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Geopolitics Reader - G. Ó. TUATHAIL



INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

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Modern geopolitical discourse was born in the era of imperialist rivalry between the decades from 1870s to 1945, when competing empires clashed and fought numerous wars, all the time drawing and redrawing the borders of the world political map. An era characterized by colonial expansionism abroad and industrial modernization at home, it was a time of tremendous technological achievement, social upheaval and cultural transformation. The dominant imperialist structure of the age was the British empire, which, despite its increasing territorial size over the decades, was poorly adjusting to the transforming conditions of world power, particularly those in the early twentieth century. The other "great" imperial powers of the time – Russia, France, Italy, the United States, Germany and later Japan – were its rivals and sought gain from its difficulties and relative decline. Each of these imperialist states produced their own leading intellectuals of statecraft and developed from their own distinctive geopolitical cultures and traditions various imperialist geopolitical discourses.

The most historically and geographically fated imperialist rivalry of the period was that between the British empire and the rising imperial aspirations of the German state in central Europe, a rivalry that was at the crux of the two world wars that destroyed millions of lives in the twentieth century. It is this rivalry that we examine here through an investigation of the geopolitical writings of the British geographer Halford Mackinder, the German general turned geopolitician Karl Haushofer, and the political agitator who became the German *Führer*, Adolf Hitler. To remind us that geopolitics was not a European monopoly, we also examine US President Theodore Roosevelt's 1905 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and the geopolitical discourse articulated by a figure described as the American Haushofer, the geographer and prominent presidential advisor, Isaiah Bowman.

HALFORD MACKINDER'S GEOPOLITICS AND BRITISH IMPERIAL GEOPOLITICAL CULTURE

Halford Mackinder began his career teaching geography in 1887 at Oxford University thanks to the influence and sponsorship of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). Mackinder had impressed a number of fellows of the RGS earlier that year when, at the young age of 25, he addressed the society and made the case for a "new geography" of academic synthesis to supersede the "old geography" of exploration and discovery that largely defined geography in the nineteenth century. Not everyone was impressed, however. One crusty old admiral sat in the front row muttering "damn cheek, damn cheek" as he spoke (Blouet, 1987: 40). To those traditionalists who saw geography as a manly science of military adventuring and "lion hunting," Mackinder must have appeared as a young bookish upstart. Many on the leadership council of the society, however, were sympathetic to his arguments and subsequently championed him for a position at Oxford, agreeing to pay half his salary for five years.