
BOOK REVIEW

Tim Marshall, *The Power of Geography: Ten Maps That Reveal the Future of Our World*, April 2021, Published by Elliott & Thompson, pages: 380

The author, Tim Marshall, selects nine earthly and one heavenly domain as the most critical points in contemporary world politics. It is a sequel to his *Prisoners of Geography*, which came out in 2015. The reader begins his journey in Australia. From there he moves to Iran then to Saudi Arabia before entering the United Kingdom. The next stops are Greece and Turkey. The odyssey then moves into the African continent where we halt in Ethiopia and the Sahel. The penultimate point is Spain from where we ascend to the realm of Space.

The section on Australia traces the continent's history, harsh and unforgiving geography, colonization, and its emergence as a multi-ethnic parliamentary democracy. According to the author, its treacherous terrain forbids settlements in the interior which is the reason why big population centers are all along or near the coast. And because it is surrounded by water on all sides coupled with the fact that the hinterland is uninhabitable, the defense of the realm demands deft diplomatic maneuvering, especially at a time when China has been flexing its military muscles in the Australian neighborhood.

The chapter on Iran sketches the geographical advantages that the country possesses. Its tough, mountainous terrain makes it almost immune from deep enemy penetrations. Additionally, the geographic advantage is augmented by a formidable combat force. The ruling elite, however, is undergoing a transition. The revolutionaries have been successful in mobilizing the populace through religious symbolism. For the moment, despite acute internal and external challenges, that revolutionary core has a firm grip on the governing structures.

Next, the reader is taken to Saudi Arabia where there is considerable socio-political reconfiguration is going on under the leadership of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. An economy powered by petrodollars and foreign

expertise is being reshaped to make it work in the absence of the two aforementioned factors. Moreover, the reliance on the US military can no longer be taken for granted, which has forced the Saudi power elite to step into hitherto forbidden territories. The normalization of ties between the Emiratis and Israelis could not have been possible without tacit Saudi approval. The consolidation of Iranian influence across the Arab world is an alarming development as far as the Saudis are concerned.

Chapter 4 deals with the United Kingdom. After exiting the European Union, there is a possibility that the Scottish and Northern Irish regions may secede from the UK. It will be a massive geo-strategic setback. It will dent London's power projection.

The next chapter studies Greece and its geo-strategic challenges. Water dominates Greek strategic thinking. It has been on the frontlines in the migrant crisis. Human traffickers use the Greek territory to enter into Europe. The intense rivalry with Turkey over the Mediterranean space also hugely influences Greek posturing.

From Greece we move eastwards into Turkey. The Turkish landmass is, arguably, one of the most critical geo-political spots in the world. Europe, the Caucasus, Africa, and the Middle East simultaneously affect the diplomatic conduct of Ankara. Since its establishment in 1923, the Turkish republic has seen regime prioritizing one region over the other; currently, it is the Middle East and the Caucasus.

The succeeding chapter sheds light on the Sahel. This area lies below the Sahara Desert stretching from Ethiopia to Mauritania. Various militant insurgencies routinely challenge the already weakened state structures. As a result, waves of refugees regularly try to reach the European shores, thereby inviting greater continental interference in this part of Africa.

The next chapter takes us to Ethiopia, a piece of land tremendously rich in ancient history; where, according to the scientific community, walked the first human ancestors. The country is surrounded by trouble spots like South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. There is intense inter-ethnic rivalry among different groups. Then, there is the delicate religious balance. Furthermore, militancy and piracy in the neighborhood have only worsened the previously

vitiating environment. And, lest we forget, this is all taking place near the Red Sea and the Bab al Mandab.

The penultimate section deals with Spain. The geography is exacting. It does not encourage national cohesion. It does not have a river system which would have aided in populating the interior. Apart from the capital Madrid, all the big metropolitan areas like Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Malaga, Seville, etc. lie on or near the coast. These physical facts then formulate the Spanish socio-political arrangement. The central authorities sitting in the heart of Spain (Madrid) have had to deal with strong regional sentiments (the Basque Country, Catalonia etc.). These centrifugal forces are such that the country does not have official lyrics in its national anthem. Externally, the waters around Spain see intense maritime activity. The Straits of Gibraltar separate the Iberian Peninsula from Africa. Spanish naval fleet works closely with NATO security architecture.

The last chapter discusses the Space. It is one domain where humanity is expected to shun its earthly differences. The space has solutions to some of our terrestrial problems. However, there is a risk that the rivalries and jealousies that divide humanity on earth will remain attached to men in the heavens also.

Aisha Jabeen Hamra
M.Phil Student, ASCE