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Empire Everywhere On the Political Renaissance of Space

"What has been lost will return."
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Space is once again becoming sexy.¹ Among historians, there is a growing sensibility for the historicity of location, geography and landscape, from which scholars can draw conclusions about processes of displacement, acculturation and the accrual of power.² Scholarship no longer envisions complexes of knowledge and power as mental constructs but focuses instead on the performative role of concrete spaces (laboratories, operation rooms, houses of wonder, herbariums, stages...) in the production of knowledge.³ Urban and regional sociology, too, has highlighted the spatial aspect in the development of societal processes, the re-formation of urban structures, the increasing isolation of social experience and changes in perceptions of the body.⁴ Following the same logic, one could say that cultural studies, having gone through a "linguistic" and a "pictorial" turn, are now on the cusp of a "spatial turn." Accordingly, the current era is more "the epoch of space" than an epoch of time.⁵ In recognition of this trend, the director of the German Center for Literary Research (*Zentrum für Literaturforschung*), Sigrid Weigel, has declared space to be a "close friend and ally of cultural studies."⁶

1. Minefields

This "will to space" may surprise many observers, especially in Central Europe, where after World War II, spatial concepts like geography, spheres of influence and territory fell into disrepute--despite, or rather perhaps precisely because of, the conflict between East and West and the demarcation line that used to run through the middle of Germany. The reason for the disrepute is obvious. All of the abovementioned concepts are tainted by their association with a brand of global politics, that during the interbellum period of the last century aimed at uniting Germany with Eurasia and Japan (Karl Haushofer) and creating *Lebensraum* in the East for a "people without space" (Johannes Grimm)--an idea which reached its nadir in the race-politics of the Nazi ideologues' "Eastern Plan." The entire vocabulary of this ideology is today a political minefield in Germany. "Geopolitics" have been politically discredited, and those who use its

¹ See *Raum, Wissen, Macht*, edited by Rudolf Maresch and Niels Werber, Frankfurt am Main, 2002.

² Karl Schlögel, "Die Wiederkehr des Raumes," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6/19/1999.

³ This was a major topic of the conference "Locations of Knowledge in the 17th Century," which was held by the special research unit "The Culture of the Performative" at the Freie Universität Berlin in late May, 2002.

⁴ Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002.

⁵ Michel Foucault, cited from the German edition, *Botschaften der Macht*, Frankfurt am Main, 1999, p. 145.

⁶ Remark made at an open lecture in Berlin in Fall 2002, cited in Amory Burchard, "Mein Freund, der Raum," *Der Tagespiegel*, 11/1/2002.

vocabulary, if only to stress the spatiality of politics, culture and power, may quickly find themselves accused of being right-wing reactionaries.⁷

It's no wonder then that the cultural studies (more precisely: social sciences) of the 1970s enthusiastically embraced the politically unsullied concept of "world of social cooperation," which was imported from Anglo-Saxon culture and which explained both social interaction and the formation of identity with reference to the capacity for socialization and understanding based on reason.⁸ Nor is it surprising that in the 1980s many scholars adopted post-metaphysical concepts which stressed the implementation and preservation of abstract principles of law and values, with the aim of containing power and national interests within a global network of international agreements.⁹ That is perhaps also the reason for the unprecedented triumph within the humanities and cultural sciences of theories (system-oriented constructivism, postmodernism, media theory) that privilege relational systems, concepts and ideas which surf along the surface of computer screens and stage an endless play of differences.

For a time it seemed as though "location, space and distance" would shrink to "insignificant dimensions" thanks to the advent of the information and telecommunications revolution.¹⁰ Temporal sequence (before/after), it was thought, would soon supersede spatial sequence (here/there). In the stream and flow, the switching and connecting of real-time data exchange and communication, which were powered by translocal, electronic networks, earthly terms like ethnic origin and religion, race and gender, seemed to lose their fateful power over bodies, things and events. Cosmopolitan, future-oriented individuals, groups and communities, it seemed, had already reacted to these novel developments and had begun to leave space and to "colonize" time.¹¹

2. Spaceless World Society

At first glance this leap from space to time, which is also evident in many descriptions of the non-stop restlessness of contemporary society,¹² seemed very convincing. In contrast to segmentary or layered social categories, the functional social systems of modern society operate spacelessly. Economics, politics and mass media are oriented along lines of communication and not along spatial, ethnic or territorial borders.¹³ For the evolution of world society, all that is important is for social connections to be established, for communication to flow unhindered and for people to communicate with enthusiastic excess in front of and by means of computer screens.

⁷ Haushofer terms "geopolitics" the "study of the earth-bound nature of political events." See *Grundlagen, Wesen und Ziele der Geopolitik, Bausteine zur Geopolitik*, Berlin, 1928.

⁸ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, 1969.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988.

¹⁰ Halmut Willke, *Atopie*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002, p. 13.

¹¹ Paul Virilio, "Der kritische Raum," *Tumult* 7, 1983, p. 16.

¹² Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, 1997; Manuel Castells, *Das Informationszeitalter, Vol. 1: Der Aufstieg der Netzwerkgesellschaft, Vol. 2: Die Macht der Identität*, Opladen, 2001-2; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire: Die neue Weltordnung*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002.

¹³ Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, p. 166.

Everything else is a matter of passwords, addresses and the will to communicate. In the globally networked world, it is ultimately irrelevant where the user logs on the Web and exchanges goods, downloads information or makes use services. All users are equal before a computer screen, whether they be Texans, Senegalese or Rhinelanders, fundamentalists, teenagers or macho-men. Everyone, at least in the popular perception, is the same distance, i.e. a mouseclick, away from everyone else.

Thanks to networking and digitalization, satellite phones, internet portals and DSL connections, communication proceeds "just as well in an environment of cannibals, terrorists, Benedictine monks and pharaohs as at the camp site on the Ruhr or Lippe rivers."¹⁴ As the Icelandic pop singer Björk put it, "home is where my laptop is." Communication does not refer to a material substrate, an object or a physical reality, nor does it correspond to something that exists in the outside world. From the vantage point of clicking, linking and networking, the "outside world" is no longer of any significance. "When one talks about the global village, one automatically sees the segmentary order of nation-states as an anachronism."¹⁵ The "electronic magnetic waves have 'conquered' space to the extent that the latter has dissolved. [...] Territoriality no longer has any conceptual limits, writes Norbert Bolz, adding: "The global village can no longer be located." Hence Bolz concludes that people should no longer cling "catechontically" to the nation, the state or a specific territory.

Media theorists are quick to consign to the ashcan of history everything that might hinder, retard or even block the "age of global communication" or the advent of "eternal peace" (Immanuel Kant): nation-states, territories, antagonisms, transport systems. Another fervent adherent of global, transatlantic spacelessness, Claude Leggewie, celebrates the ostensible cosmopolitanism created by networks. Writing about the "new world order" to be negotiated "eye to eye" between America and Europe, Leggewie asserts, without considering the rival states of Eurasia:

"Virtual networks, i.e. the Internet, will render geopolitical empires passé. Nations and empires, even America's 'imperial republic,' seem to have disappeared in cyberspace. Cultures that are still based on continental land masses (or ties of blood) and that try to erect firewalls to block the 'free flow of information' appear outmoded. If we ignore occasional relapses into raw nationalism, the cosmopolitan dream of a 'world republic' seems to be becoming a reality, and even if that is not the case, a 'global village' is being codified beyond territorial borders in the virtual addresses: 'com' for global trade, 'org' for trans-national government and 'edu' for the borderless community of knowledge."¹⁶

3. The Re-Entry of Space

The way of thinking has become clearly obsolete after the attacks of the September Eleventh. The idea of non-spatial, non-territorial global village collapsed liked a house of

¹⁴ Peter Fuchs, *Die Metapher des Systems*, Weilerwirst, 2001, p. 238.

¹⁵ Norbert Bolz, "Die Zeit der Weltkommunikation," in Bolz, Friedrich Kittler and Raimar Zons, *Weltbürgertum und Globalisierung*, Munich, 2000, p. 83.

¹⁶ Claus Leggewie, "Auf Augenhöhe: Was Europa von den USA lernen kann--und was es vermeiden soll," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 10/28/2000, <http://www.leggewie.de/texte/neueweltordnung.html>

cards together with the Twin Towers.¹⁷ The periphery, the desert, rose up and spectacularly "struck back" using old media, knives and civilian airplanes. The Bush Administration immediately understood the import of the event. It localized the "spaceless" enemy geographically and targeted first Afghanistan, the Taliban and Mullah Omar, then Iraq, Saddam Hussein and the whole of the Middle East. Despite the ability of information technology to overcome distances, the world remains territorially fixed, defined by geographical differences such as North and South, center and periphery.

The belief that the global village had minimized the importance of specific locations and bases was short-lived.¹⁸ For a brief moment in history, the "connectivistic fluidity" of the communication and information sphere was able to dominate the physical reality of spaces and places.¹⁹ It fired the centuries-old Anglo-Saxon dream that border-crossing communication, media and commerce could exercise a neutralizing, pacifying and depoliticizing effect on states, organizations and networks, causing "plagues like xenophobia, chauvinism, nationalism, dictatorship and war" to disappear in the process.

What happened, however, was exactly the opposite. Localization and localibility have remained major determining factors in politics. The power of space has re-emerged with a vengeance and, in its wake, so too the power-oriented geopolitics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was not geography, territory and hegemony that were rendered obsolete, but rather the idea of a global social system of "equal nodes," which in theory was to undermine all those states still possessed of an expansionist "cultural-missionary tendency."²⁰

4.Space is the Medium of the Political

Anyone who paid attention could sense the way things would develop even before 9/11. Space and territory, as a medium of politics, never completely fade away into nothingness. They were always present, and not just as a background or a layer of film or loosely coupled "medium," into which more rigid forms were inscribed. Space is like a computer hard drive, onto which memories and fantasies, myths and sacrifices, materialities and desires are saved or loaded. These are the very things that make up the "soul" or unconscious of a community or nation and that actively determine the latter's thinking and decision-making. Ample evidence for this truth in the Cold War era can be found in the conflicts between Vietnam and Cambodia, the Iran-Iraq War, the invasion of Afghanistan, the Falklands War or the war in Lebanon.²¹ The political primacy of space is also evident in the bloody ethnic, religious and ideological wars that have recurred in the Balkans, Palestine and Africa. There, the attempt is made to mobilize hate and violence to bring about territorial revisions leading to the construction of new states. Finally, one could also cite present-day and future conflicts over the distribution of

¹⁷ Rudolf Maresch, "Der elfte September. Der Tag, an dem die Idee der Weltgesellschaft starb," *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/11327/1.html>, 12/16/2001.

¹⁸ Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, p. 152.

¹⁹ Willke, *Atopia*, p. 175.

²⁰ Rudolf Stichweh, *Die Weltgesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002, p. 54.

²¹ Yves Lacoste, *Geographie und politisches Handeln. Perspektiven einer neuen Geopolitik*, Berlin, 1990, p. 26.

wealth and natural resources such as water, oil and gas in Siberia, Central Asia and the Middle East.²²

The demand for raw materials, sources of energy and other commodities will hardly diminish just because certain thinkers, unmindful of the importance of space, believe that the resources of the future global village (knowledge and information) are to be found in memory banks and computers. The demand for physical material is, on the contrary, bound to increase. The world's natural resources are relatively scarce, extremely valuable and to a large extent unrenovable. On top of that, they are also unequally distributed throughout the world. The wars to control the distribution of those resources will thus likely be waged with even more vehemence in the future.

Spatial considerations already play an active role in the attempts of pockets of affluence such as the EU, America and Canada to set up legal hurdles and erect technological or surveillance barriers to stem the flow of refugees and immigrants across their boundaries from impoverished eastern or southern corners of the globe.²³ Space also makes its presence felt where jihads are declared to liberate holy sites with their myths and legends, where conferences of major political and economic players have to be cordoned off from anti-globalization protesters, and where gated communities and other civilian security zones are monitored and protected by the latest weapons and media technology.

September Eleventh must therefore be seen as a catalyst rather than a caesura (better: cutting-edge) in the developing conceptions of space. More than anything, the upshot of that event was to encourage an American unilateralism, the seeds of which had been sown on the banks of Potomac ever since the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1991 and the end of the bipolar world order. As early as Winter 1990-91, *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer was writing of a "unipolar moment,"²⁴ in which the one remaining superpower, the US, would elevate itself above the rest of the international community and reshape the world according to its own interests and ideals: "Our best hope for safety in such times, as in difficult times past, is in American strenght and will – the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them." In a secret paper called „Defense Planning Guidance“ (DPG), published in 1992,²⁵ which, after being toned down by Dick Cheney in response to massive protest, later became the central document for the "National Security Plan 2002," the so-called Bush Doctrine,²⁶ Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis

²²One recalls here Turkey's plans to dam the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in order to irrigate the steppes and deserts of Anatolia, which would seriously disrupt life in neighboring Syria and Iraq. For an overview of other endangered regions and problem zones, see Michael T. Klare, "The New Geography of Conflict," *Foreign Affairs* 3/2001, p. 55.

²³ The German intelligence service has published a 100-page paper urgently drawing attention to the "increase in the flow of illegal immigrants." See "BND warnt vor illegaler Zuwanderung in die EU," *Der Spiegel* 18/2001, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/vorab/0,1518,130959,00.html>.

²⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 1/1991. Krauthammer also warns in that article about the danger of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of so-called "Weapon States," seeing it as the greatest threat to and challenge for America's unipolar power.

²⁵ "Professor War," *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,241028-2,00.html> vom 3/17/2002.

²⁶ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

Libby laid out the guidelines and principles of the future US empire:²⁷ consolidation of American hegemony, preemptive military strikes and regime changes.²⁸

Ever since, the "new world order" has had a concrete name and address. The patchwork of globalization--which Luhmann termed "global society," Castell "network society," and Hardt and Negri "Empire"--is in fact nothing other than US-neo-imperialism. There is no basis for the assumption that "a leading political role in the system of world society is available only to states that do not simultaneously pursue a cultural agenda."²⁹ The attack by the periphery on the center of world society has been reversed into an attack by the center on the periphery,³⁰ and many states in future will have to reckon with being contained and "disarmed." Obsessed with becoming the "Roman Empire of the 21st century,"³¹ the US no longer presents itself, as it did under Bill Clinton and Madelaine Albright, as reticent, but as "aggressively missionary."

"You're either for us or against us" is the simple, reductive message of this enterprise. "We found our mission," George W. Bush announced immediately after he proclaimed his war on terror before the US Congress. "Our goal should be...to westernize the planet," the philosopher Richard Rorty seconded shortly thereafter in a interview. In a published statement "What We're Fighting For," sixty leading American intellectuals pronounced their support for a "just war."³² "The mission defines the coalition; not the coalition the mission," was how Richard N. Haass, geopolitical strategist and planning director of the Brookings Institute, paraphrased the "multilateralism à la carte" Washington plans to follow in the future.³³ According to Robert Kagan, the politics of "embrace and extend," actively propagated by the Bush administration, are no accident of recent history. The mission of America, argues Kagan, was viewed even by leaders as early as Benjamin Franklin as the cause of all humanity, so that the "desire to play a leading role on the world stage is deeply rooted in the American character."³⁴

On the other hand, 9/11 merely put back geopolitics on the agenda. Geopolitics may have been considered disreputable in Bonn or Berlin for historical reasons,³⁵ but it was never went completely out of fashion in the Kremlin, the Palais Elysée or the White House. In Washington especially, political strategists and string-pullers maintain interpretative frameworks and visions of the world similar to those which were suggested by Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer and Carl Schmitt in Germany or Sir Halford Mackinder, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Nicolas J. Spykman in the English speaking world.

²⁷ See G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs* 5/2002, pp. 44-60, <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~rgibson/Ikenberry.pdf>.

²⁸ Ken Jowitt, "Rage, Hubris, and Regime Change," *Policy Review* 118, April/May 2003, <http://www.policyreview.org/apr03/jowitt.html>.

²⁹ Stichweh, *Die Weltgesellschaft*, p. 44.

³⁰ Niels Werber, "Der neue Supercode. Der Kampf der Peripherie gegen das Zentrum," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10/18/2002.

³¹ Rudolf Maresch, "Das neue Rom," *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/13047/1.html>, 8/11/2002.

³² See http://www.americanvalues.org/html/what_we_re_fighting_for.html.

³³ This attitude is not new. Madelaine Albright was also quoted as saying, „We act multilateral, when we can, and unilateral, when we must.“

³⁴ Robert Kagan, *Power and Weakness*, cited from the German edition *Macht und Ohnmacht*, Berlin, 2003, p. 102.

³⁵ It is no secret that during the Helmut Kohl era cabinet members were forbidden from using the term "national interest."

Global thinkers have always loved to move figures about on sandlots, maps and chessboards. Geopolitics provides today's political theorists, just as it did earlier Karl Haushofer, with "equipment" and principles for a "time of global house cleaning and redistribution of power on earth."³⁶

Unlike sociologists, who see functional systems horizontally as mutually excluding and replaceable entities, geopoliticians view states, nations and regions in vertical terms. Instead of parity and equality, they speak of frontyards and backyards, spheres of influence and sovereign territories. They distinguish between allied, rogue and failed states, rivals, vassals and tributaries; recently the talk has been of "willing" and "unwilling," "relevant" and "irrelevant" nations and alliances. The function, importance and position of a state or region in the global political system is calculated on the basis of its political geography. Geographical location and territorial size, the number of borders and access to water, physical terrain and climate are all classic "geopolitical codes," which substantially define a territory. So too do natural resources, quality of infrastructure (transportation, communications, electrification), size of population and demographic profile.³⁷

Alongside factors such as military strength, economic might and technotronic development, soft power elements are of eminent importance: gross domestic product, political stability and level of education all contribute to make up the ideological profile of a nation. In the Nineties, the United States discovered that what might be called the sex appeal of American culture--including everything from ideas of democracy to the political theology of human rights to the politics of free flow of information to the Hollywood film industry and pop culture to American eating habits and manners--could function as a source of power, as it was transformed into a weapon of communication.³⁸ At the base of this trend was the insight, borrowed from Michel Foucault, that military and economic might (hard power) in the long run rarely succeeds in conquering peoples and nations. The power of symbols is cheaper and more effective than the use of physical force. Hearts and minds can be won over more easily with images, brand names and semantics than with embargoes, political pressure and sanctions.³⁹

The Bush administration has ushered in a change of thinking. The new bosses in the White House and the Pentagon place their faith once more in hard power, in military strength and plain-talking weapons technology, unlike Bill Clinton, who favored trying to convince others with soft power arguments about values and attitudes. The new administration, it seems, would rather be feared than loved.⁴⁰

5. The Power of Geography

³⁶ Haushofer cited from Ulrich Ante, *Zur Grundlegung des Gegenstandsbereiches der Politischen Geographie*, Stuttgart, 1985, p. 43

³⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, London, 1965, pp. 25-89.

³⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound Lo lead: The Changing Nature in American Power*, New York, 1990, pp. 173 ff; reprised in Nye., *The Paradox of American Power. Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Oxford, 2002.

³⁹ Better worked out in: Rudolf Maresch, "Hard Power/Soft Power. Amerikas Waffen globaler Raumnahme", in: *Raum, Wissen, Macht*, pp. 237.

⁴⁰ See Fareed Zakaria, "Our Way. The trouble with being the world's only superpower," *New Yorker*, 10/7/2002, http://newyorker.com/fact/content/?021014fa_fact.

All expansion and reorientation of power notwithstanding, geography remains the determinant factor in the formulation of national or community politics. It is the one constant that cannot be changed or communicated away. Another name for geopolitics is "political geography."⁴¹ A cursory glance at a map of the world is all that's needed to see the long-term influence geography has or at least can have on politics, culture and ideology. Europeans are used to world a map with Europe at its center, whose geographical "middle" is Germany. Whereas the East is pressed by a huge land mass, one finds water everywhere in the West. The Atlantic, the great "central ocean," separates the Old and New Worlds. For Europeans, there seems to be nothing particularly unusual or epochal about this perspective, which has been the standard one in Europe for centuries and formed a certain gaze and certain attitudes.

One gets a completely different perspective, however, if we rotate the globe ninety degrees so that America occupies the map's center. Suddenly, a new vista opens up on the "floating islands" (Mackinder) of the world: Europe is no longer the center of focus but merely a part of the periphery, a frontyard of Eurasia, in contrast to America, which sits firmly in the middle of things. America's geographical situation contains a multitude of possibilities: the US can orient itself to the west, toward Pacific Asia, or to the east, the European-Arabic realm. The distance in both directions is the same. No matter which option the US selects, which geopolitical trump it chooses to play, the extraordinary position of America is apparent. Its unique political-geographical location--with a weak Mexico to the south and an equally weak Canada to the north, and to the east and west only water--predestines the development of a "planetary" brand of politics unlike that of any other nation.

This situation of "splendid isolation" suffices to explain the lessons America chose to draw from the two World Wars, as it assumed the inheritance of the British Empire and engaged in a massive build-up of its maritime and airborne military forces. It is clear why America maintains protectorates (Europe, Japan) all over the world as well as military bases from which to monitor and control the Seven Seas and their floating islands. Finally, it's equally obvious why the American Empire feels more threatened by ballistic missiles and cyberspace attacks than by ground troops or invading armies. The Monroe Doctrine, according to which no foreign power should be allowed to establish a presence in the American hemisphere; the "Star Wars" defense system, which would create a shield over America's territory; anti-hacker programs designed to protect the country's critical computer infrastructure against attack; and the passing of the Patriot Act and the establishment of an Office of Homeland Security are all defensive mechanisms primarily inspired by geography.

6. Sea Powers vs. Land Powers

The idea of land and sea as a privileged, political sphere is age old. As early as the American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), the world's oceans were viewed as the ultimate medium for exchange and trade, communication and commerce. Not only does the sea, with its infinite possibilities, challenge daredevils and risk-takers to explore unknown terrain and to create by way of conquest a totality out of distant global islands.

⁴¹ The Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén was the first to rename the discipline of political geography "geopolitics." See Kjellén, *Der Staat als Lebensform*, Leipzig, 1917.

It also spurs the energy, desire and fantasy of peoples, communities and nations, encouraging political and cultural progress and creating a multiplicity of social contacts and relations.

For this reason, sea powers have historically been fervent adherents of free-market capitalism and the driving forces behind technological innovation. As a foreign element to human life, unlike land, water places greater demands on mankind's technological imagination. In the past, sea powers also exercised a "cultivating and civilizing" function, opening the door to foreign and exotic lands and driving peoples and other smaller groups from their spatial and cultural isolation. Nevertheless, the means and extent of maritime military force are rather limited. Dependent as they are on access to a coastline, sea powers can only expand and gain new territory as far as the oceans allow. Mahan drew the conclusion from this fact that sea powers tend to favor equilibrium and peace (defensive powers), whereas land powers are more likely to try to enforce their will on other people through violence (offensive powers).

In the early modern era, England assumed the mantle of the world's predominant maritime power. It became the "master of seas" and established "a British empire in all four corners of the globe."⁴² For centuries, the tendency to think in terms of "bases and transportation lines" gave the English a superiority over those peoples whose horizons were restricted by geographical topography (valleys, mountain ranges, steppes, deserts, plateaus) and whose living conditions were correspondingly fragmentary.⁴³

However, the raw materials from which all dreams of political power are made, and which have been perennially coveted by merchants, conquerors and missionaries, are located on land and not at sea. According to Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), the region of the earth with the most valuable concentration of natural resources is Eurasia. Thus, for British imperialists, as well as for political geographers, Eurasia came to be seen as a "pivot,"⁴⁴ as the earth's heartland and consequently a potential center of conflict, to which all nations would inevitably gravitate. This heartland, which extends from the Polar Sea through an extended dry zone of forests and steppes down to the mountains and deserts in the south, is surrounded by a heavily populated inner crescent with access to water. This in turn is surrounded by an outer crescent of oceanic territories (America, Australia, Japan, etc...), which make up the rest of the world. According to Mackinder, whoever dominates this global pivot through industry and technology, organizing it and appropriating its natural resources, will rule the planet.

Eurasia was largely inaccessible to traditional sea powers. Different kinds of technology were needed to conquer it, above all, means of transportation and communication like the railroad and the telegraph, which in the wake of the industrial revolution ushered in what Carl Schmitt has termed a second, spatial revolution. This revolution clearly privileged land powers, proving the wisdom of the old European idea that "every increase in human technology creates new space and unforeseeable changes in traditional spatial structure."⁴⁵

⁴² Carl Schmitt, *Land und Meer. Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung*, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 93 ff.

⁴³ See Paul M. Kennedy, *Aufstieg und Verfall der britischen Seemacht*, Herford und Bonn, 1978.

⁴⁴ Halford J. Mackinder, „The Geographical Pivot of History,” *Geographical Journal* 23, 4/1904, pp. 421-437.

⁴⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen*, Berlin, 1995, pp. 71ff.

Geographically speaking, Russia is best positioned to dominate Eurasia. Like Germany in Europe, Russia occupies a central strategic position in Asia. If Russia were to gain a warm-water port, the balance of power in Mahan and Mackinder's sense would shift dramatically, as would also be true in the event of a German-Russian or Sino-Russian alliance. Since every state within the inner crescent represents a potential bridgehead or domino, the oceanic powers have been careful to ally themselves with individual states in this region to prevent any one nation from establishing hegemony and thus to preserve the balance of power there.

Mackinder, writing in the wake of World War I, located the global pivot between the northern (Asian) and southern (African) heartland in Europe and the Middle East. But contemporary observers might well be struck by the historical and geopolitical continuities evident in America's preemptive wars in the Hindukush and Iraq. In the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, one can see such power-political interests at work, ones which led the American CIA to fund and arm the Mujahadin, with the result that Afghanistan was plunged into civil war. One can also easily identify the geopolitical import of the eastward expansion of the EU and the integration of Turkey, of the "pluralism" in the successor states to the former Soviet Union, and of the America's maintenance of military bases in the Middle East and elsewhere. Finally, one begins to comprehend why the hawks in the Bush administration specifically targeted Afghanistan and Iraq, countries with the inner crescent of Eurasia, for military intervention and regime change.

7. The Pivot

Former US Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski has recently published a series of works laying out a comprehensive and coherent geopolitical strategy.⁴⁶ In *Game Play*, *Out of Control* and *The Grand Chessboard*, Eurasia appears as the pivotal region in a battle for global hegemony. Not only does the land mass between Lisbon and Vladivostok contain by far the greatest natural resources on the planet. The territory between the Adriatic to the West and the border to the Chinese province of Sinkiang to the East, with Kazakstan to the North and Yemen to the South, also represents what Brzezinski calls "the core zone of political instability." Some 400 million people live in almost 30 countries within this "geopolitical vacuum," which is fragmented by ethnic and religious conflicts and characterized by "unrulability." Its political leaders are basically deemed incompetent, unequal "to the challenges of modernity and globalization."⁴⁷ The situation within this "triangle of violence" (Samuel Huntington) is made all the more explosive by the fact that approximately one half of these states are trying to acquire, or have already acquired, weapons of mass destruction. For this reason, American military strategists consider this region to pose the most serious threats to the security of the United States.

Kenneth M. Pollack and Ronald D. Asmus, advisor to former US President Bill Clinton, have considerably expanded the territorial scope of this "geopolitical tinderbox."

⁴⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan*, Boston, 1986; *Out of Control*, New York 1993; *Die einzige Weltmacht. Amerikas Strategie der Vorherrschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1999 (orig. 1997).

⁴⁷ "The New Transatlantic Project," *Policy Review* 115/2002, <http://www.policyreview.org/OCT02/asmus.html>.

What they call the Greater Middle East extends from Marrakech to Bangladesh, from the turbulent regions in the Caucasus to the North to the Horn of Africa in the South. After the terrorist attacks in Bali in 2002, the trouble zone, which is predominantly Muslim, was further expanded to include Indonesia, so that it now contains one-sixth of the world population.

For Brzezinski, the core of this "zone of turmoil" is the "Eurasian Balkans," among which he includes not only Georgia and Kazakstan but also Afghanistan. Even in the days of the Cold War, Afghanistan was strategically important to the United States as a neighbor of Iran and Pakistan, as key "catalyst state," as a "third strategic front" alongside the ones in the West (Germany-Poland) and the Far East (South-North Korea), and finally as the "soft underbelly of Eurasia. A key state, argued Brzezinski, is a state that in and of itself possesses a special importance and that is lying "on a platter," waiting to be taken. The importance of a key state can be based on its geopolitical position, which gives it a regional political and/or economic influence, or on its geostrategic location, which makes it of military significance. In their vulnerability, such states are particularly open to being won or taken over.

Brzezinski's choice of the term "Balkans" is hardly coincidental. Ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the nations of Eurasia have been equally as unstable as those of former Yugoslavia. Their geographical location and the domestic political lability make it seem as though they are crying out for intervention by regional and global powers. Moreover, they are materially attractive, since the region contains massive deposits of oil, natural gas and other resources, and since the future lines of transport between wealthy Western Europe and its Eastern fringe will pass through there. It is no wonder, then, that geopolitical strategists tend to speak of the area as "a piece of grade-A filet." One can hardly blame America for seizing the opportunity and trying to establish quick dominance in Afghanistan and Iraq. After twelve years of sanctions and a hard-nosed policy of containment, Iraq is more than easy prey, so that, in the logic of power politics, it would be almost irresponsible for the empire to fail to assert its claims there. According to energy experts, American consumption of fossil fuels will rise by some ten percent over the next twenty years, and large American firms like Chevron, Exxon and Mobil already control the majority of significant oil companies in Kazakstan and Azerbaijan. It is intriguing in the context that both prominent members of the Bush administration and adherents of al-Qaeda have invested or bought stock in these firms. Long before 9/11, there were negotiations between the US and the Taliban in Afghanistan not only about extradition of Osama bin Laden but also about the construction of an oil pipeline that would have connected the oil fields of Central Asia with the ocean, thereby paving the way for the former's commercial exploitation. The French intelligence experts Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquié have recently uncovered pre-9/11 plans within the Bush administration to topple the rebellious Muslim fundamentalist regime and install a multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan.⁴⁸ For America, the terror attacks provided a welcome justification for intervening militarily and creating a new vassal state.

A similar process can be witnessed in Iraq, where before the war had even ended, US firms staked their claims and were awarded provisional contracts. It remains to be seen whether the US intends to establish a protectorate under its military authority or install, as

⁴⁸ Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquié, *Die verbotene Wahrheit. Die Verstrickung der USA mit Osama Bin Laden*, Reinbek, 2002.

in Afghanistan, a new government comprised of exiles. The difference, however, is minimal. In the case of a vassal state, the future leader of Iraq will only be able to rule if his government is provided with robust support from US-led peacekeeping forces.

8. The Earth's New Nomos

For Brzezinski, the fall of the Soviet Union established American hegemony on the great world island, with the "protectorate" and "democratic bridgehead" of Europe in the West and the "Oriental anchor" of Japan in the East. Now, for the first time, the US has the chance to establish itself on the southwestern front of Eurasia and to dominate the continent from there as well.

With the wars in the Hindukush and Iraq, the US has taken giant steps toward achieving this aim. US troops are already stationed at bases in Kirgisia and Uzbekistan, as well as in Georgia, Tatzikistan and Kazakstan, all regions previously subjected to the military domination of the Soviet Union. With the American conquest of Baghdad, the US now also has a foothold in the Middle East, in the immediate vicinity of Iran and Saudi Arabia, from where they will attempt to dominate the politics of the region. Managing Iraq's oil reserves, they will also be able to influence the future price of oil set by OPEC.

The Iraq campaign also, however, caused suppressed conflicts and rifts between America and its traditional allies to surface. With the US pursuing its "unipolar moment," unwilling to be restrained in its capacity for action by any of its Lilliputian partners, these conflicts have now boiled over.

8.1 The End of the West

Transatlantic relations were already starting to sour before the US made its plans for the Iraq War. On both side of the Atlantic, experts warned that the West might be split into two rival camps. Francis Fukuyama, for example, sees a gigantic gap opening up between European and American perceptions of the world, to the detriment of what have been common values.⁴⁹ Robert Kagan goes a step further. He is convinced that the split is already a matter of fact. In his view, there is no common ground between Europe and the American Empire, and all talk of a transatlantic "community of values" is just empty rhetoric. The Old and New Worlds are, in his view, "fundamentally different."⁵⁰

Even skeptics have to acknowledge a factual basis for the thesis that the West is split between differing cultures and systems of power. In many important political, economic and legal areas, the US and Europe have completely divergent social ideals and interests. Whereas America supports individual liberty, laissez-faire capitalism and power politics, Europe advocates social welfare systems, state economic planning and international cooperation. America thinks in simple, black-and-white terms, while Europe maintains a multivalent, complex view of the world. Whereas America exists in a state of permanent threat, against which the populace arms itself, and favors a punitive judicial

⁴⁹ Francis Fukuyama, "Has History Restarted Since September 11", A Speech held on Thursday 8th August 2002 at the Grand Ballroom of The Grand Hyatt in Melbourne, <http://www.cis.org.au/Events/JBL/JBL02.htm>, printed (a little be changed), in: *Policy*, Winter 2002.

⁵⁰ Kagan, *Macht und Ohnmacht*, p. 11.

system including the death penalty, Europe prefers a pedagogical system of justice aimed at resocializing offenders. The US lives by the law of the jungle, while Europe dreams of a Kantian paradise of eternal peace. Whereas the US views war as a legitimate means of pursuing its national interests, Europe barricades itself behind binding legal systems and tries to resolve conflict by force of argument, dialogue and consensus. The US is characterized by patriotism, readiness for sacrifice and heroism, while Europe is pacifist and anti-militarist.⁵¹

This development has led the American political scientist Charles A. Kupchan to foresee a clash of civilizations between the US and Europe, with a possible split in Europe, which could lead to a "new Byzantine"⁵² and the "end of the West."⁵³ There's much to argue for his view. Europe's socially oriented economy, the strength of its political institutions and its cultural heritage will in any case, in the long term, inevitably prove more attractive to others than the carnivorous capitalism and trashy mass culture that America has to offer. If Europe concentrates on its moral, economic and cultural strengths, it could develop into a rival and serious counterpole to the "new Rome."⁵⁴

The figures and arguments Kupchan cites in support of his thesis are impressive. Europe's population is larger than America's; the Euro has achieved parity with the dollar and now represents an alternative currency for international investors; Europe's power will increase, if it can agree on a common constitution, a trimmed-down government bureaucracy and joint armed forces. Thanks to its Eastern expansion, Europe could develop into a "considerable adversary," a bulkhead against and countermodel to America.

Should the EU's Eastern expansion prove a political and economic success, Europe could be in a position to challenge America's global hegemony. It could take up a key post along the "geopolitical pivot" and began to compete with the US for the spoils of the world. Europe is, of course, closer than the US to the heartland of the planet. Along with this geographical advantage, Europe could also call upon its historical experience and revive its traditionally close ties to the Slavic peoples, leveraging these against the US. In this scenario, the role of commander and referee formerly played by Moscow would be transferred not to Washington, but to Brussels, to a prosperous Europe that would look more toward the East than the West for its future.

There has been little evidence thus far of such a new self-assertiveness among European nations. At the NATO conference in Prague in November 2002, they seemed to have been caught off guard by the speed of recent developments, caving in to all US plans, including the Bush Doctrine of preventive warfare. At American behest, a NATO Response Force was created out of thin air, which will stand at the new Rome's disposal as events unfold. Budgetary difficulties will likely postpone the creation a single, sixty-thousand man European army. NATO rubber stamped the War on Iraq, and Europe

⁵¹ Rudolf Maresch, „Und was tust du für dein Land?“, *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/13575/1.html> 11/10/2002.

⁵² Rudolf Maresch, „Das neue Byzanz,“ *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/13692/1.html>. 12/1/2002.

⁵³ Charles A. Kupchan, „The End of the West,“ *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 2002, <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/11/kupchan.htm>.

⁵⁴ Rudolf Maresch, „Das neue Rom“, in: *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/13047/1.html>. 8/11/2002.

supported UN Resolution 1441 without reserve. They even acceded to American demands that Turkey's entry into EU be sped up.

In January 2003, the US also succeeded in driving a wedge between Old and New Europe, convincing eight European heads of state to declare their solidarity and support for the US in its war on Iraq. The atmosphere between London and Paris has been poisoned ever since, and a lot of water will have to flow under the bridge before this situation improves. Berlin and Paris have to begun to explore the possibility, together with smaller European states like Belgium and Luxembourg, of forming a joint army (EVU).

8.2 Eurasian Adversary

It is interesting to observe how the new American liberation theology has created constellations and alliances that would have been unthinkable only a year ago. When the French and Russian Presidents appeared before the cameras in Bordeaux to announce that they would veto any new, American-sponsored resolution on Iraq in the UN Security Council, the geopolitical strategists in the US were confronted with exactly what they had wanted to avoid: the emergence of a rival.

In retrospect, it is surprising how long it took for the governments in Paris, Moscow and Berlin to register the geopolitical intentions of the Bush administration and to agree on efforts to contain US hegemony. Precisely those hegemonic aspirations had been evident within the free market for years.

Moscow's recent behavior has been particularly curious. Objectively speaking, Russia should have felt most threatened by the expansionist plans of the American Empire since these present Moscow with the danger of being encircled. In the wake of the war in Afghanistan and the eastern expansion of NATO, America has become Russia's immediate neighbor, crowding in on the Russia bear's territory in both Central Asia and Europe. It is unclear why Moscow has pursued such an easy-going policy toward America. Credit programs, release from debt and a blind eye toward Russia's actions in Chechnya do not suffice as explanations for the former superpower's inaction. Perhaps, the Kremlin was blinded or lulled to sleep by the idea of Russia-American rapprochement, which was widely celebrated in the media and political circles. Or perhaps President Putin is simply surrounded by advisors who prefer to close their eyes to recent Russian history, old fears and old geopolitical considerations.

In any case, the flirt between the Kremlin and White House was intense but short-lived, and Moscow at present seems to be recalling its geographical roots, alliances and interests, which reside territorial and culturally in both Asia and Old Europe. The dream of Continental hegemony goes far back in Russia history. Lenin, too, made an attempt to gain a foothold in Europe through Communist revolutions in the central part of the continent. As early as Weimar Republic, Moscow tried to block the integration of Germany into the West and to establish special relations with Berlin. After World War II, the Soviet Union was in fact temporarily able to extend its sphere of power and influence there. It may very well be that the aftermath of the Iraq campaign, too, opens up new possibilities for the Kremlin in Europe.

8.3 The New Rome

It would be fruitless to try to predict now what the world will look like after the final conclusion of America's campaign in Iraq. What is certain is that old alliances and association such as the UN, NATO and the EU are no longer what they were, and that the US, fresh off of its first crusade against the axis of evil, will find new battlefields.⁵⁵ No one, at least among the uninitiated, knows whether "Gulliver's next stop" will be Syria, Iran or North Korea.⁵⁶ It could be that the new Rome will meet its match in Communist tanks.⁵⁷

It is also uncertain how Europe will react. Will it help in the reconstruction of the Iraq, following in Robert Kagan's words the pattern of the US "making dinner" and the Europeans "doing the dishes?"⁵⁸ Or will it break away from the empire and emancipate itself, formulating its own geo- and power-political interests and joining with Russia to form a rival to the US? Both scenarios are possible. If one follows the daring prognosis of Dirk Schümer, both Europe and the UN might even emerge as long-term victors from the ruins of the old alliances.⁵⁹

There will be no getting around questions and problems concerning space, neither for political scientists nor sociologists nor historians, least of all for the politicians who pull the strings themselves. The time is past when one could keep one's distance from "all territorial considerations"⁶⁰ and act as though "the state were hanging in mid-air and its soil were just a larger kind of property."⁶¹ Germany will become conscious once again of its geographical position. It will comprehend that its orientation toward and alliance with the West--to say nothing of gestures of gratitude and transatlantic reflexes based on events that happened more than fifty years ago--are not the ultimate historical solutions. Germany's geographical position opens up numerous possible paths: a path toward the West to build up together with Paris and other "willing" nations a strong European core, or a path toward the East to form together with France, Russia and perhaps even China an Eurasian adversary and alternative model to the new Rome. Within a year, the Empire has succeeded in doing what it had most wanted to avoid: creating a competitor and rival that would challenge its dominance. The question is, of course, whether these nations will succeed in laying aside their highly diverse interests and summoning the common will to confront the American empire. The most recent statements by the German Chancellor and Defense Minister suggest that Berlin is currently more interested in effecting a rapprochement with Washington.

⁵⁵ London, too, is already thinking about the next war, as was announced by British Defense Minister Geoffrey Hoon on 4/8/2003 in a speech at the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. See *Focus Online* <http://focus.msn.de/G/GN/gn.htm?snr=118854&streamsnr=7> 4/9/2003.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Maresch, „Gullivers nächster Halt,“ *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/special/irak/13787/1.html> 12/15/2002.

⁵⁷ Rudolf Maresch, „Der Koloss schwächelt,“ *Telepolis Online*, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/kolumnen/mar/13984/1.html> 1/18/2003

⁵⁸ Robert Kagan, „Power and Weakness,“ *Policy Review* 114/2002, <http://www.policyreview.org/JUN02/kagan.html>

⁵⁹ Dirk Schümer, „Der Sieg von Neu-Europa,“ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4/8/2003.

⁶⁰ Ulrich Ante, *Zur Grundlegung des Gegenstandsbereiches der Politischen Geographie. Über das ‚Politische‘ in der Geographie*, Stuttgart, 1985, p. 33.

⁶¹ Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, Munich and Berlin, 1923, p. IV.

If the hawks in the Bush administration get their way, NATO, the UN and the EU will be deemed obsolete, irrelevant and superfluous. Decisions about the new "Nomos on Earth"⁶² will be made in Washington according to American rules,⁶³ and nowhere else, certainly not the great house of blither on the Hudson.⁶⁴ The UN presents a danger, so the logic, to the post-war order in Iraq,⁶⁵ and for a new world order in general an international organization of law isn't needed. Just as the UN and its predecessors were seen to be unequal to past challenges (Nazi Germany, South Korea, Rwanda, the Balkans) of establishing law and order (as defined by America), they are seen to be equally unable to deal with new challenges like the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. The US still grants other countries the "right to their own opinion," but no longer any right to veto its actions.⁶⁶

In future, the empire will only deal with the UN on a case-to-case basis, for instance, when it needs to organize humanitarian assistance or cleaning-up operations. In future, it will form coalitions *ad hoc*, so as not to make itself dependent on permission from insignificant nations like New Guinea, Cameroon or Angola, when it wants to risk the lives of American soldiers to liberate a people from the yoke of a gruesome dictator.⁶⁷

The main danger will likely come from within, if American arrogance, excess and self-overestimation lead to the US leadership to make false calculations, and "wars of disarmament" become wars of attrition. Readiness to sacrifice, patriotism and heroism are not inexhaustible quantities, even in the US. On the other hand, even an empire needs partners and friends. In the age of global information, it cannot achieve all its goals by itself. In many areas (weapons proliferation, the hunt for terrorists or the fight against organized crime, human smuggling and drug dealing), America depends on international cooperation. Even the unilateralists are aware of this paradox, which is inherent in America's power.⁶⁸ That is why many are now counseling Washington to return to soft power as means of reconquering European hearts.⁶⁹

If America does not succeed in balancing its military expenditures with equivalent economic growth, new Rome will also be threatened with an imperial overstretch.⁷⁰ Voices are already warning that the "end of the American era" may be drawing near,⁷¹ and that the "wars of disarmament" are only a form of demonstrative, theatrical militarism.⁷² In order to cover up one's own weakness, one subjugates enemies that are militarily weak. Is this the reason that Syria seems to have been selected as the next enemy? Is this a case of much ado about nothing? Are preemptive strikes merely an

⁶² Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Ius Publicum Europaeum*, Berlin, 1950.

⁶³ Brzezinski, *Die einzige Weltmacht*, p. 49 ff.

⁶⁴ Richard Perle, "Thank God for the death of the UN," *The Guardian* 3/21/2003.

⁶⁵ Stephen Schwartz, „U.N. Go Home," *Weekly Standard* 4/14/2003.

⁶⁶ Richard Perle, „Im Moment sind wir mit dem Irak beschäftigt," *Berliner Zeitung* 3/26/2003.

⁶⁷ Charles Krauthammer, "A Costly Charade At the U.N.," *Washington Post* 2/28/2003.

⁶⁸ See Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*.

⁶⁹ Robert Kagan, "Resisting Superpowerful Temptations" *Washington Post* 4/9/2003,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A60003-2003Apr8.html>

⁷⁰ Paul M. Kennedy, *Aufstieg und Fall der großen Mächte*, Frankfurt am Main, 1989.

⁷¹ Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: US Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century*, New York, 2002.

⁷² Emmanuel Todd, *Weltmacht USA. Ein Nachruf*, Munich, 2003.

enormous diversion? Is the time ripe to write the obituary of a superpower and the pax Americana?⁷³

One shouldn't let oneself be misled by such Cassandra-like questions. The law of expanding spaces, discovered by Friedrich Ratzel and elaborated by Karl Haushofer, does not just consist in the division of cells, which then die off after a period of hypertrophic growth, but also includes another variant. According to Ratzel, the impetus toward the expansion of space comes from the outside. Contingency and accident are the factors that have caused the most recent case of expansionism. Accordingly, the attack on the Twin Towers can be seen to have strengthened American aspirations toward hegemony and America's belief that only it knows what is right and necessary for the world. An ecumenical movement of people in jeans and cowboy boots, who eat junk food, buy mass-produced goods and speak "terrible" English, may not be far behind.

⁷³ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy* 4/2002, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_julyaug_2002/wallerstein.html.