at judicious and persuasive conclusions about Haushofer's real beliefs and his role in Germany's catastrophe. *The Demon of Geopolitics* will compel a significant reassessment of previous scholarship in this field, and it stands out as the finest English-language work on Haushofer and his school of geopolitics. (David Thomas Murphy, Anderson University)

In this definitive biography, noted historian Holger H. Herwig explores the life and times of Karl Haushofer, widely recognized as the "father of geopolitics" and the architect of *Lebensraum*, the rationale for Germany's control of Europe and the world. Making comprehensive use of Haushofer's previously unavailable private papers, Herwig analyzes Haushofer's geopolitical concepts, his relations with his student Rudolf Hess, his mentorship of Hitler and Hess at Landsberg Prison in 1924, and his influence on Nazi

policy during World War II. Herwig offers fascinating insights into Haushofer's escape from judgment at Nuremberg, his encounter with Hess at the Military Tribunal, and his and his wife's double suicide in 1946. This riveting book ends with Haushofer's final verdict on himself: "I want to be forgotten and forgotten." But the author concludes with the admonition that the "demon" of *Geopolitik* demands much closer scrutiny in this new "age of geopolitics."

About the Author

Holger H. Herwig is professor emeritus at the University of Calgary. His books include the prize-winning *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914–1918* and *The Marne, 1914*.

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