

## BOOK REVIEW

**Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need To Know About Global Politics*, London: Elliott & Thompson Limited, 2015, 303 p., ISBN: 978-1-78396-243-3**

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### **Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Global Politics**

“Is geography destiny?”, “Why, with so rich a natural resource base, did the Balkans slip so far behind Europe although they are regionally in Europe?”. *Prisoners of Geography* is a book that you can find some informative answers for these kinds of questions.

Tim Marshall, in his book “*Prisoners of Geography*” argues that topography imprisons leaders. As he says in the introduction part; “This was true of the Greek Empire, the Persians, the Babylonians, and before them, it was true for every leader seeking the high ground on which to build on to protect the tribe. Rivers, mountains, lakes, deserts, islands, and the seas, are determining factors in history.” Actually, this theory is not new, but one rarely explained.

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Economic, social and demographic changes with the rapid technological changes, have globally affected the times we live in now from those that went before. This may be the reason why we talk so much about geopolitics. As it is written in the part of foreword, the author is unusually well qualified, personally and professionally, to contribute to this debate. He reminds us in the introduction part that he has been on the front line in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Syria. This shows the readers that he has witnessed how decisions and events, international conflicts and civil wars, can only be understood by taking full account of the hopes, fears and preconceptions formed by history and how these in turn are driven by the physical surroundings in which individuals, societies and countries have developed.

-River Ibar in Kosovo

Marshall mentions about the Balkan region as he worked in this region as a British journalist.

To better explain these geopolitical realities and how crucial the physical landscape was in reporting news in the Balkans, he leads readers on the example of River Ibar in Kosovo.

After he underlines that individual leaders, ideas and technologies are temporary and they play an important role in shaping events then they left, he says he first became interested in this subject when covering the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s. He watched close at hand as the leaders of various peoples, be they Serbian, Croat or Bosniak, deliberately reminded their tribes of the ancient divisions and ancient suspicions in a region filled with diversity. He states that once they had pulled the peoples apart, it didn't take much to then push them against each other. He gives the River Ibar in Kosovo as a prime example to explain this issue. Ottoman rule over Serbia was cemented by the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, fought near where the Ibar flows through the city of Mitrovica. Over the following centuries the Serb population began to withdraw behind the Ibar as Muslim Albanians gradually descended from the mountainous Malesija region into Kosovo, where they became a majority by the mid eighteenth century.

He sheds light to twentieth century and we're told that there was still a clear ethnic/religious division roughly marked by the river: Then in 1999, battered by NATO from the air and the Kosovo

Liberation Army on the ground, the Yugoslav (Serbian) military retreated across the Ibar, quickly followed by most of the remaining Serb population. The river became the de facto border what some countries now recognise as the independent state of Kosovo. Mitrovica was also where the advancing NATO ground forces came to a halt. During the three-month war there had been veiled threats that NATO intended to invade all of Serbia. But in truth, Marshall tells because of the restrictions of both the geography and politics in the region, NATO leaders never really had that option. He explains the other option of NATO that entering from Hungary, but he says Hungary didn't allow an invasion from its territory because it feared reprisals against the 350 thousand ethnic Hungarians in northern Serbia. The last option for NATO, Marshall tells, was an invasion from the South, which would have got them to the Ibar in double-quick time; but NATO would then have faced the mountains above them.

This example, happened in the Balkan region, shows us no matter how powerful and huge army you have like NATO, the geography effects the course of the events. The readers can find many examples about the Balkans especially in the chapter of "Russia" and "Western Europe".

To understand how geographical factors influence the tactics of decision makers and how geography shapes international politics, Marshall's book is a reference book which explains the balance between geography and politics with the flashbacks from history and with his own experiences.

Briefly, Tim Marshall's book is a reminder of that "ideologies may come and go but such geopolitical facts of life endure". Therefore, Prisoners of Geography breaks the globe up into 10 distinct regions and examines just what the implications are behind the lie of the land.