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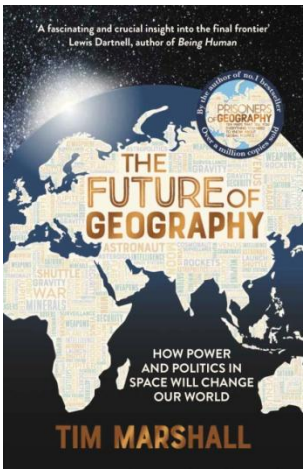
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(*) Corresponding author
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The Future of Geography: How Power and Politics in Space Will Change Our World

By Tim Marshall (Author) (Publisher: Elliott & Thompson 2023)

Hikmet Mengüaslan[1*]

[1]Adnan Menderes University - Aydın, Turkey ✉ hikmet.menguaslan@adu.edu.tr



It has been a long time since space ceased to be merely a trope of science fiction and emerged as a pressing domain of geopolitical analysis, termed "astropolitics." However, recent technological advances and the expanding civilian uses of space, along with the intensifying strategic rivalry among great powers on Earth, have rendered power projection in space an urgent matter once again. In "The Future of Geography," Tim Marshall explores space geopolitics with clarity and reminds readers that "we are now in the era of astropolitics. Nevertheless, what we have failed to establish so far is a set of universally agreed-upon rules to regulate this competition; without laws governing human activity in space, the stage is set for disagreements on an astronomical level" (p. 5).

From the very first pages, Marshall sets out to grasp the historical, political, military, and civilian dimensions of the space race. This issue will likely become increasingly relevant and pressing in the coming years, given China's rapid advancements in space technology and the concerns these have raised among Western powers, especially the United States. Overall, Marshall's hard-to-put-down book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on astropolitics by presenting a stimulating strategic vision of how military and civilian uses of space reverberate on Earth.

Structuring his book in three main parts, Marshall argues that the international norm that "space is a global common" is increasingly frayed due to intensifying geopolitical competition on Earth. The first chapter begins with a historical narrative charting humanity's evolving relationship with the stars. Marshall deliberately draws on examples from across civilizations, from ancient Greek and Roman to Chinese and Islamic traditions, as well as Renaissance Europe, to demonstrate how, since prehistoric times, different cultures have learned from one another in their engagement with the cosmos.

Ironically, Chapter Two suggests that a degree of similar collaboration could even be observed during the Cold War, when geopolitical rivalry and the ensuing arms race between the

two superpowers created conditions for technological breakthroughs and a non-negligible level of international regulation in space. However, this was primarily due to the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). While engaging, one cannot help but question Marshall's somewhat romanticized view of the collaboration that the possibility of MAD generates. The first part is primarily descriptive, offering limited analytical depth regarding the power dynamics that underpinned the significant leap in space exploration during the Cold War era.

The second part, by contrast, is the most substantial section of the book, comprising six chapters through which readers come to understand *how*, more than *why*, astropolitics might become increasingly relevant to current geopolitics on Earth. Marshall begins Chapter Three by elaborating on the geographical features of space, its orbits, chokepoints, and resources, and explains complicated technical concepts such as satellite constellations and anti-satellite weapons with admirable clarity. The cost of this simplicity, however, is an under-theorization of power dynamics in astropolitics. Indeed, the book's theoretical position is at best ambiguous.

For instance, in Chapter Four, Marshall's recurrent emphasis on the lack of effective regulation in space-related issues as a major determinant of an imminent security dilemma is not embedded within any theoretical framework of International Relations, which limits the theoretical and conceptual rigor of the work. At times, Marshall appears to adopt a realist perspective, as in his remark that "in space it is not in the interests of the big powers to give up their advantage" (p. 77), a reference to the Artemis Accords (2020) led by the United States. Despite this vague theoretical underpinning, his critique of the existing legal frameworks governing space activities and his acknowledgment of the destabilizing effects of strategic competition in space suggest that further research on the key dynamics of astropolitics is still needed.

Fortunately, this theoretical ambiguity dissipates in the remaining chapters of the second part, where Marshall turns to a central theme in the astropolitics literature: space as a strategic domain. In these chapters, he examines the military doctrines, space programs, and technological investments of the Big Three powers—China, the United States, and Russia—as well as other major actors with lesser capabilities. This inclusive approach adds significant analytical depth to Marshall's main argument by presenting a comprehensive outline of global astropolitics.

Although his bold claims, such as that "China's space program is more militarized than that of any other state" (p. 109), require further supporting evidence, Marshall successfully engages with strategically critical issues, including the weaponization of space, dual-use satellite technologies, and their implications for geopolitics on Earth. He persuasively argues that the intensification of rivalry in space activities (particularly the continuation of geopolitical competition between China and the United States) is contributing to growing fragmentation among the Big Three, leaving little room for other countries except to align with one of the emerging space blocs. Marshall concludes the second part by identifying several potential factors that may hinder compromise between these major powers.

The final part of the book consists of two chapters. In Chapter Nine, Marshall speculates about a hypothetical space war, presenting two probable scenarios in which the Big Three might become entangled in conflict. While his discussion of the potential sources and dynamics of such disputes is based more on informed speculation than empirical analysis, he raises thought-

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provoking questions regarding controversial subjects such as the management of space debris and the extraction of extraterrestrial resources.

The last chapter, by contrast, shifts toward civilian uses of space, including space tourism and the colonization of other planets. When Marshall turns to the space activities of prominent private actors such as SpaceX and Blue Origin, an implicitly liberal perspective emerges, emphasizing human capacity for progress. However, he stops short of addressing ethical and normative questions regarding the potential inequities that could result from further space exploration. In closing, he returns to a realist perspective on national sovereignty, stating that "it is unlikely that we will recognize our common humanity and work together in space to harvest its riches and then distribute them equally" (p. 245).

Ultimately, with this book, Marshall draws necessary attention to an inconvenient truth: space warfare may no longer be as distant or hypothetical as once thought. However, "The Future of Geography" is not without its limitations. Readers seeking a substantial theoretical contribution may find the book underwhelming, as it offers limited engagement with current theoretical arguments in the field of astropolitics. This positions the book as more of a gateway text for advanced research on the militarization of space. Nevertheless, Marshall's admirable ability to present complex issues of space geopolitics in a clear and accessible manner makes "The Future of Geography" both a compelling contribution to the field of astropolitics and an engaging read for a broad audience.

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