

**Book Review (1023 words):**

Blouet, B.W. (2001). *Geopolitics and Globalization in the Twentieth Century*. London: Reaktion Books, Ltd. pp. 204, illustrations.

The crux of Brian Blouet's argument is a simple one – for much of the Twentieth Century geopolitics, or policies that “seek to establish national or imperial control over space,” were the norm, and though globalization currently appears to be making the world a safer and more interdependent place, at any moment the world's most powerful nation-states may revert back to territorial aspirations due to economic recession and strive for autarky – one need only be reminded of the Germans. And in fact, that is exactly what *Geopolitics and Globalization* does; it emphasizes German geopolitical plans of expansion through the 1940s and then switches to discuss the Cold War.

The book's format is sound. Blouet provides an overview of imperialism, globalization, and geopolitics in the first section, and then in the following chapters, he analyzes the geopolitical conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Though the title suggests otherwise, the emphasis of this book is definitely on geopolitics. In fact, by the end it feels as though globalization was almost thrown in as an afterthought.

Unfortunately, the book's format is no panacea for its content, which leaves one wanting more of everything. Geopolitics is dealt with almost exclusively in the classic sense. The most powerful nation-states of a given era steal the spotlight, and geopolitics is entirely associated with territorialism and autarky. Hindsight is 20/20, thus the policies

of major powers are methodically broken down into a perfunctory ‘how and why’ story – taking the reader behind the scenes in a shallow manner. There is little critical analysis.

After reading the entire book one might feel a bit cheated by the author’s simplistic conclusion. In a single sentence, comprising its own paragraph on the penultimate page, Blouet writes: “The history of geopolitics is a history of bad ideas – sometimes mad ideas – that have led countries to wars and recessions” (177). In addition to being extremely broad and, in the end, quite useless, such analysis as this does not present an image of geopolitics that most critical geopoliticians have been striving for in recent years.

After the end of the Second World War, geopolitics became taboo, and until about fifteen years ago the word “geopolitics” was difficult to find anywhere in academic geography. In recent times, geopolitics has been brought back into the academic fray by geopoliticians more critical of its traditionally state-centric, and more obviously state sponsored, uses. Unfortunately, Blouet forgoes any critical examination of geopolitics over the past century, and instead presents recycled geopolitical rhetoric of his own: “*Geopolitik* is a German term and Germany has been particularly prone to invest in bad expansionist policies on more than one front at a time” (177). Watch out, Poland and France!

However, the book’s demerits are partially made up for by the fact that the book is part of the Globalities Series, “which reinterprets world history in a concise yet thoughtful way, looking at major issues over large time-spans and political spaces” (title page). Blouet is definitely concise; in 178 pages he goes through a century’s worth of history, at times racing through thirty-plus years of international history in two pages.

Cliff Note versions of history aside, the book does contain interesting biographical subsections on geopoliticians placed intermittently throughout the book. Every epoch of Blouet's Twentieth Century has several geopoliticians associated with it, and Blouet gives us a biographical background on each before diving into the "mistakes" Germany made or the error of the United States' containment policy.

Blouet's history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century suffers from inherent cultural bias. *Geopolitics and Globalization* is more dominated by evil Germans and Soviets than a Polish history of the Second World War. The author's historical interpretation is a straightforward one, but even with sporadic placement of tables and maps to complement his interpretation of geopolitics, one senses that he is banally, or even intentionally, leaving things out – particularly concerning the negative side-effects of U.S. and British geopolitics.

The problems with Blouet's book do not stop at being dominated by Anglo-American perceptions. From the beginning the book lacks purpose, and one strains to find a recognizable theoretical framework. Without a solid base to build on, the arguments in *Geopolitics and Globalization* crumble before one gets to the conclusion. He writes that even though globalization is the preponderant force at work in international politics today, geopolitics may return as its nemesis. However, it is this very argument that spotlights the book's flawed analysis – Blouet separates geopolitics and globalization as two dichotomous forces. The distinction between geopolitics and globalization is so black-and-white that one is left with the feeling that autarky equals geopolitics, and economic growth is globalization. Of course, both of these analogies are

too simplistic. In the end, *Geopolitics and Globalization* reads as regurgitated armchair history.

This book is neither deep enough to teach with, nor vague enough for mass readership. Yet this may be its strongest point. *Geopolitics and Globalization* appears to be targeted at educated individuals interested in geopolitics but lacking time to devote to the subject. In this light, the book displays many qualities for being written by an academic. First, it is easily accessible – not laced with unnecessary, esoteric terminology. The public might embrace this book as easily as they have Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, and in a similarly naïve fashion, believe that they now understand geopolitics as well as they do the evolution of civilizations. *Geopolitics and Globalization* is written for non-academic, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Anglo-American history buffs. Hence, the conclusion of the book caters entirely to this niche market. Blouet espouses that though globalization may be working for select Western economies, 'we' (in a banally nationalist sense) must not lose site of the fact that states being economically exploited by this process may revert to primitive, bad idea dreams of autarky.

If an Anglo-American analysis of geopolitics in the last century is what one is looking for, *Geopolitics and Globalization* is a perfect match. However, if it is a comprehensive, theoretical, holistic interpretation of the connection between policies of territorial and economic expansion one wishes to find, this book will only end up alienating the reader with its view of the two as being separate processes.

### **References**

Diamond, J. (1997). Guns, Germs, and Steel. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.