

The Nazi roots of the ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’

The Trump Administration’s “Indo-Pacific strategy” is neither original, nor has it anything to do with keeping the seas and trade routes of southern Asia “free and open” in the face of China’s alleged plans to take over the world. Rather, the recently declassified 2018 *US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific* confirms that its main purpose is to “maintain US primacy” via continued US “economic, diplomatic and military access to the most populous region of the world”, including by forging the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) into a NATO-style bloc opposed to China, so that Washington can continue to enforce the so-called “free markets” that enable its corporations to leech off of Asia’s economic growth. And the strategy by which Washington intends to achieve this varies little from that proposed under the same name a century ago by German geopolitical theorist Karl Haushofer (1896-1946), as a maritime pseudo-colonial version of the ethno-nationalist doctrine he developed to justify Nazi Germany’s invasions and ethnic cleansing on the Eurasian mainland.

According to a statement by US National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien announcing its declassification on 5 January, the *Framework* was approved “for implementation across Executive Branch departments and agencies” by President Donald Trump in February 2018. Since then, O’Brien wrote, it “has guided the development of numerous subordinate policy frameworks and campaign plans that have steered the US approach to specific issues of importance to the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, such as the *US Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China*, the *US Strategic Framework for Countering China’s Economic Aggression*, the *US Campaign Plan for Countering China’s Malign Influence in International Organisations*, and others.” According to O’Brien, “the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific [was] first advanced by Japan”, when in 2007 then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave a speech in India in which he “called for a ‘broader Asia’ spanning the Pacific and Indian Oceans”, a concept he extended all the way to Africa in a 2016 speech in Kenya. As a December 2019

paper by Harvard University historian Hansong Li¹ reveals, however, Abe did not invent, but rather only revived the concept. “In fact”, Li wrote, “a full-fledged account of the concept was born ... in Haushofer’s major treatise on political geography, *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans* (“Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean”), published in 1924.

‘Lebensraum’ on water

Born in 1869 in Munich in what was then the Kingdom of Bavaria (Germany was not unified until 1871), Haushofer joined the Army at the age of 18, graduated from the Bavarian War Academy in the late 1890s, and in 1908 was sent as a military attaché to Germany’s diplomatic mission in Tokyo, tasked with studying the strategy and tactics of the Imperial Japanese Army while acting as a military advisor and artillery instructor. Following his return to Germany in 1910, he gained his PhD with a thesis titled “Reflections on Greater Japan’s military strength, world position, and future”. Haushofer had also studied the works of the British Empire’s “father of geopolitics” Halford Mackinder, whose theory that whoever controls the “Eurasian Heartland” of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Russia could rule the world, expounded in the 1904 paper “The Geographical Pivot of History”, has been the

basis of so-called “great-power competition” ever since.² Incorporating into this theory the notions of racial superiority and “blood and soil” ethno-nationalism promoted in Germany by the paganistic Thule Society of which he was a member, Haushofer developed—and, from 1923 onwards, popularised via his monthly *Journal of Geopolitics*—the concept that all nations must necessarily compete in a dog-eat-dog contest for Lebensraum, “living space”, in pursuit of which Germany must conquer and populate with “Aryans” the territories to its east. Modern historians tend to downplay Haushofer’s association with Adolf Hitler, claiming that it was mainly indirect via his student Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s long-time ally who was deputy *Führer* of the Nazi Party in 1933-41. As *Executive Intelligence Review*

has reported,³ however, in fact Haushofer regularly visited Hess and Hitler while they served time in prison for the Nazis’ attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government in 1923 (the so-called Beer Hall Putsch), during which visits he and Hess ghost-wrote much of Hitler’s manifesto *Mein Kampf*. “During those prison visits”, *EIR* reported, “Mackinder’s dogma ... became transformed in the pages of *Mein Kampf* into the necessity for a *Drang nach Osten* (“Drive to the East”) for *Lebensraum*”, ultimately expressed in the Nazis’ invasion of Czechoslovakia that set off World War II. Haushofer’s works were also quickly translated into Japanese, and became a cornerstone of Imperial Japan’s so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a.k.a. invasion and subjugation of neighbouring countries before and during WWII, which presumably explains Abe’s familiarity with Haushofer’s Indo-Pacific theory.

Hansong Li explains that Haushofer formulated his Indo-Pacific concept as a means to counter Germany’s rivals in the contest for influence in Asia by supporting the sovereignty—under German tutelage—of China, India, Japan, and the colonised nations of Southeast Asia, to shore them up as a bulwark against both the entrenched French and British, and the recently arrived USA (which had annexed the Philippines in 1898). “Given the long history of EurAmerican involvement in South, Southeast and East Asia”, Li wrote, “it was too late and too costly for Germany to operate as a colonial-imperial power in the region. Haushofer’s solution is to convert the region into a self-conscious political body, with German-educated Indian leaders on the front lines of anti-colonial resistance.... In this way, a soft but robust maritime Indo-Pacific would complement Germany’s continental developments in good times, and come to its aid in the absence of good fortune.” Regional ethnic divisions and “spatial determinism”—Lebensraum by another name—were to be emphasised,

however, in hopes that every nation would consider Germany a better friend than its own neighbours.

Beneath the fluff about “freedom” and “democracy”, the USA’s *Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific* differs from Haushofer’s original only in that rather than supplanting incumbent external powers, it seeks to maintain its own “preferred partner” status.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 20 January 2021

Footnotes

1. “The Indo-Pacific: Intellectual origins and international receptions in global contexts”, published in [*Europe in Flux*](#), Yale University, 17 July 2020.
2. “Xinjiang: China’s western frontier in the heart of Eurasia, part 1”, AAS, 18 Nov. 2020.
3. “Kissinger and ‘Zbig’: Two students of one Southern-fried Fascist”, *EIR*, 1 Jan. 2001.