

ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEW

BOOK REVIEW: THE POWER OF GEOGRAPHY: TEN MAPS THAT REVEAL THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD BY TIM MARSHALL, ELLIOTT & THOMPSON LTD, 2021, 304 pages, ISBN: 978-1-9821-7862-8 *© Σ

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Geography plays a crucial factor in shaping conflict zones and defining power dynamics. In his previous book, *“Prisoners of Geography,”* Tim Marshall did a remarkable job highlighting the indisputable reality that the geography of nation-states is a defining factor in great power rivalries. In the sequel to his geopolitical exploration *“The Power of Geography: Ten Maps That Reveal the Future of Our World,”* Marshall delves deeper and examines ten maps that intricately weave through the geopolitics of eight countries, one region, and outer space.

The book is structured into ten parts. In the introduction to the book, Marshall observed that the Cold War had become a distant memory, and even minor states were jostling amidst great power contestation to take center stage. Let us all agree that the world is witnessing a shift to a multipolar order, and the destination of this transformation in the coming years is still uncertain. Will it be a bipolar world, albeit unlike the Cold War? Well, only time will tell.

After a brief introduction of the book, which focuses on the importance of geography in the new era, unbeaten factors such as globalisation, anti-globalisation, technology, Covid-19, and non-traditional security threats, especially climate change, Marshall’s list of ten maps includes Australia, Spain, Greece, Turkey, the UK, Iran, Saudi Arab, Sahel region, Ethiopia. The tenth and last chapter is dedicated to outer space, where he argues that geopolitical drama has spilled out of the earth - to the Moon and beyond. The first part discusses Australia, which traces its journey *from the Middle of nowhere to now being somewhere big*. The section covers various aspects, including geography, history, topography, islands, rivers, population, climate change and vulnerability with time, political aspirations, and defence strategy, particularly maritime strategy. Concluding this part, Marshall’s primary focus is to position Australia between China and USA, emphasising the threat China poses to Canberra. Confronted with tough choices, Australia must navigate a careful balance where a misstep could result in significant and lasting consequences in a region considered the most economically crucial in the world.

The book’s second part follows the same pattern as the previous one, and even the later sections maintain a similar approach to discussing geographical, political, societal,

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and economic features. In this section, Marshall explores Iran's strengths and weaknesses while highlighting the ethnic and religious historical legacy of the Fars. From natural resources and being the highest exporter of oil to economic sanctions, Islamist political conquest, and strained relations with other Arab countries, Iran holds a strong presence in geopolitics and is likely to shape the future of the Middle East. Despite Iran's consistently tense relations with the US, Tehran has forged close ties with China. Marshall's tempered dismissal of Iran's religious revolutionaries amid internal challenges, a range of proxies in the region, and nuclear issues leads him to conclude that Iran's political leadership role is akin to divine intervention.

The next country that has been discussed is Saudi Arabia, another Middle Eastern nation. Marshall asserts that this country's problem lies in two words: Saudi and Arabia. The analysis of Saudi Arabia precisely spans from historical roots to natural resources, highlighting strong American support but predicting less interest in the future. The argument revolves around historical patterns encompassing both tangible and intangible factors and explains how Saudi Arabia, from an isolated region, ascended to prominence in Arabia. In the process, oil granted them a significant Arab country tag, and in return, American support ensured their security. The author somehow expresses hope in Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman for offering a new social contract that would make them politically, economically, and socially accessible and enjoyable. However, he expresses concern about Saudi Arabia's future, saying that if the world moves from oil to energy resources, what must Saudi Arabia offer? He elaborates that we are approaching a time in which Saudi leadership must look ahead, as Americans will not fight to defend Saudi Arabia's solar panels.

The following section moves from the Middle East to Europe, with Marshall focusing on the UK, a nation he thinks is still finding its role in global affairs after Brexit. Britain has always been different from the rest of Europe. The waters surrounding it continue to play a central role in its culture and geopolitics. The conflicts with France since the UK's exit from the EU are given context. After Brexit, Britain, as a middle-European power, seeks to forge political, economic, and defence ties worldwide. New strategies are emerging but remain in flux. However, Marshall argues that Britain's challenges extend beyond external factors as it grapples with the possibility of an Independent Scotland. Marshall clarifies that geopolitical analyst Sir Halford Mackinder's vision of Britain was to focus on and highlight the importance of geography, not to justify aggression against other states. He concludes by stating that post-Brexit, the British are coming again as friendly or equals, but this won't always be the case.

Moving on to Greece, a gateway to Europe is one of the countries that faced the effects of migration. Its geographical location has placed it centrally within a significant geopolitical flashpoint in the coming years: the eastern Mediterranean. The discovery of an undersea gas field somewhat pushes EU members to the edge of conflict with aggressive Turkey. Marshall argues that Greece is not Russian, English, or American; it is Greek and an important country for foreign powers. Greece finds itself at the forefront of the hostile Russian naval fleet in the Black Sea, migration crisis and appears poised to evolve into a pivotal transit route for a gas pipeline originating from the eastern Mediterranean.

The sixth part explores Turkey, and Marshall argues that Turkey is flexing its muscles with much greater ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean. Rooted in imperial history and its strategic placement at the intersection of East and West, Ankara is pursuing a neo-Ottoman agenda. This agenda is indicative of Turkey's ambition to become a significant global power beyond its actions in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara faces challenges

with its immediate neighbours due to domestic factors. These domestic factors are the development of Turkey and its *forever war* against Kurds. In the post-9/11 world, modern Turkey sees numerous competitors and aims to be self-sufficient in weapons to achieve its great power ambitions. However, considering all geographical constraints, how far will Ankara travel in the realm of *realpolitik*?

Moving to Africa, Marshall takes us on a journey to the Sahel, the only region Marshall discusses in this book. The Sahel, the vast arid zone at the southern fringes of the Sahara, is a war-torn region straddling ancient geographical and cultural divides, with some parts currently under the influence of Al-Qaeda and ISIS. These persisting dynamics will force people to flee, with some heading to Europe, which can further exacerbate this humanitarian crisis. However, how can we disregard the opportunities this turbulent region offers? Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have deep pockets to fill. In the case of the Sahel, Marshall argues that a military solution is the way to tackle the spillover effects of the Sahel to other European countries such as Spain, Italy and France. He encouraged America's whack-a-mole concept to tackle this flux region. The challenges are exacerbated by the governing authorities and big businesses, which focus excessively on accumulating personal wealth and ensuring benefits flow to their ethnic groups. It seems that ethnic geography is stronger than state borders.

The eighth part of this book discusses Ethiopia, a country from which many things come, such as humans. The so-called water tower of Africa, Ethiopia possesses a critical advantage over neighbouring country Egypt. Marshall illustrates that Ethiopia's control of the Blue Nile and the development of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam threaten Egypt's water access. The strategic position of Ethiopia is a potential battleground for *water wars*, but it also exemplifies the influence of technology as Ethiopia employs hydroelectric power to change its fortune. Marshall argues that through technology, Ethiopia can overcome the limitations of its geographical constraints. Focusing on the potential of water resources, the author suggests that cheap and abundant electricity can transform millions of people's lives if used wisely.

The second-last part of this book, which discusses Spain, Europe's oldest nation, confronts the risk of fragmentation driven by regional nationalism. Marshall discusses that the European Union cannot endorse Catalonia's quest for independence and that dismissing an emerging state can open doors of opportunity for Chinese and Russian influence to permeate Europe. Spain's challenges exemplify the vulnerability of certain states and supranational alliances. The region between Morocco and Gibraltar serves as a crucial crossroad for people and drug smuggling into Europe via Spain. The potential destabilisation of the Sahel region, fear of its spillover effects on Morocco, Melilla, Ceuta, and mainland Spain, climate change, population movement, economic challenges, and political fragmentation are internal threats to Spain. He argues that primary challenges stem from its geographical and internal dynamics, and the sentiment that explains "*Spain is not Europe*" appears less true in this sense.

The last but intriguing chapter of the book is dedicated to space, which he calls geopolitical power struggles that are beyond earthly restraints, being projected into space. Marshall thinks space is an arena poised to become a focal point in future geopolitical struggles amid strategic competition. Marshall introduces the concept of astropolitics or *realpolitik* for space, which he attributes to Professor Everett Dolman. Interestingly, he argues that competition in space would not end the rivalry between states on earth. He believes that the vastness of space allows us to expand our minds to the limitlessness of the universe.

The book offers a compelling analysis of how geographical factors shape international relations. Through ten well-chosen maps, Marshall provides a deeper understanding of why countries act like they do on the world stage. His clear and concise writing makes the book accessible to a broad audience.

While the book emphasises the enduring influence of geography on national interests and capabilities, it does not paint a completely deterministic picture. Nations retain some agency in shaping their destinies through policies and alliances. This emphasis on geography aligns with the realist school of thought, which views power and national interest as the primary drivers of international politics. However, this focus on ‘classical’ geography departs from some realist thinkers who also consider cultural or ideological factors. Moreover, it might overlook how technological advancements can mitigate some geographical limitations. Additionally, limiting the scope to ten countries restricts the ability to provide a truly comprehensive view of global geopolitics.

Acknowledgement and Declaration

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