HOW BIG IS A HEMISPHERE?

By F. VAN BRIESSSEN

The revision of the American neutrality law on November 13, which will allow armed American merchant ships to travel to ports in the European war zone, has again focused world attention on events in the Atlantic. In the discussions concerning the attitude the United States should take there, no term has been more widely used than "Western Hemisphere." It is remarkable that a term of such importance has never been clearly defined.

Dr. van Briessen, formerly on the staff of the United Press in Berlin and now Far Eastern correspondent for a Cologne paper, has written a study about the Western Hemisphere, or rather about its Atlantic portion. For years he has made a hobby of collecting maps of the Western Hemisphere, some of which are reproduced here.—K.M.

WHAT IS A BOUNDARY?

Boundaries are the visible definition of claims to ownership and power which can be defended. Whether it is the peasant who marks off his fields from his neighbor's with stones, or the state that drives in boundary posts with the national insignia to indicate the extent of its power, it always stands for the maintenance of a claim and the course of the line up to which this claim has been established. A boundary always runs where the pressure from without and within as well as the mutual requirements of security are balanced.

Politically speaking a boundary is always related to man and society. It only appeared when man acknowledged personal property and the community of a group. But ever since that indeterminable moment in prehistoric times it has also always been the subject of endless dispute among men, a symbol almost of human strength and weakness. The true or alleged urge for security, this dynamic shifter of boundaries, is often a driving force behind such disputes, for boundaries, in order to give a feeling and reality of security, must push outward. This is particularly true in cases in which actual political frontiers and ethnological boundaries do not coincide.

Undoubtedly a "sensible agreement" has often defined the course of a border, and such borders have proved to be a great deal more stable than those whose formation has been decided by irrational factors such as hate, greed, revenge, or a feeling of superiority. But human society and its forms of life, particularly in the older continents, have grown so complex in the course of thousands of years that in many cases a rational solution was impossible. Instead it was often the stronger who fixed the borders in the manner which seemed most reasonable to him.

IMAGINARY BOUNDARIES

Great as the difficulties are in defining the borders between territories or states, the obstacles become almost insurmountable when it is a case of defining spheres of interest. These are often bordered by imaginary lines which, moreover, enclose territories whose ownership is not clear or, on account of pseudo-sovereign conditions, is subject to the danger of being constantly shifted. These zones of interest or spheres of influence and their boundaries are a direct function of the power of those states who are in dispute about them. While, however, in the case of national frontiers these states are in direct contact with each
other, spheres of interest are more often zones of protection or preferential activity reaching beyond the actual state borders. In the case of imperial possessions they are usually territories adjoining colonies, protectorates, or dominions. In other words the sovereign states have contact with each other only in their fields of gravitation. For the definition of zones of interest, lines of demarcation are usually agreed upon, unless a powerful state prefers simply to declare a zone of interest and to leave it more to the extent of its power than to international agreements whether this zone shall be recognized or not.

**GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL BOUNDARIES**

The territorial course of political borders makes them at the same time geographical phenomena, but only in so far as their course runs over land and sea, rivers and mountains, that is to say, geographical contours. This fact has often led to false conclusions, so that it seems necessary to define here the difference between geographical and political boundaries.

Geographical boundaries are usually unequivocal, as they are the clearly definable encounter of natural conditions or the universally recognized results of scientific agreement. No one doubts the obviousness of the boundary between land and sea, or the partition of the earth into east and west by the prime meridian. High, unscalable mountains and broad, rapid rivers can be geographical borders, and tropics and subtropics are divided from each other by the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. While geographical borders, at least according to earthly standards, are of a permanent nature, political borders are variable. Hence beside geographical there are also historical atlases. Those countries whose geographical and political borders coincide completely or over long distances, as is the case with islands (England, Japan) or states spanning a continent like the USA, are favored with a tremendous political advantage. They could, in the course of their history, save enough time and power to be able to go forth from their naturally protected borders into the world of imperialistic undertakings.

**DIVIDING THE WORLD**

The idea of dividing up the earth beyond the fixed state borders by imaginary lines of demarcation, that is, to define the various fields of gravitation, is not new and has probably always been a child of expansion-minded ages. Ancient Rome had such a boundary line at the Pillars of Hercules; and in the Age of Discovery Pope Alexander VI in 1493 divided the world by a meridional line, redefined in 1494 in the Treaty of Tordesillas, into Spanish and Portuguese spheres, thereby separating part of present-day Brazil from what is now known as the Western Hemisphere (see Map IV). Because the world was discovered from Europe, the earth’s boundaries were decided in those days by the Old World. In the meantime, however, the balance of power has shifted so greatly that new demands have been made on the part of the New World for a redistribution of the world. The problem of the Atlantic frontiers of the Western Hemisphere has become so acute in present times that its solution, in case of war between the continents, would entail the decision over right and wrong.

**IN WHICH HEMISPHERE IS ENGLAND?**

In 1884 the Washington Meridian Conference recommended the exclusive use of the Greenwich meridian as prime meridian. Since then modern geography has made the Greenwich meridian the demarcation line between the hemispheres, and everything to the west of this meridian as far as the 180th degree is Western Hemisphere. According to this, geographically almost all of England, large parts of western France, all of Spain and Portugal, and considerable parts of West Africa belong to the Western Hemisphere.

Cartographically, however, such a division is impracticable, as it has
been agreed upon to draw the world, not according to its division into hemispheres, but according to its large land masses. It is more practical to represent all of Europe or all of America on a map than to take into consideration the arbitrarily determined prime meridian. The fact, however, that for cartographic reasons the Western Hemisphere is made to begin in maps at longitude 20 or 30 and the Eastern (Eurasian) Hemisphere is made to end there, naturally does not mean that these meridians are the political or geographical boundaries of the hemispheres. Hence the practical considerations of cartography have no influence on the political distribution of the world. Otherwise we would have the fantastic situation of cartographers being the ones to decide whether or not the American occupation of Iceland is justifiable by international law.

**MONROE'S HEMISPHERE**

When President Monroe formulated his well-known message, there was no doubt that with the expression "this hemisphere" he meant only the American continent including its islands with its clearly defined geographical border formed by land and sea, and that Greenland as well as Iceland, both possessions of a European power, were excluded from this, that is, the Western Hemisphere. This is generally confirmed by politicians and historians, except when they make assertions for purposes of propaganda. Thus Francis Pickens Miller, although favoring the expansion of the hemisphere, writes in an article in *Foreign Affairs* (July 1941, page 727): "For three centuries Americans have been accustomed to think of their world in continental terms. The land mass of the Western Hemisphere was the New World . . . The Monroe Doctrine was concerned with continents, not oceans . . . . We favored freedom of the seas, but we were not interested in ruling the waves."

**CONTINENTAL AMERICANISM**

While Miller attempts in the second part of his short essay to prove that the conditions and possibilities of the world have changed so fundamentally that Monroe's (and John Adams's) continental conception of the Western Hemisphere have been destroyed and made invalid, as high-ranking a historian as Professor Charles A. Beard is of a different opinion. In his book *A Foreign Policy for America* (New York, 1940) Beard writes (page 12):
The primary foreign policy for the United States may be called for convenience Continental Americanism. The two words imply a concentration of interest on the continental domain and on building here a civilization in many respects peculiar to American life and the potentials of the American heritage. In concrete terms the words mean non-intervention in the controversies and wars of Europe and Asia and resistance to the intrusion of European or Asiatic powers, systems, and imperial ambitions into the western hemisphere. This policy is positive. It is clear-cut. And it was maintained with consistency while the Republic was being founded, democracy extended, and an American civilization developed.

In his final summing-up (page 151) Beard, who absolutely refuses to be called an isolationist, says: "Slowly, but with increasing force, it was realized that the 'foreign outlet' doctrines of imperialism and internationalism were illusions; ... that the frontiers for the expansion of American enterprise were within this continent, not in the fabled Indies or on the Rhine, the Danube, or the Vistula."

And further (page 152): "With reference to such conflicts and sufferings, continentalism merely meant a recognition of the limited nature of American powers to relieve, restore, and maintain life beyond its own sphere of interest and control—a recognition of the hard fact that the United States either alone or in any coalition, did not possess the power to force peace on Europe or Asia, to assure the establishment of democratic and pacific governments there, or to provide the social and economic underwriting necessary to the perdurance of such governments. ... Continentalism, strictly construed, meant a return to the correct and restrained diplomacy of earlier time."

WHAT IS THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE?

No American President since James Monroe has made the idea of the Western Hemisphere as much of a political slogan as has President Roosevelt. The beginning of Roosevelt's turn towards foreign policy can be determined by his "Quarantine" speech in Chicago in 1937, whose tendency, directed against the non-democratic powers, mainly Germany, was intensified soon after in his honorary degree speech at Kingston. Since then the expression "Western Hemisphere" has become so frequent in speeches, articles, and official documents, without it ever having been properly defined by authoritative American circles, that it seems necessary to discuss this term critically. In this article we shall deal only with the Atlantic expansion of the Western Hemisphere.

The term has been defined neither in the resolution of Congress against the transfer of territories within the Western Hemisphere from one non-American power to another, which was included as a basic principle in the Havana Convention (July 29, 1940); nor in the National Guard and Reserve Officers Mobilization Act of August 27, 1940, which prohibits the use of American troops outside of the Western Hemisphere. But the term continues to appear in laws, speeches, and documents and to retain the same vagueness and elasticity.

In our introductory discussion we have established that the term "Western Hemisphere," as it is used by politicians and statesmen, is not a geographical or cartographical but solely a political concept. In a critical investigation of the American conception of the boundaries of the Western Hemisphere purely geographical arguments can therefore be disregarded. President Roosevelt too seems to have realized this when, after the Eight Point Declaration, he replied in the Washington press conference to a question regarding the extent of the Western Hemisphere that it depended on which geographer he had last talked to. In other words, from the geographical point of view this term is arbitrary. AN ELASTIC LINE

As a matter of fact these boundaries have been constantly expanded in de-
mands upon Europe, and American writers are now throwing the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, and Dakar into the discussion. The most recent steps in this expansion were the agreement between the Danish Minister in Washington, de Kauffmann (who had been recalled by his Government) with the Federal Government, by which Greenland was practically ceded to America; the American occupation of Iceland, already occupied by the British; the establishment of an American air base on the African continent in Nigeria; and the increasing vehemence of official American formulations, which added to the elastic term of the Western Hemisphere the new expression "American defense frontiers." Secretary of State Hull on September 12 stated that it depended upon the attitude of Germany how far the "defensive waters" of America should extend.

The claims of American writers and speakers are contradictory, since they avoid making a clear difference between geographical and political boundaries. The New York Times of July 20, 1941, fixes the Atlantic border between the hemispheres on the 20th western meridian (see Map I), with the assertion that this is the general agreement between cartographers. A map of the Associated Press appearing on October 19, 1941 in the Shanghai Times (see Map II) shows the same line of demarcation, with, however, two indentations so that the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands remain in the European hemisphere. Both solutions divide Iceland in half, in order to give a geographical justification for the American occupation of Iceland. Vilhjalmur Stefansson in a politically inspired geographical study in Foreign Affairs (No. 3, 1941) entitled "What is the Western Hemisphere?" proposes fixing the boundary in the "middle of the Atlantic channel" at an equal distance from both land masses (see Map III).

In this last on the whole excellent presentation the attempt is made to designate Iceland as an old part of the Western Hemisphere, even before this hemisphere itself is defined. Hence Iceland is claimed as the first European settlement in the Western Hemisphere. To reinforce this theory he quotes a report of the American State Department of 1868 ("A Report of the Resources of Iceland and Greenland" by Benjamin Peirce, Superintendent of the US Coast Survey), which says: "It belongs to the Western Hemisphere." Thus a geological and geographical relationship is quoted to prove a political theory. In actual fact the old Germanic settlement of Iceland was, until its occupation by the British, in personal union with Denmark by having the same king.

**ZONE VS. ZONE**

With all these American attempts at a representation on a geographical basis one must not forget that, while there is a war in Europe, the United States are still officially at peace.
According to international law, European powers are, on the basis of a state of war, entitled to declare combat zones as a warning for neutral shipping. On the other hand the United States could declare a state of war on the basis of the Neutrality Act, and, in connection with this state of war, a prohibited zone for American shipping. Both were done on November 5, 1939. The fact that the combat zone declared by Germany, which also included Iceland and has often been shown in American maps, and the American neutrality zone, which has carefully left Iceland free, overlap has been the cause of constant friction and may, as the Greer and Kearny incidents have shown, lead to a decided aggravation of European-American relations. (For both zones see Map IV.)

The revision of the Neutrality Act by Congress on November 13 made even this vague and ill-defined limitation for American shipping obsolete. The boundaries of the Western Hemisphere as seen by America have become even more elastic and hence more liable to entail a serious clash.

According to the conservative conception as it is represented by Prof. Beard, the political boundaries of the hemispheres coincide with the land boundaries of the continents. If the doctrine of the freedom of the seas, as it is traditionally expounded by the United States in contrast to the British demands for supremacy of the sea (“Britannia rules the waves”), is to have any real meaning, it must utterly exclude limitations of this freedom of the seas by demarcation of zones of sovereignty and predominance. This applies all the more to a state which cannot yet claim the rights of a belligerent. Its hemisphere ends theoretically and practically with the three-mile limit, and even the American Safety Zone of about 300 miles, which was established at the Panama Conference (see Map IV), has only a theoretical value, as—having been introduced during the war—it has found no general international recognition. The German reply to the Declaration of Panama states unequivocally that a safety zone of this nature can only have a meaning if agreed upon and treated equally by all. (See Documentary Appendix.)

TO THE LOGICAL END

The American demand for extending American “defense frontiers” almost infinitely is, in the real sense of the word, ex-orbitant, that is, reaching beyond its own orbit. This becomes obvious when the demand is carried ad absurdum. At a time when warships were well-known as a mobile means of defense, the range of a cannon, then three miles, was fixed by common consent as the limit of sovereignty. There were only a few powers who did not join in this agreement and demanded a nine or ten-mile limit. Lately, however, attention has been called to the fact that modern guns can shoot much farther, and that airplanes may in a way be considered as long-range artillery. Similar arguments such as the changes that have taken place in warfare through the greater effectiveness of modern weapons, through high-speed warships, submarines, and bombing planes with a large radius connected with airplane carriers, sponsored the Declaration of Panama and the claim for an extension of the boundaries of the Western Hemisphere. But where is such an extension supposed to end in view of the constant development of the effectiveness of modern industry? If every state were to claim this point of view for its defense there would very soon be an unholy confusion in the world of safety zones, defense frontiers, and outposts. In that case Europe could demand bases in Massachusetts, Japan in Australia, the USA in Kamchatka, and Russia in California.

ROOSEVELT AND NELSON

The main reason given for the expansion of the Atlantic boundaries is President Roosevelt’s assertion of the menace, economic as well as military, to the American continent or Western Hemisphere (whatever that may be) by Germany. We need only refer to Roosevelt’s speech of October
28, 1941, in which he mentioned an alleged German plan to divide up South and Central America and to occupy the Panama Canal.

In the influential periodical *Foreign Affairs* (July 1941), F.P. Miller, for instance, gives the following reasons for his imperialistic anti-Monroe Doctrine theory of hemisphere expansion:

"The ocean has ceased to be a barrier and has become a highway for enemy attack. Our coastline is no longer the line of American defense. To paraphrase Nelson, our sea and air frontiers have become the shore-lines and air-lines of our enemies. Our freedom as a nation will depend, in the future, less upon our ability to execute land operations than upon our control of the sea and air approaches across the oceans.

"This means that as long as Europe continues to be a source of actual or potential aggression against us, the air and water of the North Atlantic must be controlled by us or by our friends. A glance at the map will show the location of control points in this area. If control over the entire area is to be effective, the controlling forces must be in possession of Greenland, Iceland, the British Isles, Gibraltar, the Azores, Cape Verde Islands, and either Dakar or some nearby point on the West Coast of Africa. From the standpoint of the defense of the United States, these strong-points are our advance bases."

ARE THE AMERICAS MENACED?

Hence an aggressive demand of tremendous extent is built up on a problematical danger. Opposed to such demands that seek to extend the Western Hemisphere into the infinite are the views of military experts, as, for example, those of the well-known collaborator of the *New York Times*, Hanson W. Baldwin. In an article, "The Realities of Hemisphere Defense," appearing in a recent issue of *Reader's Digest*, he writes:

"If we must seize half the world in order to defend America, the quicker we know it the better. Let us look at the matter more closely. There is, first of all, the problem of the narrowed world. In terms of time the world is smaller. But what is often overlooked is that this helps the defense as well. Defense forces, as well as attackers, can be rallied far more rapidly than was ever before possible. In the balance of offense and defense, it is just as far as ever from Dakar to Brazil. Moreover, our ships and planes can now be based, not on New York or Norfolk, but on our new strongholds at Trinidad and in British Guiana. And they are roughly as close to the shoulder of Brazil as is Dakar! This is an altogether different picture from the one that has become popular in the hysteria of the moment. There is altogether too much disposition in this country to lose sight of the influence of geography upon war, to regard 1,600 miles of ocean as a mere bagatelle in the seven-league strides of Adolf Hitler. We are asked to envisage an Axis base on the shoulder of Africa and swarms of planes and
ships cutting us off from our sources of strategic raw materials in South America and imprisoning our shipping in the Caribbean. This is absurd. Our shipping would be harried by submarines, surface raiders and planes, but our lines of communication could not be cut. Neither the British nor the Germans have been able to prevent shipping from using the English Channel, 25 miles wide, not 1,600 . . .

"There remains the threat of invasion of South America from African bases. Britain has not yet been invaded, yet she lies within 25 miles of the Continent . . . The American people may decide to enter the war at the side of Britain. If they do a case can be made out for our temporary occupation of West African bases. But clearly such bases are not vital to Hemisphere Defense: they would probably be more of a liability than an asset."

AMERICA'S DEFENSE

There is not much to be added to this in our presentation of the Atlantic boundaries of the Western Hemisphere. These boundaries are to be found neither in Iceland nor Dakar, neither in Ulster nor the Cape Verde Islands. And even if one calls the boundaries of the Western Hemisphere, which are undefined, the American defense frontiers, this does not alter the fact that America can be defended from its own continent.

A recognition of this fact might be seen in the acquirement of bases on British islands within the Western Hemisphere which took place on September 5, 1940 in connection with the destroyer deal and which may be but the first step in this direction. A return to a realization of its own position would show the New World that it is lucky enough, even without extensive safety zones and defense frontiers, without advance posts and bases in other continents, to be more secure than any other great state on earth.