

Title: The Power of Geography: Ten Maps that Reveal the Future of Our World

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The Power of Geography is a comprehensive geopolitical analysis in the light of geographical, topographical and demographical realities of regions where the Big Three i.e. the USA, Russia and China have numerous stakes. The author has assumed probable scenarios that could pave the way for great powers to dominate each other in those regions. He suspects a major competition among them in Space that is bereft of globally-agreed international regulations as yet.

Australia, with copious natural resources, fears blockade as it's an island continent. It's connectivity with East Asia via narrow straits is highly vulnerable to blockade—nightmarish for the Aussies as their energy sector would crumble. The author underlines the expanding diplomatic influence of China in the Southwest Pacific states: Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati and other archipelagos that jeopardises the position of Australia in its neighbourhood. He unveils Australia's foreign policy goal of making alliances with major sea powers that could aid and protect her. The trilateral partnership among Australia, the UK and the US, AUKUS, announced in September 2021 for provision of nuclear submarines to Australia is *in sync* with that foreign policy objective.

Iran confronts multiple domestic and foreign policy challenges not least the economic downturn, surging unemployment, and insurrection against the central government in the south-west and south-east provinces. Iran's limitation in reaching the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Hormuz hinders it from becoming major sea power as it can be easily disconnected; however, closure of the strait from Iranian side can have substantial impact on global oil market. The author suggests normalization of US-Iran relations under the Biden Administration as the regime change, under the Bush Doctrine, is no longer demanded now.

The author discusses the 1945 meeting between President Roosevelt and King Ibn-Saud that laid the foundation of "oil in return of security" consensus between them. The era of oil is waning but Saudi Arabia will need security as its access to the Indian ocean is restricted by two narrow straits in the east and the south. The diversification of economy and Saudification of manpower are gigantic tasks but may fall victim to delay despite Crown Prince's ambitious Vision 2030 plans including construction of \$500billion Neom City.

The United Kingdom's opportunity for getting a lead-role in Northern Europe has been described. Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe and the USA's declining interests in security of Europe, after its pivot to Pacific, can engender a grand alliance among the Nordic and the Baltic states supported by Central European states like Poland and

Romania under supervision of the UK. But the UK's integrity is gravely threatened by probable independence of Scotland. This will drastically undercut the existing strategic deterrent of the UK—the lost facilities in independent Scotland would be highly difficult to replicate elsewhere.

The frosty relations between two Mediterranean states: Greece and Turkey have been explicated at length. Besides centuries of animosity, conflicting claims over various island states in the Aegean Sea and discovery of massive natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean have exacerbated the situation. The author questions the role of NATO forces if one of its member countries attacks another member. Greece earmarks a significant portion of its limping economy over defense expenditures at the altar of socio-economic development—a trend likely to continue owing to existing state of Greece-Turkey relations.

Turkey's foreign policy objective of independence, outside the domain of NATO and towards gaining the glory of Ottoman era, has been spelled out. Its acquisition of S-400 surface-to-air ballistic missile defense system from Russia in 2019 is in stark deviation from its commitments with NATO. The "Blue Homeland strategy envisages the Turkish state as a dominant power in three seas: The Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has strengthened its domestic defence production industry, opened its military bases abroad and is unconcerned if ejected from NATO alliance. Turkey's absence from NATO will magnify Greece's role as the southern-most flank of NATO.

The vast reserves of minerals, particularly rare elements used in electronic gadgets, in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan collectively called as "The Sahel" are of immense geopolitical importance for the Big Three. The Sahel is the site of world's fastest-growing insurgency where the American and French forces have been conducting counter-terrorism operations. Central government's feeble authority and unimpressive military offer the control of security matters to the USA and France for securing their interests, otherwise China and Russia will fill the gap. The word insurgents, and not Islamists, would have been used in the relevant chapter.

The potential of Ethiopia, situated along the Horn of Africa, has been holistically explained. Ethiopia confronts multiple challenges: ethnic riots, devastating impacts of climate change and dearth of sea route after secession of Eritrea are few major ones. The real power and leverage of Ethiopia is its water resources, twelve lakes and nine rivers, that could transform its destiny. The Grand Ethiopians Renaissance Dam, GERD, could head off the flow of Nile River into Egypt. The geography of Ethiopia vis-a-vis Egypt supports the former as it cannot be subdued should a water war begins between them.

Catalonia, located in the Northeastern tip of Spain, offers a platform to Russia and China in the Western Mediterranean. Referendum in 2017 supported the independence of Catalonia but was quashed by

Spain's Supreme Court. The UK is in precarious position as its support for an independent Catalanian state can raise similar voices in Scotland. An independent Catalonia, without EU's umbrella, would link the Western Mediterranean port city of Barcelona with China's Belt and Road Initiative. Spain's wishful thinking of getting back Gibraltar from the UK will highly fortify its defence posture if happens in reality.

Space is now of cardinal consideration in geopolitical domain of the Big Three as full spectrum deterrence strategy encapsulates dominance in space technology also. The author highlights opulence of mineral reserves in Space that are indispensable for our posterity and could herald a new race among the Big Three. There could be two major flashpoints in Space: Low Orbit region, upto 2000 kilometres for placing military satellites and libration points where the satellites can stay without utilising fuel as the equal but opposite gravitational pull of the Earth and the Moon cancel each other.

The author has missed Russia's natural gas pipeline networks, especially 1,230 kilometres long Nord Stream 2 project, that is laid from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, circumventing the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. The much-debated pipeline will dramatically transform the Russia-Europe natural gas trade relations. The gas supply to Western European states will be concentrated from Nord Stream System, through the Baltic Sea, at the expense of loss of transit fees to the CEE states once Nord Stream 2 becomes up-and-running.

The book is an interesting read for policy makers, strategists, politicians, students of geography, international relations and avid readers. The topographic and geographic exposition through maps in every chapter marvellously enthralls and engages the readers in unique creation of this world.

Reviewed by Tariq Asad, Civil Servant Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Islamabad.