

Book Review

Global Geopolitics: A Critical Introduction

Klaus Dodds

Pearson Prentice-Hall, Harlow, England, New York, 2005, 254pp.

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Klaus Dodds (University of London) recently published a noteworthy introduction to Geopolitics. During the 1990s, together with some other political geographers such as John Agnew, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby and others, Dodds played a pivotal role in the rediscovery of geopolitics by the Anglo-Saxon scientific community. In the early 1990s, this group of academics started to re-examine the old geopolitical literature, which had been a taboo since 1945 due to Hitler's alleged collusion with geopolitical scientists (or was it the other way around?). In this re-evaluation process, the academic group tried to debunk some of the implicit assumptions embedded in Traditional Geopolitics (1899–1945). Their work also led to a fundamental investigation of some of the leading traditional geopolitical authors, ranging from Mahan & Mackinder to the controversial German school of Geopolitics and its figurehead Karl Haushofer.

The academic circle of which Dodds still forms part also tried to develop its own paradigm: Critical Geopolitics. In this approach, Geopolitics is reconceptualized as a discursive process not limited to a small group of 'wise' men and women. Geopolitical reasoning starts at a simple level and pervades the daily practice of international politics. In short, Critical Geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states. Or, as the author clarifies, Critical Geopolitics explores the geographical assumptions and understandings underpinning foreign policy-making and theories of world politics. In contrast to Traditional Geopolitics, explanations are sought to determine how geographical labels and designations enter into popular and formal discourse rather than to imply a strong causal relationship between global physical geography and state behaviour. In the past, Dodds has contributed in particular to this debate via his work on the interconnection between foreign policy analysis and Critical Geopolitics. Further, he is also known for his continuing interest in geopolitical traditions, his work on the international politics of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, but also his stimulating and original research on Britain and the South Atlantic Empire.

Dodds has written an interesting, hands-on introduction to the very diverse body of literature that Geopolitics has become today. When one observes the manuscript more closely, the reader will discover that this new book's structure is actually quite similar to an earlier book of his, *Geopolitics in a Changing World* (Prentice-Hall, 1999). After an introduction to the geopolitical literature and its relation to globalization, both books follow exactly the same path: the exploration of different current topics that challenge and even subvert the territorial practices of nation-states. This book tackles issues such



as global apartheid and North–South relations, Popular Geopolitics (the representation of the world through media such as films, cartoons and music), the globalization of danger (mostly focused on weapons of mass destruction), the globalization of environmental issues (from Stockholm to Rio and beyond) and the globalization of humanitarianism (with an added case study about the United Nations and Yugoslavia during 1992–1995). In this new book, *Global Geopolitics. A Critical Introduction*, Dodds has added two chapters in comparison to the 1999 effort. One is about the so-called anti-geopolitics and the globalization of dissent, in which the author, for example, recalls Edward Said’s fascinating contribution on the imaginative power of Orientalism, and also discusses such relevant topics as decolonization and the Cold War and an insight into today’s anti-globalization protests. The second and last chapter that is added in comparison to his earlier book tackles the globalization of terror. In the post-11 September 2001 period, such a topic is — evidently — difficult to avoid. The Critical Geopolitics approach states that world leaders find themselves in a constant battle to represent the world, via their discourse, in a particular way so as to convince their constituents and the wider world of the legitimacy of their course of action. The author, for example, examines the so-called *Axis of Evil* rhetoric of George W. Bush’s administration. Quite accurately, the author points out that the labelling of certain global political spaces as an ‘Axis of Evil’ (Iran, North Korea) has both internal consequences within the US (e.g. the position of Arab- and African-Americans) and external implications (a simplification of the world in which complexities within territories such as Saudi Arabia or Palestine are avoided). Personally, I would have devoted more attention to the dynamics with which the rhetoric of leaders tries to mould the reality (social constructivism) and tries to convince the constituents and world public opinion of its ‘veracity’. This chapter is somewhat descriptive in nature, which is nevertheless understandable in the sense that this book was conceptualized as being introductory.

The attraction of this book nevertheless lies in the fact that it appeals to a broader public. It is also ideal to use in an undergraduate environment where students investigate the dynamics of current world topics. The introduction to Geopolitics at the beginning of the book offers the reader a certain framework from which they can orient themselves. A stylistic but efficient improvement compared to his earlier book is that Dodds now identifies at the beginning of each chapter the key issues that will be tackled, at the end he formulates a number of key questions upon which the reader can further reflect. This is an eloquent way of making both the text and the topics at hand even more accessible. Whereas in the 1999 effort the author’s final conclusions largely focused on topics such as globalization and the unequal and interconnected world, this 2005 reworking is shaped much more by the post-11 September 2001 topics of current world politics (in which Dodds rightly sees a reinforcement of the importance of the nation-state, territory and the politics of identity).

From the viewpoint of the Critical Geopolitics framework, this attention to the interconnection between discourse and politics in the post-11 September 2001 environment is understandable. However, a more fundamental scientific question must be posed: whether Geopolitics can be reduced to a mere analysis of popular, practical and formal discourses, as the Critical Geopolitics project argues. Does not the evolution in current world politics suggest that phenomena such as the rhetoric of (anti-)terrorism



constitute but a mere *blip* on our radar screen, while more fundamental changes are taking place on the international scene, changes which might even re-introduce the traditional debate in Geopolitics about the impact of physical territoriality on international politics? Themes such as *energy* (the global scramble for the increasingly scarce oil and gas reserves, in particular as a result of the Chinese and Indian economic growth) or *demography* will probably prove essential in the geopolitics of the remaining part of the 21st century. The academic question thus arises whether the Critical Geopolitics paradigm is the only tool available to achieve a better understanding of today's geopolitical relations. In the near future, academic debate should perhaps focus on the question how Geopolitics should further develop from an epistemological and methodological point of view. Is the partial integration and/or combination of existing geopolitical paradigms a viable option that would facilitate a better insight into the 'geopolitical evolutions' seen in current world politics?

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The Hidden Handshake: National Identity and Europe in the Post-Communist World

Aleš Debeljak

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The Hidden Handshake is a compilation of four essays emphasizing the dialectic of the self and the larger community. Taking the case of Slovenia as a bounded political and cultural entity embedded in wider regional (Europe) and global codes of existence, the author takes his readers on a journey of profound self-reflection, which ultimately aims to show there is a value in pursuing a mode of existence transcending the parochial limitations of one's national cultural tradition, but also that cosmopolitan habits can never be completely divorced from an individual's particular cultural background (p. ix). The message is highly personal, containing many references to the experiences Debeljak has been through as well as his reflections upon them, and resonates well with all those who identify themselves with small but proud national cultures in the mosaic of European and world politics.

Aleš Debeljak is a well-respected cultural critic and one of the leading poets of Central Europe. He has been awarded a number of prizes for his work, such as the Slovenian National Book Award (Ljubljana), the Miriam Lindberg Israel Poetry for Peace Prize (Tel Aviv) and the Chiqyu Poetry Prize (Tokyo). Besides *The Hidden Handshake*, Debeljak is the author of *Reluctant Modernity* and *Twilight of the Idols: Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia* as well as several books of poetry, among which *Anxious Moments*,