

THE POWER OF GEOGRAPHY: TEN MAPS THAT REVEAL THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD

*Review by: Muhammad Ahmad Khan**

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The power of geography is all about the geographical significance of a state. It is not every time that major powers will decide the fate of all states; sometimes geography, whether human, political or environmental, all play a significant role in standardizing the relative power capability of states. Marshall claims that smaller states with geographical significance also have much say in international politics and changing world environment. The book discusses states, regions and, most importantly, space that will impact international politics in the coming era. Author has discussed five geographically important regions and states within these regions. Indo-Pacific through Australia, Africa through The Sahel and Ethiopia, Europe through the UK, Turkey, Greece and Spain, the Middle East through Iran and Saudi Arabia, and lastly, space will be the focus of the coming generation in international politics. For these entities, geography has proven a power.

Australia sits between the two great world water bodies, the Pacific and Indian oceans. However, Australia is worried about expanding Chinese claims in the region. Chinese threat emerged when it started pushing itself into the South China Sea. Although Australia cannot prevent China from making such claims, it can contribute a little effort to halting Chinese influence in the South Pacific. Australia may adopt a constructive dialogue with Beijing with an eye on the US.

Iran is a major stakeholder in Middle Eastern power politics in which it aims to be a regional power against the narrative promulgated by Saudi Arabia. The author claims that Iran supports Hezbollah and Houthi in Yemen. Iran's presence remains if any state tries to escape the Persian Gulf dilemma due to Iranian influence and move towards the Gulf of Aden. Iran knows that time is not with them and must act cautiously to survive in the international system. On the other side, Saudi Arabia is adopting a

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reformist approach, lending hands with China and Israel and keeping the US as its security ally.

The UK, a small island, has indulged in regional politics and maintained international order before the US-led world order. It aims to pursue its alliance worldwide, including with the US, independently as both have synergistically pursued interventions in other states. The US, which wants a stable Europe, will keep the UK under its influence. Britain can act as a Knight on the American chessboard, capable of making its moves.

Greece believes that it is Turkey who is intendedly trying to destabilize it. Both states, Greece and Turkey, have conflicts over sea exploration. Turkey's EEZ does not have many natural resources and trying to get some from the areas presumably under Greece. Thus, Greece is building its naval capabilities, including submarines. In case NATO loses Turkey as its reliable partner, Greece will be another option. Moreover, Greece will not be English, Russian, or American this time, but only Greece itself. On the other side, Neo-Ottomanization under Erdogan has threatened other regional states, including Greece. If that pushes US interests, Greece will seek influence in NATO more than Turkey, further impacting the regional influence of the latter. Besides Turkey and Greece, Spain is also important for the major powers to enhance their influence due to its geographical significance in the Mediterranean.

The book highlights that Sahel is volatile due to security, economic and environmental issues. Around 3.8 million people have been displaced so far due to increasing insecurity. Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram are working inordinately in the Sahel region. Not just the US but other European states are also contributing to counter-terrorism operations in the region. With these states' help, a vast tree-planting operation, the Great Green Wall, is under process. European states are engaged in stabilizing the Sahel region. Ethiopia also holds much geographical significance in the African region and must manage its relations with its neighbours if it wants to be a developed country in the coming era.

Lastly, the book deals with questions about global commons, like space. What if a state starts claiming the space or tries to settle down up there? Will it be called a colonialist state? With Russia's adventure through Sputnik, a space race started among major powers because smaller states could not bear the cost of such adventures. Major companies are also coming in, such as Elon Musk's SpaceX. The like-minded western states, including the US, Japan, UAE, UK, Canada, Australia and Luxemburg, have signed Artemis Accords to explore the moon and extract its resources. Excluding China and Russia accelerates the space race among these blocs. The analysis shows that wherever states started their adventures, it has only yielded competition and power struggle, and the winner will decide the lines drawn for the other states to follow.

The book grabs a pervasive understanding of the role of regional politics in deciding international politics. The world environment is changing significantly, and so does change the significance of states. Geographically important states will become

more relevant in deciding the region's fate. It depends upon the political decision, but their geographical importance has systematically made them relevant in international politics. However, the author has over-signified the role of some states in international politics while downplaying others in the coming era.