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How Reliable is Wikipedia 18 Years after its Establishment? A Comparative Look at Various Language Entries on Karl Haushofer

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Abstract: *This article discusses the level of accuracy of different language Wikipedia entries on Karl Haushofer, a highly controversial German geopoliticians of the first half of the 20th century. Entries are compared in terms of length, the number notes and Haushofer's own publications. Also the structure of the texts, and the quality of the reference section is discussed. The content of the longest entries is scrutinized and the most common along with the most serious mistakes of these entries are shown and corrected. The English entry on Karl Haushofer differs from most others by referring mostly to US publications of the 1940s, which reversely means that most of the more recent research on Karl Haushofer is ignored.*

Keywords: *Haushofer, geopolitics, case study, reliability, mistakes, Nazi Party, Hess, Hitler, Ribbentrop, Asia, Japan*

The Internet as a Source of Knowledge

In the 21st century, we are used to having up-to-date information available at our fingertips. Ideally, we further expect that this information is reliable and—preferably—even verifiable. While most people would claim that the first assertion (up-to-date) is the least of problems with Wikipedia entries, the other two (reliable and verifiable) are more likely to be questioned when discussing the merits and demerits of Wikipedia, which has long been a bone of contention within the academic world. However, with the multilingual web-based encyclopedia's having turned 18 in January 2019¹, the discussion has somehow cooled down and (nearly) everyone is using Wikipedia. Many believe that most of the apparent shortcomings of any “wiki”-style text (i.e., many, usually unknown, sometimes obscure authors) can be overcome by checking different language Wikipedia entries on the same topic. While they often look similar (because they frequently use identical illustrations), authors and sources and therefore contents often differ exten-

sively. However, even looking at a wide array of different languages does not necessarily mean that one ends up getting solid information because different language entries feature common as well as uncommon mistakes, often framed in ways that only people that already have extensive knowledge about the subject in question can decipher.

Karl Haushofer as a Case Study

Karl Haushofer was born in Munich in 1869 as the eldest son of Professor Max H. Haushofer. In 1887, Karl joined the Bavarian army, where he studied at various army schools culminating in the Bavarian War Academy. Later, he taught there, joined the general staff, and was sent to East Asia as the first Bavarian military observer to Japan, where he stayed from February 1909 to June 1910. Upon his return, a lung disease meant that he was put on the reserve list. This allowed Haushofer to recover, write his first book and get a Ph.D. in Political Geography. *Dai Nihon* (1913), as well as his Ph.D. thesis (1914), dealt with Japan. During World War I, he rose to the rank of colonel and was promoted to major general upon his retirement in 1919—a kind of golden handshake, not unusual in the military. In that year, he met Rudolf Hess, who would later become Hitler's deputy in the Nazi Party (NSDAP). When Hitler and Hess were imprisoned in Lands-

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¹ In January 2019, Wikipedia turned 18. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia> (February 24, 2019).

berg, Haushofer visited them numerous times, and we can assume that his ideas of *Lebensraum* (living space) must have struck a chord with Hitler, who was at that time looking for a new vision for Germany. From the 1920s to the early 40s, Haushofer published many books, and his son, Albrecht (1903-45), a political geographer in his own right, was sometimes sent on semi-diplomatic missions by Hess and Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign policy advisor and later foreign minister (1938-45).

Karl Haushofer, like the Nazis, aimed at overcoming the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty; he aimed at doing so without risking another World War. His most influential geopolitical idea was that of cooperation between Germany, Russia (later the USSR), and Japan, the so-called *Kontinentalblock*, directed at Anglo-Saxon world domination. Haushofer's direct influence on Hitler was never profound and disappeared when Hitler gradually moved from Munich to Berlin. Hitler's hubris meant that he became increasingly self-assured so that the opinion of others did not count much anymore. Nevertheless, Haushofer's indirect influence on some Nazi leaders continued for some time via his well-known publications, the connections of his Berlin-based son Albrecht as well as via his friend Rudolf Hess. In the 1930s and early 40s, Haushofer was involved with various academic intuitions like the German Academy in Munich and folkish-nationalistic Nazi organizations dealing with Germans abroad, but he never joined the Nazi party, mostly due to his wife's half-Jewish background. He was no (racist) anti-Semite. Albrecht Haushofer was involved with the resistance and was killed by the Nazis in April 1945. After being interrogated by the allied representatives, Karl Haushofer committed suicide together with his wife, Martha, in March 1946.

Due to his closeness to Hess and some other Nazis, his half-Jewish wife, and the allied (mis-) understanding of *Geopolitik* as one of the pillars of the Nazi conquest of Europe, Karl Haushofer has always been an ardently contested figure, both during his lifetime and posthumously. If we assume that controversial topics tend to reveal more differences between different language entries in Wikipedia, comparing the depictions of Karl Haushofer, therefore, might be an ideal choice for such a case study.²

On the Internet, the information available has multiplied manifold over the last one or two decades. Entering the four terms "Karl, Haushofer, *Geopolitik*, Japan" in that fashion produced a mere 300 results in August 2005. This number increased to 4,700 in September 2011 and 5,600 in May 2012 and stands now (February 2019) at 19,700.³ Among the many books published about Karl Haushofer since the late 1970s, some make him look innocent (e.g., Ebeling, 1994; Matern, 1978), some argue critically but in a balanced way (Jacobsen, 1979; Sprengel, 1996), and some overestimate his influence (Herwig, 2016; Hippler, 1996).⁴ If we add specialized studies such as Gottschlich (1998), Spang (2013, 2018) and Bassoni (2018, 2019) to the picture, one might think that everything has been said and that on such a broad basis a balanced representation of Haushofer's personality, work and impact should be possible.

Karl Haushofer in Wikipedia

1. Statistical Analysis

If we now look up "Karl Haushofer" in Wikipedia, we find that there are entries in 37 mostly European and some Asian languages.⁵ Among his contemporary rivals as geopolitical thinkers, Sir Halford

² For more information about Haushofer in general, consult the two most comprehensive books about Haushofer by H.-A. Jacobsen (1979) and C. W. Spang (2013). A brief discussion of the literature can be found in Spang, this issue, pp. 23-24.

³ The older figures are taken from Spang, 2013, p. 62 (note 169). A search in February 2019 was conducted via google.com. The use of the German term *Geopolitik* was intentional; changing it to "geopolitics" increased the number of hits to 34,900.

⁴ See Spang (this issue, pp. 23-34), for a critical analysis of Herwig's work.

⁵ See <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q76746#sitelinks-wikipedia> (Feb. 24, 2019) for details. Entries are available in the following languages: Belarusian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Georgian, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Javanese, Korean, Latin, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Ukrainian.

Table 1. *Statistical Analysis of Wikipedia Entries on Karl Haushofer*

Language	Word count (characters)	References (notes)	Haushofer's works	Secondary literature	External + Library links
German	4,858 (35,936)	23	32	17	4+5
English	3,724 (25,208)	47	18	13	8+11
Polish	2,994 (23,106)	42	17	9	4+12
French	2,901 (18,673)	19 (7+12)	18	22	2+12
Italian	2,539 (17,623)	7	45	3	1+5
Norwegian	1,683 (11,568)	2	19	17	3+11
Russian	1,344 (9,939)	7	6	0	3+10
Rumanian	1,203 (8,501)	5	0	0	0+8
Spanish	1,045 (6,849)	0	3	0	3+13
Catalan	1,033 (6,447)	0	6	0	0+10
Japanese	2,957 (4,397)	2	1	4	5+11
Chinese	710 (1,058)	0	0	0	2+12

Note. These data were retrieved on December 14, 2018.

Mackinder (33 languages⁶) and Alfred T. Mahan (28⁷), or allies Rudolf Kjellén (24⁸), Friedrich Ratzel (42⁹), only Ratzel is covered in more languages.

2. From Norwegian to Spanish

Beyond the five most comprehensive texts, which will be discussed hereafter in more detail, that the Norwegian entry is the sixth longest comes as a surprise. In some parts, it resembles the Italian text, at least when it comes to devoting a lengthy section to Haushofer's experience in East Asia, including similar mistakes.¹⁰ The fact that the Russian text is among the most substantial, reflects, on the one hand, the overall size of the Russian Wikipedia, which is currently the fourth biggest when it comes to the number of entries;¹¹ on the other hand, it echoes Russian interest in geopolitical questions and

the fact that Russia/the USSR played an important role in Haushofer's concept of an anti-Anglo-Saxon alliance of Germany, Russia/the USSR and Japan, the so-called *Kontinentalblock*. It has to be added here that the Russian introduction of Haushofer seems to avoid many of the common mistakes and presents him in a comparatively balanced way.¹² Why precisely the Rumanian entry makes it into the top ten in terms of length remains unclear, however. A cursory look at the Rumanian text shows that it mixes up some dates, claiming for example that Haushofer entered the Bavarian army in 1889, while he actually did already two years earlier. Also, Haushofer got his Ph.D. in 1913, not in 1912. The entry also mentions the legendary but fictional Institute of Geopolitics in Munich (which will be discussed later) and claims that Haushofer became the dean of his faculty at Munich's Ludwig-

⁶ <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q299938#sitelinks-wikipedia> (Feb. 24, 2019).

⁷ <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q142988> (Feb. 24, 2019).

⁸ <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q455088> (Feb. 24, 2019).

⁹ <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q76762> (Feb. 24, 2019).

¹⁰ Both entries, i.e., the Italian and the Norwegian, share—among others—the following mistakes in this section. First, Haushofer, in fact, never acted as an artillery instructor in Japan; second, he did not travel in Asia for four years and never visited Tibet; third, Haushofer did not speak Korean, Chinese, or Russian; finally, Haushofer did not understand Hindi. Both entries also repeat the long-standing claims that Haushofer was connected to some occult societies.

¹¹ The number of entries in each language can be checked at <https://www.wikipedia.org/> (Feb. 24, 2019). English (1): 5,8 Mio. entries, German (2): 2,27 Mio., French (3): 2,08 Mio., Russian (4): 1,53 Mio., Spanish (5): 1,5 Mio., Italian (6): 1,5 Mio., Polish (7): 1,32, Japanese (8): 1,14 Mio., Chinese (9): 1,04 Mio., Portuguese (10): 1,02 million.

¹² In the case of the Russian entry, Google Translator was used to examine its contents. Along with translating the text into English, one gets an alphabetic rendering of the Russian text, making it easier to deal with proper nouns and many other aspects.

Maximilians-University (LMU), a position that he never held.

The Spanish along with the Catalan entries are ninth and tenth regarding length. As Spanish is spoken in many countries and by many US citizens, this entry shall be scrutinized here a little more closely. The Spanish entry says that Haushofer started to teach at Munich University (LMU) in 1913, while, in fact, he took up teaching there only in 1919. A common mistake can be found here as well, namely, the idea that Haushofer had been major-general during WWI, while in reality, the highest rank he held as an active officer was that of colonel. The entry mixes up Karl and his son Albrecht Haushofer at times, wrongly claiming that Karl was engaged in diplomatic activities in London. The idea promoted here, namely, that Albrecht Haushofer was the no. 2 of Nazi diplomacy and the man behind the Hitler-Stalin Pact has no basis at all. It was Karl rather than Albrecht, who was in favor of cooperation with the USSR.¹³ The suggestion that the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) had anything to do with the death of Karl and Martha Haushofer also lacks any solid basis.

One grave mistake of the Spanish, as well as the Catalan entry, has to be singled out here because it turns history upside down. While Haushofer surely cooperated with many Nazis (especially Rudolf Hess and Joachim von Ribbentrop), there is no doubt that he never joined the NSDAP. Nonetheless, both the Spanish and the Catalan entry wrongly declare that Haushofer and Hess founded the NSDAP in 1919.¹⁴ In reality, the party was founded as *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* by Karl Harrer and Anton Drexler on January 5, 1919, at a time

when Haushofer and Hess had not even met. It was renamed as *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) only in February 1920.

The Catalan text resembles the Spanish one in some parts (both refer to Haushofer's encounter with Lord Kitchener in India and mention the same, rather unlikely people among those who influenced Karl Haushofer (Thomas Macaulay and Edward Gibbon), but it does not mix up Albrecht and Karl Haushofer and does not repeat the strange MI6 claim and is, therefore, a little more balanced.

3. Haushofer in Asia: Comparing Two Asian Wikipedia Entries

The Japanese entry also contains various mistakes; many of them seem to be based on the English Wikipedia entry. The inaccurate statement that Haushofer studied and taught at "German" (*doitsu*) military schools, while, in fact, they were more specifically "Bavarian",¹⁵ is a particular misinterpretation of the Japanese entry. Also, the incorrect idea that Haushofer had been German military attaché in Japan and arrived there in 1908 are two mistakes in the Japanese entry that are not reflected in its English counterpart. Both entries mix up Haushofer's *Dai Nihon* (1913) and his Ph.D. thesis (1914).¹⁶ The claim that Haushofer spoke Japanese, Korean and Chinese, while in fact, even his Japanese was mediocre, is common but not shared by the English entry. The *shisō to eikyō* (thought and influence) section again reflects the English Wikipedia entry because it is organized similarly by singling out Ratzel and *Lebensraum* (living space), Kjellén and the concept of autarky, Mackinder's heartland theory, pan regions and potential world dominance via German

¹³ An example of Albrecht Haushofer's skepticism vis-à-vis the USSR can be found in a letter, dated July 30, 1930, which he sent from Moscow to his parents. In it, he explained that "judging from my impressions, there is no way to think about a joint game with Moscow." The letter is quoted by Laack-Michel, 1974, pp. 294-295 (Doc. 22).

¹⁴ In Spanish, the relevant sentence reads as follows: "Desde 1919, Haushofer y otros dirigentes (entre ellos Rudolf Hess) fundaron el Partido Nacionalsocialista de los Trabajadores Alemanes [...]." In Catalan, the parallel sentence is as follows: "Des de 1919, Haushofer i altres dirigents (entre ells Rudolf Hess) van fundar el Partit Nacional Socialista dels Treballadors Alemanys [...]." Both sentences quoted above, translate into English as: "From 1919, Haushofer and other leaders (among them Rudolf Hess) founded the National Socialist German Workers' Party." The usage of "desde" (or "des de") = since or from, might reflect the fact that the party was not yet called "NSDAP" in 1919.

¹⁵ Based on its rank as a kingdom and its size as the second biggest state of the German Empire (1871-1918), Bavaria enjoyed various special rights, the so-called *Reservatsrechte*. Among them was the (near) independence of its army in peacetime. On this basis, Haushofer had been sent to Japan in 1909/10.

¹⁶ K. Haushofer's Ph.D. thesis, *Der deutsche Anteil an der geographischen Erschließung Japans ...* (1914), and *Dai Nihon* (1913) are both listed in the reference section below.

cooperation with the Soviet Union as its main points.¹⁷ While these aspects are part of German geopolitical thinking, Haushofer's most essential theories were arguably his call for German-Russian/Soviet-Japanese cooperation (*Kontinentalblock*) and his idea of a unity of the monsoon region (*Einheit der Monsoonländer*) from India in the South-West to Japan in the North-East, a concept that was positively received by 1930s/40s geopoliticians in Japan.¹⁸ One unique point of the Japanese entry is a picture of Haushofer's tomb close to the family estate, Hartschimmelhof (40 km south-west of central Munich).

The much shorter Chinese entry equally misses out on the difference between the German Imperial army and the Royal Bavarian army. It also wrongly claims Haushofer had mastered various languages, adding Russian to the list. The Chinese text furthermore incorrectly says that Haushofer was promoted to major-general during WWI. Mackinder, Ratzel, and Kjellén are mentioned as sources of Haushofer's geopolitics while the Chinese text talks of his "great influence" (影響很大, Yǐngxiǎng hěn dà) on Nazi foreign policy, which is an overstatement.¹⁹

4. How Good are the Most Substantial Entries Beyond English?

Comparing the five most comprehensive Wikipedia entries on Karl Haushofer shows what the statistical analysis also hints at, namely that the English (no. 2 in terms of length) and the Polish entry (no. 3) are very similar, which in real terms means that the Polish version is a slightly edited translation of the English text. A mere look at the

parallel table of contents and the fact that 40 out of 42 endnotes of the Polish entry are directly taken over from the English original, suggests that the Polish text does not warrant any further scrutiny. Furthermore, the list of Haushofer's works almost perfectly mirrors the English entry's list, and the four external links offered are identical with the first four provided in the English text.

The *Bibliographie* of the French entry (no. 4) is the most comprehensive catalog of secondary literature among all the entries on Haushofer. It mentions no fewer than twelve works in German, eight in French and two in English. Nevertheless, the notes (*Références*) are almost entirely based on French works. The structure of the entry also differs evidently from the English (and the Polish) one with the addition of various subheadings hinting at some of the important aspects of Haushofer's life and work, such as *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (Journal of Geopolitics), *Influence sur ses contemporains* (influence on his contemporaries),²⁰ and *Haushofer et l'Asie* (Haushofer and Asia).²¹

One mistake that warrants correction here is the erroneous statement that the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* ceased publishing in 1941 after the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and the USSR ("la guerre à l'Est, ce qui entraîne l'arrêt de la publication de son journal en 1941"). The journal continued to be published until Volume 21, Number 5/6 (September/December) 1944 with Haushofer as sole *Herausgeber* [editor].

The biggest mistake in the French entry is the old but unsubstantiated and incorrect claim that Haushofer headed the *Institut de Géopolitique de Munich*, with its supposedly 1000 people working

¹⁷ The Japanese, like the English Wikipedia entry, constructs a connection between Karl Haushofer and the left wing of the NSDAP around Georg Strasser and others on the mistaken assumption that Haushofer wanted to cooperate with the USSR because of its communist regime while in fact, Haushofer wanted to do so despite the Soviet leadership of the country. Besides these similarities, five out of eight external links listed at the end of the English Wikipedia entry reappear here, among them a questionable History Channel documentary.

¹⁸ For a concise introduction of Haushofer's view of monsoon Asia as one geopolitical unit, see Spang, 2013, pp. 354-357. Haushofer's influence on the development of geopolitics in Japan is discussed in Spang, 2013, pp. 480-546.

¹⁹ Regarding the areas of his influence on Nazi foreign policy, the one difference between the Japanese and the Chinese entry is the latter mentioning the "state-as-organism" idea, not to be found in the Japanese text.

²⁰ This section is mostly based on the comments Stefan Zweig made about Karl Haushofer in his book *Die Welt von Gestern* [The World of Yesterday]. Zweig met Karl and Martha Haushofer in 1909 on an ocean liner on their way to East Asia. Zweig and the Haushofers remained in contact until the late 1930s.

²¹ In this part of the text as well as in the preceding one on Occultisme, claims of Haushofer's alleged membership in secret societies and spiritual influence on the Nazis are correctly rejected, based on the findings of Jacobsen (1979) and others.

for the Nazis.²² Such an institute never existed, a point that David T. Murphy (2014) has recently taken pains to explain. Had he taken account of an important hint published one year before his article appeared (Spang, 2013, p. 469), he could have avoided much speculation, though.²³ The list of Haushofer's works provided by the French Wikipedia is almost identical with the one included in the English entry.²⁴ Overall, the French text is well structured but still needs some serious revisions.

The Italian entry (no. 5) is based on the Italian version of a rather old text by Robert Steuckers, a Belgian ultra-nationalist, who has been involved with German and Russian right-wing activists since the 1990s. Six of seven notes refer to Steuckers, and two of three works mentioned in the bibliography (*Fonti*) are by him.²⁵ The Italian Wikipedia entry is strictly chronologically organized and features a detailed table of contents. The *Biografia* section talks at some length about Haushofer's sojourn in

Japan and the Orient (*Il Giappone e l'Oriente*), and is the only Wikipedia entry on Haushofer with a separate subheading on Albrecht Haushofer.²⁶ Concerning Karl Haushofer's Asian experience, the following mistakes have to be pointed out: Haushofer never was an artillery instructor (*istruttore dell'artiglieria*), and his level of Japanese was never good enough to read on his own. He did not speak Korean, Chinese or Russian, as is claimed in the Italian Wikipedia entry.²⁷ Similarly, the assertion that Haushofer translated Hindi texts is far beyond the realm of possibility.²⁸ The only foreign languages that Haushofer spoke reasonably well were English and French. Noteworthy is the exceptionally long list of Haushofer's works presented by the Italian entry. Finally, it should be mentioned that the French and the Italian text utilize completely different sources from each other as well as from those used in the English entry.

²² The relevant sentence in the French text is as follows: "En 1938, Karl Haushofer dirige l'Institut de Géopolitique de Munich qui emploie un millier de collaborateurs." https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Haushofer (Feb. 24, 2019).

²³ Murphy (2014, pp. 8-10) presents his lengthy argument how an October 1940 article by Charles Kruszewski (which does not even mention the proper noun "Geopolitical Institute") might have spurred Frederic Sondern's claim for such an institute with "1.000 Nazi Scientists", while, in fact, reading Spang, 2013, p. 469, would have provided the link Murphy was looking for, namely a *New York Times* article of February 17, 1940, which reported about a lecture in the US capital as follows: "The German war aims were outlined tonight as a re-establishment of the Holy Roman Empire by Dr. Edmund A. Walsh, regent of the Foreign Service School of Georgetown University, before a capacity audience in Memorial Continental Hall in the first lecture of his annual series. 'There exists in Munich,' he said, 'where it has been functioning for many years, a so-called Geopolitical Institute. It is the headquarters of that composite branch of science which the Germans call geo-politik, to describe the double element of geography and political science contained therein. [...] Hundreds of very competent, if very fanatical, experts are working under the leadership and direction of a certain General Karl Haushofer, who is the master mind and chief advisor of Hitler and at the same time the controlling power over the Reich diplomacy and foreign relations. There is the true Nazi brain trust.'" That all of this was "fake news" is shown by a straightforward comment by Karl Haushofer in his "Apologie der deutschen Geopolitik", where he flatly denied the existence of such an institute by saying: "Ein Institut für Geopolitik in München hat nie existiert." See Jacobsen (1979/I, p. 640).

²⁴ Astonishingly, the French entry's list does not include a French translation of various texts by Karl Haushofer, called *De la géopolitique*, published in 1986.

²⁵ One of these internet-based texts is listed with "1912" as the year of publication, while in fact, the text has been online since 2002, even if the year 2012 appears in the URL: <http://robertsteuckers.blogspot.com/2012/10/i-temi-della-geopolitica-e-dello-spazio.html> (Feb. 24, 2019). Steuckers' original French text "Karl Haushofer" (1992) is no longer online, but a revised version (2000) can be found at <http://www.evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=255> (Feb. 24, 2019). The mistaken claim that Haushofer was sent to Japan to (re-)organize the Japanese army remained unchanged: "il est envoyé au Japon pour y organiser l'armée impériale."

organize the Japanese army remained unchanged: "il est envoyé au Japon pour y organiser l'armée impériale."

²⁶ Albrecht Haushofer is portrayed as geopolitican and playwright. His involvement with the failed July 20, 1944 plot against Adolf Hitler and some of his plays are correctly mentioned.

²⁷ The relevant sentence of the entry reads as follows: "Durante i quattro anni successivi viaggiò per l'Estremo Oriente, aggiungendo il coreano, il giapponese e il cinese al suo repertorio di lingue: russo, francese e inglese."

²⁸ This claim is presented here with the following phrase: "[...] tradurre parecchi testi indu e buddisti [...]."

The German entry on Haushofer lists 17 secondary works, 14 in German three in English, many of them reasonably up-to-date.²⁹ Most of the 23 notes (*Einzelnachweise*) either refer to publications by Haushofer and other contemporary authors or recent publications on Haushofer, mostly published in the 21st century, with a few exceptions like a reference to the early standard work on Haushofer by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (1979). The current version of the German entry is reasonably balanced, even though there are still numerous simple mistakes, such as arguing that Haushofer's planned stationing at the German embassy in Tokyo did not materialize because his low military rank would have meant subordination under the military attaché. In fact, the opposite was the case: After his arrival in Japan, Haushofer was promoted to the rank of major while military attaché von Bernewitz was just a captain. Due to this development, Haushofer could not be subordinated to the attaché.³⁰ The statement that Haushofer was introduced to Japanese dignitaries in spring 1909 is also wrong. By coincidence, Haushofer briefly met the former Foreign Minister Aoki Shūzō, but the German embassy did nothing to call his presence to the attention of the Japanese before his official stationing with the 16th division of the Imperial Japanese Army in Kyoto in the late summer of 1909. Only then was he introduced to the Japanese authorities.

Karl Haushofer in the English Wikipedia: Appearances are Deceptive

Directing our attention now to the English entry on Karl Haushofer, the first thing to notice is its academic structure, featuring a list of 18 of Haushofer's works, a total of 47 references, a bibliography with five books, and a further reading section with another eight works. Eight external links round off this entry, which is frequently edited. What is striking, though, is that not a single work referred to in the 23 notes of the German entry is

mentioned in the references of the English text.³¹ The bibliography and further reading sections list just two German works but ignore all other languages. Instead, the notes are dominated by Andreas Dorpalen, *The World of General Haushofer* (1942), Johannes Mattern, *Geopolitik: Doctrine of National Self-Sufficiency and Empire* (1942), and Edmund A. Walsh, *Total Power: A Footnote to History* (1949).

Dorpalen's work appears 15 times directly and once indirectly in a reference to the introduction to the book by Herman Beukema. Mattern's monograph is cited in seven notes, and Walsh's work appears 14 times, with the same author's September 16, 1946, *Life* article mentioned once. Adding note no. 32 to "Mackinder, p. 78"³² and a reference to an anonymous *Time* article of March 25, 1946, this amounts to 40 allusions to American wartime or early cold war sources, barely ever cited in any other language entry on Karl Haushofer (other than—for already explained reasons—the Polish one). Out of 51 works mentioned in 47 references a mere three have been published since 2000. None of these three recent publications has any direct relation with Haushofer, and even the most recent work is already more than a dozen years old. In short, the English entry ignores nearly everything that has been published about Karl Haushofer over the last 70 (!) years.

While the English Wikipedia entry presents most of the basic facts about Haushofer's life without serious blunders, many of the interpretations reflect the age of the reference works. Probably due to this basis, Haushofer is introduced here as a politician, a term not used in any other (major) language mentioned in Table 1, other than Spanish (and Catalan). Phrases like "His son, Albrecht, was issued a German Blood Certificate through the help of Hess" are not wrong but unnecessarily ambiguous because one wonders what happened to the other son, Heinz, and Haushofer's wife Martha, who, in fact, got the same kind of certificate. Also, Haushofer was not sent to

²⁹ Seven of these 17 works have been published since 2000, two each in the 1990s, 80s, 70s, and 60s. The two remaining works listed in this section (*Literatur*) were both published in 1939: one is a *Festschrift* for Karl Haushofer's 70th birthday, and the other one is a short history of the Haushofer family by Haushofer's second son, Heinz.

³⁰ This is explained on p. 242 of Martha Haushofer's travel diary (*Reise-Tagebuch*), available in the Haushofer family's private archive.

³¹ Reference no. 47 provides the link to Haushofer's book *Weltpolitik von heute*, which can be read online: <https://archive.org/details/Haushofer-Karl-Weltpolitik-von-heute> (February 24, 2019).

³² Without any further information, one can only guess that H. J. Mackinder's book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919) is meant here.

Japan “as an artillery instructor”. To the contrary, he was sent there to learn from the Japanese army, which had beaten Russia in 1904-05. Furthermore, it is not true that Haushofer “had attained the rank of General”, as it is claimed here, “by World War I”. Correct is what we find two lines further down in the text: “[H]e retired with the rank of major general in 1919.”

Like some other language entries, the English one confuses Haushofer’s *Dai Nihon* and his Ph.D. thesis. Similarly to the comment about Albrecht Haushofer’s “Blood Certificate”, the following sentence is not wrong but at least awkward, because it judges developments with hindsight and requires too much prior knowledge of Haushofer’s further curriculum vitae: “Haushofer entered academia with the aim of restoring and regenerating Germany.” Usually, anyone who wants to “restore” or “regenerate” a country “enters” politics and not academia. The reference to Louis Pauwels’ book and the claims to occultism remain equivocal enough not to criticize them too harshly here. Finally, the statement that Haushofer was working for a German-Japanese alliance is correct but to link this to his book *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozean* (1924) ignores that Haushofer had argued for German-Russian-Japanese cooperation already in *Dai Nihon* in 1913.³³

The geopolitics section of the entry starts with indicating Haushofer’s main sources. Once more, what we find here is not wrong, but just mentioning six names without further evaluating the kind and amount of influence exerted by each of these men is not sufficient. While especially German political geographer Friedrich Ratzel and pro-German Swedish political scientist and parliamentarian Rudolf Kjellén³⁴ strongly influenced Haushofer, the input by Oswald Spengler, Alexander von Humboldt, and

Karl Ritter was far more indirect while the influence of Halford J. Mackinder on Karl Haushofer was probably not as strong as it is claimed further down in the English entry.³⁵

Describing the fields in which geopolitics influenced German foreign policy thinking in the Nazi era, the entry goes as far as saying that *Geopolitik* presented “itself as a panacea.” It should be recalled, though, that Haushofer frequently repeated that geopolitics could explain about 25% of politics,³⁶ which contradicts claims of *Geopolitik* formulating “normative doctrines for action” or the one mentioned above: a 25% panacea does not make much sense. Here, the wartime and cold war base of the English Wikipedia entry shines through.

This is also the case when the text repeats the mistaken idea that Haushofer founded “the Institute of Geopolitics in Munich” and a “Munich School”, which both never existed as has been stated above already.³⁷ Many aspects that are described here as essentially German are, in fact, part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century imperialist *zeitgeist*, strongly influenced by Social-Darwinism. An example of this is the fact that buffer states in Eastern and Southeastern Europe (created in Versailles in 1919 without even allowing German delegates to participate in the discussions), are presented here as an idea taken from German geopolitics.³⁸ According to the English entry, Haushofer was calling for German control of Eastern Europe and Russian territory. Whether Haushofer was thinking in terms of occupation and direct control or calling for cooperation is an open question because his approach differed at times and it is difficult to know which of the two approaches was his own and which was an adaptation to the ever radicalizing Nazi *zeitgeist*. Influenced by wartime and cold war authors, the overall tendency of the English Wikipedia entry is to stress

³³ Haushofer, 1913, p. 262. In fact, before the end of WWI, Haushofer hoped for a monarchical alliance of four empires: the German, the Russian and the Japanese empire along with the Hapsburg empire (Austria-Hungary)

³⁴ The claim that Kjellén was Ratzel’s “student” (apparently taken from the English entry on Kjellén, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Kjell%C3%A9n, Feb. 24, 2019) also has to be questioned. This term seems to establish a teacher-student relationship between both men, which was not the case. Staying within the realm of Wikipedia, it is noteworthy that neither the Swedish nor the German entry on Kjellén even mention Ratzel’s name.

³⁵ The reference given here leads to a short description of German geopolitics in a book by Saul B. Cohen (2003), which can be found there on pp. 20-22 (and not on pp. 21-23 as reference no. 5 states).

³⁶ Haushofer mentions his 25% idea many times. See Haushofer’s *Einführung* [Introduction] to Fairgrieve, 1925, p. 6, or Haushofer, 1928, pp. 47-48. Sprengel, 2000, p. 162, calls this a *Pseudodeterminismus*.

³⁷ See Murphy, 2014, and Jacobsen, 1979/I, p. 640.

³⁸ Not surprisingly, the related note refers to Dorpalen, 1942, pp. 205-206.

“control”, while Haushofer’s support for the Anticomintern (1936), the Hitler-Stalin (1939), and the Tripartite Pact (1940) seems to indicate a stronger focus on “cooperation”. While in his wartime publications Haushofer praised the successes of the *Wehrmacht* and Hitler (probably to some extent to protect his half-Jewish wife and their quarter-Jewish sons), entries in the diary of his wife, Martha, show that the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 depressed him and that the attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, was interpreted as a black day (*schwarzer Tag*) in the Haushofer family.³⁹ Japan’s role within Haushofer’s theory seems to be underestimated in the Wikipedia entry. The country was an essential part of Haushofer’s *Kontinentalblock* mentioned twice already.

The last section of the text is called “Contacts with the Nazi leadership.” While the Nazis as well as proponents of *Geopolitik* (like the majority of contemporary Germans) opposed the Versailles Treaty of 1919 and dreamt (at least) of returning to the pre-WWI borders, to claim that “their practical goals were nearly indistinguishable” without further explaining what is meant by “practical goals” is misleading. The Holocaust and the anti-communist, radically racist aspects of the war on the eastern front were core aspects of the Nazi regime’s policy, but have nothing to do with Haushofer’s geopolitical thinking. Already in 1987, the growing distance between the Nazis and *Geopolitik* in the 1930s and 40s has been described and analyzed in an excellent article by Mark Bassin with the telling title “Race contra Space: The Conflict between German Geopolitik and National Socialism”. Although this pioneering text was published at a time when Ronald

Reagan was the US president and Mikhail Gorbachev led the Soviet Union, its results have still not been taken into account by the English Wikipedia entry on Karl Haushofer.

Returning to the beginnings of Haushofer’s contacts with the Nazis, we are still unsure how often the professor met Hitler while the latter and Hess were imprisoned after the Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923. Whereas US-wartime propaganda claimed that Haushofer was at the Landsberg prison every week, some post-war authors go as far as suggesting daily meetings between Haushofer and both prisoners.⁴⁰ Without any further explanation or reference, the English Wikipedia entry states that “Haushofer spent six hours visiting the two [i.e., Hess and Hitler]” in prison.

Based on the visitors’ lists, one of the post-war directors of the prison informed Hans-Adolf Jacobsen in 1971 that Haushofer was in Landsberg eight times, namely on June 24, July 1, 8, 15 and 22, August 5, October 9, as well as November 12.⁴¹ According to the details provided to Jacobsen, Haushofer spent around 22 hours at Landsberg in 1924.⁴² Haushofer’s diary mentions either “Landsberg” or “Hess” on all of these dates except July 15 and August 5, but also on October 2, which means that we can thus verify six visits with two or three more being rather likely. Officially, Haushofer was listed as visiting Hess, not Hitler. However, nobody can indisputably say how many of his visiting hours Haushofer spent with Hitler (and Hess), rather than with Hess alone, Murphy’s (2014) skepticism whether Haushofer had met Hitler in Landsberg at all⁴³ is most likely erroneous. There are two reasons why we can be quite sure that Hitler attended at

³⁹ See the October 15, 1939 entry of Martha Haushofer’s diary (BA Koblenz, N 1122, Vol. 127): “Karl, who has now also given up hope of containing the conflict, [is] in deepest depression.” Potentially, the sinking of the British battleship *Royal Oak* at Scapa Flow by a German submarine on the previous day had made it clear to Haushofer that at this stage no negotiated peace settlement was possible anymore. The June 22, 1941 entry reads, “Today [is] another black day: War broke out with Russia.” Karl Haushofer’s diaries contain little more than his appointments.

⁴⁰ Neumann, 1942, p. 292, and 1943, p. 283, claims weekly visits, Pauwels and Bargier, 1967, pp. 372-373, go as far as saying that Haushofer was there (almost) daily.

⁴¹ The list indicates precisely when Haushofer came and when he left. Each time, Haushofer was there between half an hour and two hours in the morning and between 75 and 120 minutes in the afternoon. Landsberg is only a little over 30 km away from Haushofer’s already mentioned estate (*Hartschimmelhof*).

⁴² Jacobsen, 1979/I, p. 239 (note 37). There is no reason to distrust the director of the Landsberg prison.

⁴³ Murphy, 2014, p. 16-17, writes that “Haushofer’s visits with Hitler in Landsberg are complete inventions.” Interestingly, in his Ph.D. thesis (1992, p. 161), the same author had explicitly claimed that Haushofer visited both men in Landsberg. Obviously, Murphy did not read Spang, 2013, before publishing his text. This has already been established above in note 23.

least some of these encounters between Haushofer and Hess. First, Hess wrote to Haushofer in 1924 how the latter had impressed Hitler.⁴⁴ Second, much later, on November 20, 1933, Haushofer wrote to Hess what he would tell Hitler directly if he still had direct access to the chancellor like he had at Landsberg or at social gatherings in the 1920s at the home of Munich publisher Hugo Bruckmann and his wife, Elsa.⁴⁵ These two letters seem to be proof that Haushofer did see and talk to Hitler at the Landsberg prison, even though we cannot be sure how extensive these encounters actually were.⁴⁶

In his post-war “*Apologie der deutschen Geopolitik*”, Haushofer’s wrote that only Hess and Foreign Minister (1932-38) Constantin von Neurath understood geopolitics. Rather than taking this statement at face value, it needs to be put into historical perspective, however. When Haushofer wrote down his apology, he had been interrogated many times and just about escaped being put on trial along with the main war criminals at Nuremberg. Under these circumstances, it would obviously not have been wise to elaborate on his and his son’s working relationship with some Nazi leaders during most of the prewar and the (early) wartime period. Until 1941, there is ample proof that Karl and Albrecht closely cooperated with Hess and Ribbentrop.⁴⁷ In July 1935, Karl Haushofer and Ribbentrop missed each other in Munich. As a result, Haushofer went to Berlin to catch up with Ribbentrop. After the latter had been appointed Nazi am-

bassador to the UK, he sent a telegram to Karl Haushofer to congratulate him on his 67th birthday, personally signed with the closing phrase “comradely greetings” instead of “*Heil Hitler*”.⁴⁸ Albrecht Haushofer, who worked free-lance for Ribbentrop’s office, the so-called *Dienststelle*, and was sent to Japan on a semi-diplomatic mission in 1937,⁴⁹ called Ribbentrop in a letter to his father, dated March 16, 1937, “our friend in London”,⁵⁰ indicating that Haushofer’s “*Apologie*” needs to be read with care.

The final misinterpretation that has to be corrected here is a mistaken attempt to link Haushofer with the socialist wing of the NSDAP around Gregor Strasser, who was one of the most prominent casualties of the notorious “Röhm purge (night of long knives) of 1934, during which Hitler consolidated his grip on power by having Strasser, the SA commander Ernst Röhm, and the former *Reichswehr* leader and chancellor Kurt von Schleicher assassinated. Among Haushofer’s alleged collaborators on the left wing, even Ernst Niekisch, one of the representatives of National Bolshevism, imprisoned by the Nazis from 1937 to 1945, is mentioned.⁵¹ While calls for cooperation with the USSR made *Geopolitik* look suspicious at times,⁵² Haushofer did so for purely geopolitical reasons, despite being a staunch anti-communist. Based on the political status quo, Haushofer had simply accepted the fact that the government in Moscow was communist. He, therefore, suggested coopera-

⁴⁴ The letter was dated June 11, 1924, and is reprinted in Hess, 1987, p. 334. In it, Rudolf Hess wrote that Haushofer’s quiet and thoughtful way of speaking had impressed Hitler. How the date fits with Haushofer’s above-mentioned visits remains unclear, however.

⁴⁵ See Jacobsen, 1979/I, p. 376. In November 1933, Haushofer wrote: “[I]f I still had the opportunity to speak to your boss, Fuehrer, Chancellor, and tribune, as I did in Landsberg or at Bruckmanns’ place”.

⁴⁶ Another seldom mentioned proof is a comment in Ernst Hanfstaengl’s autobiography (1970, p. 168). After his release from Landsberg, Hitler talked with Hanfstaengl and told him that Germany should closely cooperate with Japan. Hanfstaengl saw this as an indication that Hitler must have been indoctrinated in this direction by Haushofer at Landsberg.

⁴⁷ These events can be traced in Karl and Martha Haushofer’s diaries, available in BA Koblenz, N 1122, Vol. 127. Excerpts are quoted in Spang, 2013, p. 427.

⁴⁸ BA Koblenz, N 1122, Vol. 54. The telegram is dated August 27, 1936.

⁴⁹ See the forthcoming edition of Albrecht Haushofer’s travel diary 1937, edited by C. W. Spang and Ernst Haiger.

⁵⁰ The original German is “*unserem Londonder Freund*”. On March 2, 1938, Albrecht Haushofer presented his views of the leading German diplomats to Ribbentrop. See Jacobsen, 1979/II, pp. 342-344.

⁵¹ Jacobsen, 1979/I, p. 202, rejects any claims like this.

⁵² In a long letter, dated November 26, 1937, Kurt Vowinckel (publisher of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* and many of Haushofer’s books) explains why geopolitics was viewed critically by many within the Nazi leadership. According to Vowinckel, pro-Russian leanings among geopoliticians were one reason for growing official skepticism.

tion with the USSR despite—not because—of the communist leadership of that country.⁵³

Conclusion

Besides various factual mistakes and many misinterpretations, large parts of the English Wikipedia entry are open to various readings. This ambiguity is partly due to the out-of-date literature on which most of the text is based. Taking into account the latest research would allow a more precise argumentation.

A comparison of the most comprehensive Wikipedia entries on Karl Haushofer reveals that only the German, and—to a lesser extent (and somehow surprisingly)—the Russian one, are reasonably close to the results of recent research and thus to historical reality. While earlier versions of the German entry had dealt with far-fetched ideas of Haushofer's alleged "occultism", trips to Tibet that never took place, even mentioning the counterfactual *Institut für Geopolitik*, the current version seems to be much improved. Apart from the obstinate ungrounded mirage of that Munich Institute, the Spanish/Catalan claim that Haushofer founded the NSDAP is the most recent addition to a long list of wrong assertions regarding "the father of German geopolitics." Other inaccuracies that have earlier been rampant (e. g., the idea that Hess had been Haushofer's aide-de-camp during World War I) have mostly disappeared in the meantime, indicating that there is hope that revisiting Wikipedia's Haushofer entries in the future might be less disappointing. For the time being, looking at the entries on Karl Haushofer in various language editions of Wikipedia strongly suggests that, even after 18 years of its existence, Wikipedia should still be used very cautiously.

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⁵³ Thinking of the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG, West-Germany) from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, one might compare Haushofer's approach vis-à-vis the USSR with the FRG's dealing with the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East-Germany). While the FRG remained a close ally of its NATO partners, it still concluded treaties with many of the Warsaw Pact states, including the USSR.

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