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BOOK REVIEW: THE POWER OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TEN MAPS FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD

Tomáš Žipaj*

MARSHALL, T.: *Sila geografie v 21. storočí: Desať máp budúcnosti nášho sveta [The power of geography in the 21st century: Ten maps for the future of our world]*. Bratislava: Premedia, 2021. 372 p. ISBN 978-80-8159-987-3.

Tim Marshall is a British journalist, author and broadcaster, specializing in a variety of issues concentrated mostly on foreign affairs, international diplomacy and geopolitics. **Marshall** has worked as a journalist for Sky News for more than 24 years, reporting on situations from more than 30 states and covering 12 war events. He is also founder and editor of news web platform *thewhatandthewhy.com*. **Marshall** is well known for his books such as "*Prisoners of Geography*", "*Divided: Why We're living in Age of Walls*" and "*A Flag Worth Dying for*".

In his book "*The Power of Geography: Ten Maps That Reveal the Future of Our World*", **Marshall** deals with geography and its influence on the political processes in 10 selected regions, which will shape the global political space in this century. Within the book the knowledge from many disciplines is combined. Not only geography, but also history, politics, technology and environmental studies. In ten chapters, the author focuses on Australia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Greece, Turkey, Sahel region, Ethiopia, Spain and the Universe. Within each chapter, the geopolitical development of the area is described at first, followed by its the current situation; the challenges facing the actors in the coming period are presented at the end of every part.

Australia is presented as an isolated "island" located far away from all other key geopolitical centres. Formerly an inhospitable country used to export British

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prisoners, Australia has gradually become a thriving area, attractive to live in for people from all over the world. **Marshall** considers the relationship between Australia and China to be crucial, as China is Australia's largest trading partner. However, at the same time, China is making territorial claims to nearly 80 % of the South China Sea, which could extend its influence dangerously to the borders of the Coral Sea. Australia will have a difficult role to play as a major donor of development aid to neighbouring island states, since China seeks to overtake its position, as has been demonstrated by the distribution of Covid-19 protective equipment. For Australia, it will be necessary to develop partnerships with the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. On the other hand, there is a necessity to maintain a constructive trade dialogue with China.

In the beginning of the second chapter, the author described Iran as a country with a rich history, from the times of Mesopotamia, through the Persian Empire, to the current form of an internationally isolated country. For the last century, fight between secular and clergy power has taken place in Iran and the strife has ended with victory of Islamic fanatics. Iran is considered a geopolitical focus, as none of the external actors know the specific details of its nuclear program. After **B. Obama** signed a nuclear agreement with Iran, his successor **D. Trump** cancelled it and imposed sanctions on Iran, which caused instability in the region. In the neighbourhood, ISIL is a challenge for Iran within Syria and Iraq, which could lead to losing Iran's corridor to the Mediterranean. Demonstrations for the democratization of institutions are taking place more frequently within the state. The Islamic regime must also deal with Kurdish and Arab uprisings.

Saudi Arabia has been chosen for the role of geopolitical importance that stems primarily from the massive deposits of fossil fuels, specifically oil and natural gas. The current Crown Prince **Muhammad** pursues an aggressive foreign policy towards several states; supporting movements that are to contribute to the overthrow of leaders in Saudi Arabia's neighbourhood. However, none of the major world leaders have imposed any sanctions on Saudi Arabia, as they are a key oil exporter to all parts of the world. According to **Marshall**, Saudi Arabia faces a major challenge in a situation where states are making transition to renewables sources and decreasing impact of oil and oil products. The state apparatus will have to invest in new sectors to maintain a strong position in the region, otherwise "dominance" over the Middle East will be taken over by Iran.

The fourth part is dedicated to the United Kingdom, the state that created the world's largest empire in the 19th century, but nowadays builds only on its previous glory. The specific position of the United Kingdom stems from its

geographical position, where it is possible to reach its territory only by sea or air. The current position of the United Kingdom is determined by the leaving from the European Union (Brexit), by the difficult relationship with the United States, as well as by the need for economic co-operation with China. However, the United Kingdom still has considerable influence in building the international environment - as a permanent member of the Security Council has right to veto resolutions; United Kingdom is a stable member of NATO; as one of the strongest economics is also member of international forum G7. After Brexit, London is challenged to maintain the Union, especially in parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland that have voted to remain in the EU. Scotland's autonomy would cause losing control of the northern coast, where strategically important UK's ports are located. The accession of Northern Ireland to Ireland would have broad economic and political implications for the United Kingdom.

Greece has been a geopolitical front throughout history, with Romans, Turks, British and Russians dominating its territory after its ancient glory. Nevertheless, Greece managed to maintain its magnificent culture for centuries, which was confirmed in 1896 by the organization of the first modern Olympic Games. Historical tensions between Greece and Turkey continue till presence, as Greece currently tries to resolve a dispute with Turkey over natural gas deposits discovered in the Aegean Sea. The migration crisis is also contributing tension to the relationship, with many migration routes to Greece leading by sea from Turkish territory. According to **Marshall**, a major challenge for Greece is to maintain peace in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, under growing tensions by Turkey, in attempt to mine in its territorial waters. However, Greece and Turkey are both members of NATO, and the whole alliance would be involved in the conflict between them, but most of member states want to maintain Turkey's membership, since Turkey serves as a protective zone against Russia.

In the sixth part, the author deals with the mentioned Turkey, which served as an important transit zone and is still referred as a crossroad between East and West. Today's modern Turkey seeks to build on the glory of the former Ottoman Empire. The current president **Erdogan**, thinks in terms of neo-Osmanism. However, neo-Osmanism was rejected in the Western Balkans, where states seek to integrate into the EU. States in North Africa refuse to allow more influence of Turkey. Saudi Arabia and Iran maintain a dominant position in the Middle East. **Erdogan** thus focused on the sea, where under the project "Blue Homeland", he is trying to gain the greatest possible influence across the Aegean, Black and Mediterranean Seas. After **J. Biden** took office, he indicated that United States

would demand the same conditions from Turkey as from other NATO members. In the context of internal stability, political establishment will have to deal with growing resistance from the Kurds. **Erdogan** has found new allies in Qatar and he is working to expand his influence on the eastern tip of Africa.

The importance of the Sahel region has been growing dramatically in recent years, but in a negative sense. Climate change, poverty, security instability will have a far-reaching impact on Northern and Central Africa, but also on the European continent. Domestic governments are unable to ensure stability in the region, they must rely on international support, mostly from the United States and France. **E. Macron** tried to include the region of Sahel under the EU's common defence policy, but he did not find support from other member states' leaders. The region is narrowed by the climate, population and food crisis, which could lead to mass migration to European countries. The Sahel countries are unable to exploit the potential of massive mineral resources, either they are under the control of terrorist organizations or they cannot process them effectively. A new player, China, has also appeared on the scene, trying to gain influence in Africa through massive investments. In addition to the United States and France, other EU countries will have to contribute to creating stability in the region, if they want to prevent mass migration to the Schengen borders.

The eighth chapter **Marshall** dedicated to Ethiopia – the area where the ancestors of modern humans came from. Following the independence of Eritrea, Ethiopia has become the most populous country without access to the sea, which limits its potential and therefore Ethiopia is forced to cooperate with neighbouring countries. Ethiopia has the ambition to take the lead in the region, but military dictatorship, ethnic heterogeneity and weak infrastructure hamper its ambitions. The reform politics of the new leader, **A. Abiy**, did not meet with understanding in some parts of the state, which provoked other conflicts. In the "Horn of Africa" region, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates fight with each other to gain more influence; that has brought massive investment in energetics and manufacturing to neutral Ethiopia. With the construction of a massive hydroelectric power plant on the Blue Nile, Ethiopia gained control over the most important tributary of the Nile. According to the author, it will be a challenge in the future to maintain normalized relations between Ethiopia and Egypt, as Ethiopia may reduce the inflows of the Nile, on which the "life" of whole Egypt depends.

Spain had its "golden era" in the 16th Century, when it was the largest colonial power with colonies in Latin America. However, nor several attempts to unify the country have seen a reduction in the autonomist efforts of some regions,

especially in the north of Spain (Catalonia, Basque and Galicia). During the 20th Century, the Basque Country sought autonomy through a series of violence perpetrated by ETA. However, after losing public support, the Basques agreed to exist within Spain as an autonomous nation. Catalonia has held several referendums on independence, after the latter in 2017, the leaders declared Catalan independence, but they opposed the Spanish constitution. Madrid did not allow this act. Other EU leaders have tacitly agreed with the Spanish government's actions, as they would fear separatist tendencies in their states after the potential independence of Catalonia. Following Brexit, the United Kingdom is dealing with the difficult situation in Gibraltar, which would like to belong to the EU. The gain of Gibraltar would multiply the Spanish influence in the Mediterranean. **Marshall** identified as challenges for Spain: maintaining internal regional stability; maintaining its position as a stable member of the EU and NATO, and effective protecting of the Schengen border.

The last and most interesting chapter of the book is devoted to the Universe. The environment behind the Earth's atmosphere currently belongs to everyone and no one at the same time, which can cause big problems in the future. The solution is to create a legal framework so that states do not fight with each other but cooperate (outer space is also beyond the scope of international law). The space agreement of 1967 is obsolete and does not reflect the current situation. However, in space research, states are beginning to catch up with private companies, led by **E. Musk** and **J. Bezos**. In the book, the author likened **H. Mackinder's** teachings on controlling Heartland to **Dolman's** thesis about controlling the low orbit: "*Who rules one, controls the whole Earth.*" However, space exploration is only in its infancy, and there are number of asteroids within the solar system that can provide the Earth with endless sources of minerals. The book concludes with the author's message about space exploration: "*It is obviously our destiny to go even higher, if we move together, we will get there even faster*".

The peer-reviewed book provides a balanced view on history, geography and politics within selected regions. The book "*The Power of Geography: Ten Maps That Reveal the Future of Our World*" offers interesting view of the geography influence on historical development and political processes across the entire political map of the world. **T. Marshall**, as author maintained his high standard. The book offers a comprehensive geopolitical view of the challenges in next decades. The book belongs to the library of every student of social and political sciences, but also to every person interested in the connection between

geography and politics. For a more comprehensive understanding of the issue, it is recommended to read **Marshall's** fundamental book "*Prisoner of Geography*" before reading this one.