

# The impact of Napoleon

*Prussian high politics, foreign policy and  
the crisis of the executive, 1797–1806*

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# 1 Introduction

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‘The first decade of Frederick William III’s reign’, Heinrich von Treitschke writes, ‘is the most traduced and least-known epoch of Prussian history’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, H. M. Scott describes the whole fifty-year period from 1763 to 1806 as ‘one of the most neglected half-centuries in Hohenzollern history’.<sup>2</sup> The relative obscurity of the period from 1797 to 1806 can be explained by the fact it is apparently untypical of what we are accustomed to think of as typically Prussian. The early reign of Frederick William III lacks the clear contours of the Great Elector’s state-building; the stern militarism of Frederick William I; the unprecedented expansion of Frederick the Great; and the later achievements of the Prussian reform period after 1806. Unlike many other periods, the years from 1797 to 1806 saw Prussia shock Europe not by her assertiveness, but by her quiescence, not by her contempt for international norms, but by her trusting belief in such norms long after they had been abandoned by her neighbours; and when Prussia was punished in 1806, it was not for her aggression, but for her diffidence. Yet – as this book attempts to show – Prussian statesmen before Jena did not regard themselves as untypical. They were no less beholden to the doctrine of the primacy of foreign policy, and the demands of geopolitics, than their predecessors or successors. The decisive difference lay not so much in the unspoken assumptions underlying Prussian deliberations, but in the resulting responses: timidity, indecision, opportunism, miscalculation, high-political intrigue, royal preference and sheer necessity sustained the neutrality policy until the bitter reckoning at Jena and Auerstedt. The years 1797 to 1806 thus constitute a unique alternative narrative of Prussian history in which the price of passivity

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1879), I, p. 145: ‘Das erste Jahrzehnt Friedrich Wilhelms III, ist die bestverleumdete und unbekannteste Epoche der preussischen Geschichte.’

<sup>2</sup> H. M. Scott, ‘Introduction: Prussia from Rossbach to Jena’, *German History*, 12 (1994), 280 [Special Issue: Prussia from Rossbach to Jena. Guest editor H.M. Scott, 279–85].

and vacillation in a predatory environment was spelt out with unambiguous clarity.

**Method: the primacy of foreign policy; geopolitics; high politics; the antechamber of power**

The chief theoretical inspiration behind this book is the primacy of foreign policy. First articulated by Ranke and refined by Dilthey,<sup>3</sup> the primacy of foreign policy soon rose to a position of near hegemony, not merely in late-nineteenth century German historiography but in public life as well. 'Foreign affairs', Bismarck announced in 1866, 'are a purpose in themselves. I rate them higher than all other matters.'<sup>4</sup> Some fifty years later Hermann Oncken could declare without serious risk of contradiction that the primacy of foreign policy was not merely a 'dynamic basic law' of German political life, but 'a biological statement of fact'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Leopold von Ranke, 'Das politische Gespräch', in Leopold von Ranke, *Das politische Gespräch und andere Schriftchen zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Halle/Saale, 1925), pp. 10–36; Leopold von Ranke, 'Die grossen Mächte', in Leopold von Ranke, *Völker und Staaten in der neueren Geschichte*, edited by Leonhard von Muralt (Zurich, 1945), pp. 44–88; Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Friedrich der Grosse und die deutsche Aufklärung', in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes*. Collected Works, vol. III (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 176–205. Hermann von Caemmerer, 'Ranke's große Mächte und die Geschichtsschreibung des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Studien und Versuche zur neueren Geschichte, Max Lenz gewidmet* (Berlin, 1910), p. 309. There is a good introduction in Bernd Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges. Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1980), pp. 181–8; Ernst-Otto Czempel, 'Der Primat der Auswärtigen Politik. Kritische Würdigung einer Staatsmaxime', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 4 (1963), 266–87; and Rudolf L. Bindschedler, 'Zum Primat der Außenpolitik', in Urs Altermatt and Judit Garamvölgyi (eds.), *Innen- und Aussenpolitik. Primat oder Interdependenz? Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Walter Hofer* (Berne and Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 27–36. Also relevant are Heinrich August Winkler, 'Gesellschaftsform und Aussenpolitik: eine Theorie Lorenz von Steins in zeitgeschichtlicher Perspektive', *HZ* 214, 2 (1972), 335–62; Henry A. Kissinger, 'Domestic structure and foreign policy', *Daedalus*, 95 (1966), 503–29; Ernst-Otto Czempel, 'Strukturen absolutistischer Außenpolitik', *ZjHF*, 7 (1980), 445–51. Newer discussions and applications of the theory are: F. A. J. Szabo, 'Prince Kaunitz and the balance of power', *IHR*, 1, 3 (1979), 401–8; D. E. D. Beales and T. C. W. Blanning, 'Prince Kaunitz and the primacy of domestic policy', *IHR*, 2 (1980), 618–24; F. A. J. Szabo, 'Prince Kaunitz and the primacy of domestic policy: a response', *IHR*, 2 (1980), 625–35; Horst Möller, 'Primat der Aussenpolitik: Preussen und die französische Revolution', in Jürgen Voss (ed.), *Deutschland und die französische Revolution* (Munich, 1983), pp. 65–81.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Klaus Hildebrand, 'Geschichte oder "Gesellschaftsgeschichte"? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen', *HZ*, 223 (1976), 346.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann Oncken, 'Über die Zusammenhänge zwischen äußerer und innerer Politik', *Vorträge der Gehe Stiftung zu Dresden* (Dresden/Leipzig, 1918), p. 16: 'dynamisches Grundgesetz . . . eine biologische Feststellung'.



Soon after, Wilhelm Mommsen was merely reflecting the consensus view when he said that it was the duty of the historian to ‘hammer the notion of the “the primacy of foreign policy” into every German brain’.<sup>6</sup> In short, the concept of the primacy of foreign policy has both historiographical and political implications. In the political sense – as in Wilhelmine or Weimar Germany – it signifies a *prescriptive* demand for the strict subordination of all other matters to the external security of the state; this aspect need not concern us here. Used historiographically, on the other hand, the concept can be purely *descriptive*; it records but does not necessarily endorse the decisive role played by foreign policy – and its resulting internal consequences – in the historical development of the Prusso-German state.

Like all interpretative frameworks, the primacy of foreign policy involves a set of basic assumptions about the historical process. First of all, it postulates that international relations are conducted quite independently of ideological and societal considerations.<sup>7</sup> ‘There is no trend of opinion, however dominant’, Ranke writes, ‘which can break the force of political interests.’<sup>8</sup> Hence the primacy of foreign policy not merely allowed the state to override domestic opposition, it also sanctioned agreements with ideological adversaries abroad. Secondly, the emphasis on foreign policy is justified by the ‘irrevocability’ of decisions in that sphere.<sup>9</sup> Whereas erroneous domestic policies could be reversed, there was no appeal from the harsh arbitrament of partition, annexation and war. Consequently, the historian must focus on the

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges*, p. 25. On the ascendancy and reception of Ranke see also Hans-Heinz Krill, *Die Rankerenaissance. Max Lenz und Erich Marcks. Ein Beitrag zum historisch-politischen Denken in Deutschland 1880–1935* (Berlin, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, ‘Methodologie und Theorie der Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen’, *GWU*, 27 (1976), 196: ‘internationale Politik als eine in sich geschlossene Sphäre originärer Machtpolitik verstanden, die eigenen “Gesetzen” unterliegt’.

<sup>8</sup> Leopold von Ranke, ‘A dialogue on politics’, in Theodor von Laue (ed.), *Leopold von Ranke. The formative years* (Princeton, N.J., 1950), p. 172. German original: ‘Es gibt keine so entschieden herrschende Tendenz der Meinung, daß die Interessen vor ihr zurücktraten’, in Ranke, ‘Das politische Gespräch’, p. 28; Winkler, ‘Gesellschaftsform und Außenpolitik’. See also the preamble to Uta Krüger-Löwenstein, *Rußland, Frankreich und das Reich, 1801–1803. Zur Vorgeschichte der 3. Koalition* (Wiesbaden, 1972): ‘Anders als heute . . . trafen die Politiker jener Zeit ihre Entscheidungen weitgehend unabhängig von wirtschafts- und gesellschaftspolitischen Erfordernissen’; H. Gollwitzer, ‘Ideologische Blockbildung als Bestandteil internationaler Politik im 19. Jahrhundert’, *HZ*, 201 (1965), 306–33; Hans Rothfels, *Gesellschaftsform und auswärtige Außenpolitik* (Laupheim, 1951), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

'moment of decision' in international relations.<sup>10</sup> It is this emphasis on drama, not *longue durée*, which distinguishes the primacy of foreign policy from the more gradual explanatory models of Marxists, modernisation theorists and others. Thirdly and relatedly, the primacy of foreign policy insists that the outcome of a given historical situation is always 'open', never pre-determined;<sup>11</sup> hence the focus on the moment of decision and the free will of the protagonists. 'Political history', as Jacques Julliard has written, 'measures the contribution of voluntary actions in the unfolding of history.'<sup>12</sup> However, fourthly and paradoxically, the primacy of foreign policy also stresses the constraints on human volition and the dictates of 'necessity': an external threat may be so acute as to nullify free will and admit of only one course of action. This tension between freedom and necessity has repeatedly been referred to by both critics and champions of the primacy of foreign policy, but it has never been satisfactorily resolved.<sup>13</sup>

If the primacy of foreign policy was mainly deployed to describe Prussia-Germany's historical role within the international state system, it also served to explain her constitutional development. 'The degree of independence', Ranke wrote, 'determines a state's position in the world, and requires that the state mobilize all its inner resources for the goal of self-preservation. This is its supreme law.'<sup>14</sup> 'The internal history of a state', Dilthey maintained, 'is entirely determined by its external experience.'<sup>15</sup> Politically, this argument was used to counter demands for political reforms in late nineteenth-century Germany. Bismarck spoke for many when he insisted that one first had to make a house safe from the (external) elements before addressing specific questions of interior

<sup>10</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, 'Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht', in Andreas Hillgruber, *Die Zerstörung Europas. Beiträge zur Weltkriegsepoche 1914 bis 1945* (Frankfurt/Main and Berlin, 1988), p. 14; Hillgruber, 'Methodologie und Theorie der internationalen Beziehungen', pp. 193, 198: 'Moment der freien Entscheidung'.

<sup>11</sup> See Winfried Baumgart, *The peace of Paris. Studies in war, diplomacy and peace-making*, translated by Ann Pottinger Saab (Santa Barbara, 1981), p. xviii; Hillgruber, 'Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht', p. 22: 'Offenheit der jeweiligen Zukunft'.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Julliard, 'Political history in the 1980s. Reflections on its present and future', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12, 1 (1981), 29.

<sup>13</sup> On the tension between necessity and free will see: Hillgruber, 'Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht', p. 20, on 'Zwänge'; Hildebrand, 'Geschichte oder "Gesellschaftsgeschichte"?' p. 329; Winfried Baumgart, *Der Friede von Paris 1856* (Munich and Vienna, 1972), p. 14: 'Das methodische Grundprinzip, von dem wir uns leiten lassen, ist, die tatsächlich geschehene Geschichte nicht als einzig mögliche zu verstehen, sondern der Geschichte in ihren inneren Spannung zwischen Freiheit und Notwendigkeit, in ihrer Entscheidungscharakter nachzuspüren'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Politisches Gespräch': see the translation in von Laue (ed.), *Leopold von Ranke*, p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> Dilthey, 'Friedrich der Grosse und die deutsche Aufklärung', p. 181: 'Die innere Geschichte ist ganz bedingt von der äußeren.'

decoration.<sup>16</sup> Historiographically, it encouraged the tendency to see the internal development of Germany as a function of her foreign-political position. 'Perhaps the most powerful motive for the great domestic reforms of the era of enlightened absolutism', Dilthey wrote, 'was the need to mobilize resources for the external struggle through the most intensive cultivation of all spiritual and material strengths of the state.' The degree of possible internal freedom, J. R. Seeley maintained, was inversely proportional to the external pressure on its borders.<sup>17</sup>

This link between foreign policy and internal structure was put on a sound empirical footing by Otto Hintze.<sup>18</sup> Hintze's theories were a direct challenge to Marx, and all those who saw the historical process in purely endogenous terms; he argued that the constitutional development of a state was also powerfully influenced by its relations with other states. 'As a result of constant rivalry and competition between themselves', Hintze wrote, 'individual states find themselves forced into a continuous intensification and rationalisation of its administrative apparatus.'<sup>19</sup> In particular, Hintze focussed on the search for efficient institutions – military, administrative and executive – to facilitate the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Of course, while internal cohesion might be a necessary response to external pressure, it was far from automatic; but the fate of the German Reich and Poland between 1772 and 1806 showed that the result could be political extinction.<sup>20</sup>

Until the outbreak of the First World War, the primacy of foreign policy was generally interpreted to the disadvantage of broader popular

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges*, p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Dilthey, 'Friedrich der Grosse und die deutsche Aufklärung', p. 179: 'Mittel für den Kampf nach außen zu gewinnen durch die intensivste Förderung aller materiellen und geistigen Kräfte des Staates, das ist vielleicht das mächtigste Motiv für die großen inneren Reformen im Zeitalter des aufgeklärten Absolutismus.'

<sup>18</sup> Otto Hintze, 'Staatsverfassung und Heeresverfassung', in Otto Hintze, *Staat und Verfassung. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur allgemeinen Verfassungsgeschichte*, edited and introduced by Gerhard Oestreich (Göttingen, 1962), esp. pp. 55, 78; 'Die Entstehung der modernen Staatsministerien', *ibid.*, esp. p. 276; 'Staatenbildung und Verfassungsentwicklung, Eine historisch-politische Studie', esp. pp. 34–5; 'Machtpolitik und Regierungsverfassung', *ibid.*, esp. pp. 425–6. In a similar vein see also the rather abstract reflections of Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 310–11. For a more recent work on Hintzian lines see Johannes Kunisch, *Staatsverfassung und Mächtepolitik. Zur Genese von Staatenkonflikten im Zeitalter des Absolutismus* (Berlin, 1979), p. 11; Czempiel, 'Strukturen absolutistischer Außenpolitik'.

<sup>19</sup> Hintze, 'Weltgeschichtliche Bedingungen der Repräsentativverfassung', p. 147: 'Durch beständige Rivalität und Konkurrenz untereinander, sehen sich dabei die einzelnen Staaten gezwungen zu einer fortschreitenden Intensivierung und Rationalisierung ihres Betriebes.'

<sup>20</sup> Hintze, 'Machtpolitik und Regierungsverfassung', pp. 433–4.

political participation. 'The main determining factor for our monarchic-constitutional system of government', Hintze argued, 'lies in the fact that we are surrounded by the greatest military powers on the continent and that an enormous military-political external threat faces our long and unprotected borders. Strict internal cohesion is necessary in order to withstand this pressure; and this strict cohesion demands a primarily dominatory, that is to say monarchical spirit in our governmental and administrative system.'<sup>21</sup> During the later years of the Weimar Republic, the controversial German lawyer Carl Schmitt took this theme a step further in his attack on the parliamentary system. Instead of 'government by discussion', Schmitt demanded a 'decisionist' executive; when the preservation of the state was at stake, he argued, *any* decision was better than none.<sup>22</sup> But the link between foreign-political strength and authoritarian rule was not an immutable one. During the Prussian Reform period (1807–1815/19), for example, the demand for agrarian, economic, social and constitutional changes was justified by the need to free Germany of Napoleon and restore Prussia to her rightful place in the European pentarchy of powers. During the First World War and after, Max Weber, Otto Hintze and others came to realise that the foreign-political salvation of the *Reich* could only be achieved through greater popular political participation. 'Only he who sees internal politics from the perspective of its inevitable arrangement according to the needs of foreign policy', Weber argued, 'is a politician. Those who do not like the "democratic" consequences which come from this should do without the great power policy which they require.'<sup>23</sup> After 1918, Hintze claimed

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 439: 'Der wesentlichste Bestimmungsgrund unseres monarchisch-konstitutionellen Regierungssystems liegt in der Tatsache, daß wir von den größten Militärmächten des Kontinents umgeben sind und daß ein enormer militärisch-politischer Druck von außen auf unseren langen, von Natur ungeschützten Grenzen lastet. Es bedarf einer straffen Zusammenfassung im Innern, um diesem Druck Widerstand zu leisten; und diese straffe Zusammenfassung bedingt einen vorwiegend herrschaftlichen, d.h. monarchischen Geist in unserem Regierungs- und Verwaltungssystem.'

<sup>22</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Munich and Leipzig, 1922), pp. 9, 32; Carl Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus* (Berlin, 1926), pp. 12–13. On Schmitt see also Hermann Lübbe, 'Dezisionismus- eine kompromittierte politische Theorie', *Praxis Philosophie. Praktische Philosophie. Geschichtstheorie* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 61–77. For a useful definition of *dezisionismus* see Christian Graf von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung. Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Frankfurt/Main, 1990), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Max Weber, 'Innere Lage und Außenpolitik', in Max Weber, *Zur Politik im Weltkrieg. Schriften und Reden 1914–1918*, edited by Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 191–201: 'Nur der ist ein nationaler Politiker, der die innere Politik unter dem Gesichtspunkt der unvermeidlichen Anpassung an die außenpolitischen Aufgaben ansieht. Wem die daraus folgenden "demokratischen" Konsequenzen nicht passen, der verzichte auf eine Großmachtspolitik, die sie unvermeidlich macht' (p. 192).

that Seeley's dictum about the relationship between external pressures and internal freedom now had to be reversed.<sup>24</sup> In short, as Karl Rotthaus pointed out, there was no 'correct' form of government *per se*; what mattered was whether a given system served the foreign-political purposes of the state or not.<sup>25</sup>

Despite serious challenges from Karl Lamprecht and Eckart Kehr, the primacy of foreign policy remained the dominant theoretical model until the 1960s; thereafter, it came under increasing attack from a younger generation of German historians. Their objectives were both political and methodological. Politically, these critics took exception to the apologetic baggage of the primacy of foreign policy, which potentially excused not merely Germany's aberrant behaviour on the international stage, but also her illiberal constitutional arrangements.<sup>26</sup> The primacy of foreign policy, in Zieburas view, was thus an 'anti-democratic ideology'.<sup>27</sup> Methodologically, the objection was to the neglect of social and economic forces; the emphasis on the 'moment of decision' – it was argued – obscured the deeper, long-term forces at work in the historical process.<sup>28</sup> These differences were comprehensively aired in the Fischer controversy about German responsibility for the First World War, which was in turn part of a much wider debate about the relationship between foreign policy, society and elite manipulation throughout the Wilhelmine period. Indeed, far from conceding a primacy of foreign policy, the new generation of historians argued for a 'primacy of domestic policy' – *Primat der Innenpolitik* – according to which Germany's external relations were instrumentalised to perpetuate the status quo at home. No clear victor emerged from this debate. On the one hand, the new social history of politics rapidly established itself as something of a 'new orthodoxy' until itself attacked from the left towards the close of the 1970s. On the

<sup>24</sup> Otto Hintze, 'Liberalismus, Demokratie und auswärtige Politik', in Otto Hintze, *Soziologie und Geschichte. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Soziologie, Politik und Theorie der Geschichte*, edited and introduced by Gerhard Oestreich (Göttingen, 1964), p. 202. In the same vein see also Hermann Oncken, 'Über die Zusammenhänge zwischen äußerer und innere Politik', pp. 22, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Rotthaus, 'Staatsform und auswärtige Politik. Eine Rankestudie', *Pf*, 179 (1920), 19.

<sup>26</sup> Zieburas, 'Die Rolle der Sozialwissenschaften in der westdeutschen Historiographie der internationalen Beziehungen', *GG*, 16 (1990), 93.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>28</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Moderne Politikgeschichte oder "Große Politik der Kabinette"', *GG*, 1 (1975), 351 and *passim*; Wehler, 'Was bedeutet Leopold von Ranke heute?', in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Aus der Geschichte lernen? Essays* (Munich, 1988), pp. 98–100; Ulrich Muhlack, 'Leopold von Ranke', in *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft um 1900* (Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, 1988), pp. 11–36, defends Ranke against the charge of neglecting socio-economic factors.

other hand, the pendulum has now begun to swing back towards a more self-consciously *political* interpretation of key events in German history. This shift has been most marked for the Wilhelmine period,<sup>29</sup> but it is also evident for Revolutionary and Napoleonic Germany. 'If ever there was a country whose history was moulded by international relations', Tim Blanning writes, 'it was surely Prussia.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the more reductionist doctrines of the *Primat der Innenpolitik* have long since been retracted by some of its most passionate advocates.<sup>31</sup> But what is beyond all doubt is that societal historians have so far advanced no serious interpretative framework of their own to explain foreign policy; they have admitted as much themselves.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> A typical example of this is the recent collection edited by Gregor Schöllgen (ed.), *Flucht in den Krieg? Die Aussenpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland* (Darmstadt, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Tim Blanning, 'The death and transfiguration of Prussia', *HJ*, 29, 2 (1986), 459. For a recent interpretation of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period in Germany on Rankean lines see the work of T.C.W. Blanning, 'The French Revolution and the modernisation of Germany', *CEH*, 22 (1989), 116; T. C. W. Blanning, *The origins of the French Revolutionary wars* (London, 1986); Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866. Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1983), p. 11: 'seldom have all aspects of life been determined to such an extent by power politics and external pressure'. In the Blanning school see also Peter Wilson, *War, state and society in Württemberg, 1677–1793* (Cambridge, 1995). A recent stimulating and unjustly neglected restatement of the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* is Ulrike Müller-Weil, *Absolutismus und Außenpolitik in Preußen. Ein Beitrag zur Strukturgeschichte des des preußischen Absolutismus*, *Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen* 34 (Stuttgart, 1992), *passim*, especially pp. 21, 231–2. This study is indebted to and amplifies Gottfried Niedhart, 'Aufgeklärter Absolutismus oder Rationalisierung der Herrschaft', *ZfHF*, 6 (1979), 199–211.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Geschichtswissenschaft heute', in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur 'Geistigen Situation der Zeit'*. Vol. II: *Politik und Kultur* (Frankfurt/Main, 1979), pp. 709–53: 'Inzwischen hat der "Primat der Innenpolitik" als harter Keil auf einem groben Klotz seine Schuldigkeit getan. Eine Dogmatisierung muß selbstverständlich vermieden werden' [p. 736]. See translation in: Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Historiography in Germany today', in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Observations on the 'spiritual situation of the age'*. *Contemporary German perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass. 1984), pp. 221–59: 'Meanwhile the primacy of domestic policy has doggedly done its job. Naturally, a dogmatizing of issues must be avoided' [p. 239].

<sup>32</sup> Ziebura, 'Die Rolle der Sozialwissenschaften', p. 90; Hillgruber, 'Die Diskussion über den "Primat der Aussenpolitik" und die Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen in der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945', in Hillgruber, *Die Zerstörung Europas*, pp. 39–40: 'Bilanzierend kann man feststellen, daß die Vertreter der "Gesellschaftsgeschichte" zwar theoretisch für Interdependenz von Innen- und Außenpolitik plädieren, diese aber nicht praktizieren, sondern die internationalen Beziehungen in ihren Forschungen strikt ausklammern.' For a recent attempt at a zeitgemäße Politikgeschichte see Paul Nolte, *Staatsbildung als Gesellschaftsreform. Politische Reformen in Preußen und den süddeutschen Staaten, 1800–1820* (Frankfurt, 1990), p. 15. An interesting attempt to marry Hintzian themes and the primacy of foreign policy to the *Zeitgeist* was undertaken by Winfried Schulze in *Landesdefension und Staatsbildung. Studien zum Kriegswesen des innerösterreichischen Territorialstaates (1564–1619)* (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1973), especially pp. 16–18 and 24, and in *Reich und Türkengefahr im späten 16. Jahrhundert. Studien zu den politischen und gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen*

The second theoretical inspiration for this book is the fraught and problematic concept of 'geopolitics'. Of course, the idea of a close relationship between geography, politics and history has a very long tradition. 'La politique des états', Napoleon famously remarked, 'est dans leur géographie'; history, Herder writes, 'is geography which has been set in motion'.<sup>33</sup> But the (pseudo-) science of 'geopolitics' – as championed by Ratzel, Haushofer, Kjellen, Mackinder and others – only emerged around the turn of the century. In its crudest form, 'geopolitics' was a geographically determinist variant of the primacy of foreign policy in which the interest, fears and policies of the state were merely a function of its location on the map. 'Man and not nature initiates', Sir Halford Mackinder wrote, 'but nature in large measure controls'.<sup>34</sup> On this reading, the geographic centrality of Germany in general and Prussia in particular – the German *Mittellage* in Europe – explained not only her aggressive foreign policy, but also her unique constitutional development. The widespread fear of encirclement (*Einkreisung*), the idea of preventive war, and the maintenance of authoritarian politics at home, so the argument ran, simply reflected the laws of geopolitics. 'The German *Mittellage*', Hermann Oncken wrote, was the 'fundamental fact of our national existence'.<sup>35</sup> Even such a liberal figure as Franz Schnabel spoke of the 'particular geographic burden (*Belastung*) of Germany'.<sup>36</sup>

This sense of Germany's unique geopolitical exposure was buttressed by the comparison with Britain. Historians such as Otto Hintze, Hermann Oncken and Gerhard Ritter distinguished between 'insular' and 'continental' state forms; Carl Schmitt spoke of '*Land*' and '*Meer*'.<sup>37</sup>

*einer äußeren Bedrohung* (Munich, 1978), especially pp. 12–14. An example of neo-Hintzianism with foreign policy left out is Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Politischer Wandel im Osten. Ost- und Westpreußen von den alten Ständen zum Konstitutionalismus*, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa 36 (Stuttgart, 1992), especially p. 489.

<sup>33</sup> Napoleon cited in Yves Lacoste, *Geographie und politisches Handeln. Perspektiven einer neuen Geopolitik* (Berlin, 1990), p. 17; Herder cited in Wolf D. Gruner, *Die deutsche Frage. Ein Problem der europäischen Geschichte seit 1800* (Munich, 1985), p. 38: 'Geschichte ist in Bewegung gesetzte Geographie.'

<sup>34</sup> Halford Mackinder, 'The geographical pivot of history', *The Geographical Journal*, 23, 4 (1904), 422.

<sup>35</sup> Oncken, 'Über den Zusammenhänge zwischen äußerer und innerer Politik', p. 36: 'Grundtatsache unserer nationalen Existenz.'

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Gruner, *Deutsche Frage*, p. 38 (1985).

<sup>37</sup> Hintze, 'Machtpolitik und Regierungsverfassung', pp. 424–56, esp. 427–8; see also Hintze, 'Staatenbildung und Verfassungsentwicklung', p. 49; O. Hintze, 'Das monarchische Prinzip und die konstitutionelle Verfassung', in Oestreich (ed.), *Staat und Verfassung*, p. 365. Hermann Oncken, 'Über die Zusammenhänge zwischen äußerer und innerer Politik', esp. pp. 17–19; Gerhard Ritter, *Die Dämonie der Macht: Betrachtungen über Geschichte und Wesen des Machtproblems im politischen Denken der*

Whereas the 'insular' location of Great Britain permitted the development of a representative political culture, the 'continental' situation of Prussia-Germany compelled her to achieve the internal cohesion necessary to survive in the predatory international system. Similarly, whereas Britain could concentrate on a remunerative maritime foreign policy, Prussia-Germany was entirely focussed on the mainland of Europe. While Britain could afford to uphold the European balance of power at a safe distance, Prussia-Germany enjoyed no such latitude. Indeed, it is not difficult to sense the suspicion, hostility, but also envy in Fritz Wagner's description of British policy during the French Wars of 1792 to 1815. 'Until the fall of Napoleon', he wrote, 'British capital was active in inciting one state after another, and even the peasants of remote mountain valleys, to launch a war of liberation . . . while Britain enriched herself at the expense of European colonial property overseas.'<sup>38</sup> British observers, of course, saw things differently. According to Spencer Wilkinson, the 'historical function of Great Britain' was to 'hold the balance between the divided forces which work on the continental area'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, to quote Alfred Thayer Mahan's graphic image, Britain's role during the Napoleonic period was that of a 'fruitful mother of subsidies, upon whose bountiful breasts hung the impoverished and struggling nations of the continent'.<sup>40</sup> On this reading, Prussian behaviour throughout the period resembled that of a rebarbative infant, resentfully suckling on a patient and maternal Britain.

The obvious apologetic implications of geopolitical arguments often obscured their intrinsic explanatory power. For this reason, criticism of geopolitics has tended to be part of a much broader assault on traditional political history in general, and the primacy of foreign policy in particular. Historians such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Gilbert Ziebura, H.-D. Schultz and Jürgen Kocka objected both to the idea of geographic determinism itself and to its exculpatory potential. The *Mittellage*, Schultz argued, was merely an intellectual stratagem designed to 'turn

*Neuzeit* (Munich, 1948), *passim*. Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europeanum* (Berlin, 1988), p. 19 and *passim*; *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes* (Hamburg, 1938), esp. pp. 120-1; Carl Schmitt, *Land und Meer. Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (Cologne, 1981).

<sup>38</sup> Fritz Wagner, *England und das Europäische Gleichgewicht 1500-1914* (Munich, 1947), p. 42. In a similar vein see Ulrich Scheuner, *Das europäische Gleichgewicht und die britische Seeherrschaft* (Hamburg, 1943), pp. 5-11, 76; Adolf Rein, 'Über die Bedeutung der übersseeischen Ausdehnung für das europäische Staaten-System. Ein Beitrag zur Bildungsgeschichte des Welt-Staatensystems', *HZ*, 137 (1928), esp. 67-73.

<sup>39</sup> Spencer Wilkinson's response to Mackinder's article, 'The geographical pivot of history', p. 438.

<sup>40</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (London, 1893), II, p. 381.



perpetrators into victims'.<sup>41</sup> After all, as Kocka pointed out, both Poland and Switzerland were located in the heart of Europe but had developed very differently from Germany; this reference to Poland turned out to be something of an 'own goal'. Moreover, as Gilbert Ziebura argued, geopolitical 'constraints' could hardly be reconciled with the simultaneous insistence on the free will of states and statesmen characteristic of traditional political history.<sup>42</sup> These were telling criticisms, but they had already been anticipated. As far back as 1921, Karl Hoffmann had understood that foreign policy 'rests on a continuous tension between space and the human will'.<sup>43</sup> Some fifty years later Klaus Hildebrand – a traditional but non-determinist political historian – stressed that a rigidly geopolitical view risked underestimating the role of human agency in the historical process.<sup>44</sup>

In any case, far from being buried by the tide of historiographical progress, the idea of geopolitics has undergone a remarkable renaissance in recent years. At the theoretical level, this has been most evident in France, where Yves Lacoste has set up a course in 'geopolitics'.<sup>45</sup> In Germany, the revival of geopolitical models has been led by Immanuel Geiss and Gregor Schöllgen.<sup>46</sup> But even more traditional empirical historians such as Wolf Gruner now routinely refer to the importance of

<sup>41</sup> H.-D. Schultz, 'Deutschlands "natürliche Grenzen"', in Alexander Demandt (ed.), *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1990), p. 74; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum 'Historikerstreit'* (Munich, 1988), pp. 174–89: 'Die Dogmen der Geopolitik als Denkverbot'; Jürgen Habermas, 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung', in *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich and Zurich, 1987), p. 75: 'geopolitischen Tamtam von "der alten europäischen Mittellage der Deutschen"'; Jürgen Kocka, 'Hitler sollte nicht durch Stalin und Pol Pot verdrängt werden', in *Historikerstreit*, p. 141. For a recent attack on the renaissance of geopolitics see Rudolf Walther, 'Man braucht mehr Platz', *Die Zeit*, 21.7.1995, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ziebura, 'Die Rolle der Sozialwissenschaften', p. 87.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Hoffmann, 'Innen- und Außenpolitik', *Deutsche Rundschau* 189 (1921), 287: 'beruht auf einer unaufhörlichen Spannung zwischen dem Raum und dem menschlichen Willen'.

<sup>44</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, 'Staatskunst oder Systemzwang? Die "Deutsche Frage" als Problem der Weltpolitik', *HZ*, 228 (1979), esp. p. 644.

<sup>45</sup> See Anne Corbett on French enthusiasm for geopolitics, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 11.3.1994. Lacoste publishes a triennial journal: *Hérodote. Revue de géographie et de géopolitique*.

<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Geiss, 'Geographie und Mitte als historische Kategorien. Anmerkungen zur einem Aspekt des "Historikerstreits"', *ZfG*, 10 (1991), 979–94; Gregor Schöllgen, *Die Macht in der Mitte Europas. Stationen deutscher Außenpolitik von Friedrich dem Großen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1992); Heinz Brill, *Geopolitik heute. Deutschlands Chance?* (Frankfurt and Berlin, 1994).