

## Book Reviews

***Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics.* By Tim Marshall. London: Elliot & Thompson, 2016, xvi + 303pp. ISBN: 978-1-78396-243-3 (pbk.)**

As human beings, the land we live in always plays an important role in our lives. It affects all aspects of human lives: history, economy, society, and political developments. Many wars, conflicts, social problems, and also economic issues have occurred as a result of a decision-making process that has been affected by factors that are geographical. The connection between geographical factors and decision-making process has even resulted in a concept of geopolitics. Thus, it is important to delve deeper into a discussion about geographical factors to gain a better understanding of how global politics changes throughout human history.

Tim Marshall is a British journalist specializing in foreign affairs. Throughout his career as a journalist, he has covered major conflicts in countries such as Syria, Croatia, Bosnia, Lebanon, and Kosovo. In this book, Marshall argues that geography shapes these countries past and future. He elaborates his argument through an introduction, 10 chapters of discussion, and a conclusion. The ten chapters cover Russia, China, USA, Western Europe, Africa, the Middle East, India and Pakistan, Korea and Japan, Latin America, and The Arctic.

At first, it appears unusual that this book does not incorporate Southeast Asia of which this region has been considered as the most dynamic, fastest growing region and has contributed some significance to the academic research, foreign affairs topic in particular. The main reason why Marshall has chosen the 10 countries can be found in the introduction. Marshall writes:

*I have focused on the powers and regions that best illustrate the key points of the book, covering the legacy of geopolitics from the past (nation-forming); the most pressing situations we face today (the continuing troubles in Ukraine, the expanding influence of China); and looking to the future (growing competition in the Arctic). (xiv)*

This book contributes to the study of geopolitics by answering two main questions; why did a few countries decide to choose certain policies? and why had some countries encountered tremendous turmoil while others can appear as big powers? The answers lie within geography.

Through the chapters about Russia, China, USA, and Western Europe, Marshall aims to answer the first question. Take Russia and America as an example. The two countries are the opposite of each other, but both are very big in size and have important presence in global politics. However, given the similarities of their size and power, Russia mainly focuses on its national interest meanwhile America always tries to be a power that extends its hand globally. In this book, Marshall argues that the reason why these two countries act the way they do is mainly influenced by geographical factors surrounding them. By looking at the map provided at the beginning of the first chapter, readers can see that Russia will keep pushing its influence and interest in the Baltic States as these countries act as Russia's buffer zone in a way that can fortify Russia's defense. As for USA, it can focus on expanding its power because 'the country is a massive fertile land and an alternative to the Atlantic ports with which to conduct business (70)'. Even the USA does not need to depend on other countries for energy supply which gives the country extra time to focus to expand its influence globally. This particular situation

is identical to European circumstance to some extent.

As for the second question, Marshall attempted to reason it out through the discussion about the Middle East, Korea and Japan, India and Pakistan, and Latin America. He successfully elaborated the fact that these countries experience way more disturbance is much influenced by their locations which have affected big powers' foreign policy direction. Besides, the Korea and Japan discussion clear provides another insight about whether or not Korea's problems can be solved.

Marshall has done an extraordinary work in showing his contention along with its evidence. He is not a geopolitics researcher, yet it is evident that he has an extensive knowledge about countries mentioned in the book from the first until the last chapter. His experience as a journalist has given an interesting view in this book as he does not put much attention on theory. It is reinvigorating to read a book about geopolitics that deeply focuses only on the geography part of the global politics. His narrative is also presented in a simple way so new learners are able to acquire some basic knowledge as well as comprehensive understanding on how geopolitics work behind today's foreign policy challenges.

Prisoners of Geography might not be able to explain everything in detail through the 10 maps as what the title proposes since the maps provided appears to be too simple. In spite of that, a few questions posed by Marshall about how geography affects leaders and their decision-making process are very intriguing in some ways and will certainly provoke more researchers of geopolitics to delve deeper into this particular topic.

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