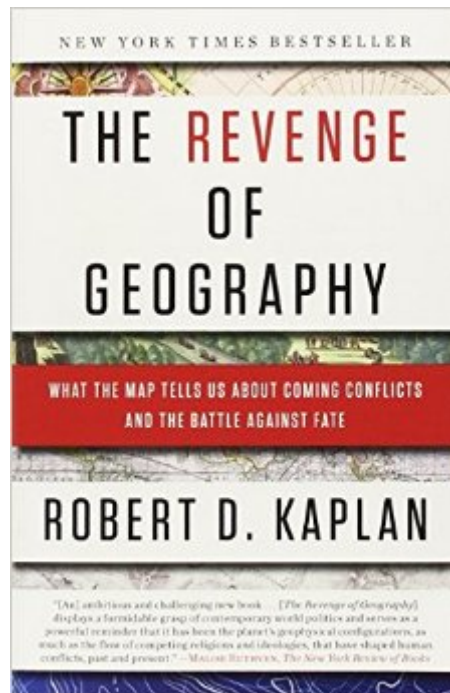


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The Revenge Of Geography: What The Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts And The Battle Against Fate



Synopsis

In this provocative, startling book, Robert D. Kaplan, the bestselling author of *Monsoon* and *Balkan Ghosts*, offers a revelatory new prism through which to view global upheavals and to understand what lies ahead for continents and countries around the world. In *The Revenge of Geography*, Kaplan builds on the insights, discoveries, and theories of great geographers and geopolitical thinkers of the near and distant past to look back at critical pivots in history and then to look forward at the evolving global scene. Kaplan traces the history of the world's hot spots by examining their climates, topographies, and proximities to other embattled lands. The Russian steppe's pitiless climate and limited vegetation bred hard and cruel men bent on destruction, for example, while Nazi geopoliticians distorted geopolitics entirely, calculating that space on the globe used by the British Empire and the Soviet Union could be swallowed by a greater German homeland. Kaplan then applies the lessons learned to the present crises in Europe, Russia, China, the Indian subcontinent, Turkey, Iran, and the Arab Middle East. The result is a holistic interpretation of the next cycle of conflict throughout Eurasia. Remarkably, the future can be understood in the context of temperature, land allotment, and other physical certainties: China, able to feed only 23 percent of its people from land that is only 7 percent arable, has sought energy, minerals, and metals from such brutal regimes as Burma, Iran, and Zimbabwe, putting it in moral conflict with the United States. Afghanistan's porous borders will keep it the principal invasion route into India, and a vital rear base for Pakistan, India's main enemy. Iran will exploit the advantage of being the only country that straddles both energy-producing areas of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Finally, Kaplan posits that the United States might rue engaging in far-flung conflicts with Iraq and Afghanistan rather than tending to its direct neighbor Mexico, which is on the verge of becoming a semifailed state due to drug cartel carnage. A brilliant rebuttal to thinkers who suggest that globalism will trump geography, this indispensable work shows how timeless truths and natural facts can help prevent this century's looming cataclysms.

Praise for *The Revenge of Geography*

“An ambitious and challenging new book . . . [*The Revenge of Geography*] displays a formidable grasp of contemporary world politics and serves as a powerful reminder that it has been the planet's geophysical configurations, as much as the flow of competing religions and ideologies, that have shaped human conflicts, past and present.” —Malise Ruthven, *The New York Review of Books*

“Robert D. Kaplan, the world-traveling reporter and intellectual whose fourteen books constitute a bedrock of penetrating exposition and analysis on the post-Cold War world . . . strips away much of the cant that suffuses public discourse these days on global developments and gets to a fundamental reality: that geography remains today, as it has been

throughout history, one of the most powerful drivers of world events.ââ "The National Interest" Kaplan plunges into a planetary review that is often thrilling in its sheer scale . . . encyclopedic.ââ "The New Yorker" [The Revenge of Geography] serves the facts straight up. . . . Kaplan's realism and willingness to face hard facts make The Revenge of Geography a valuable antidote to the feel-good manifestoes that often masquerade as strategic thought.ââ "The Daily Beast" From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I read this book from two perspectives. First, decades ago, I was given a copy of the Air Force War College's textbook on geography as a basis for global military strategy and therefore became familiar at an early age with some of the concepts this book explores. Secondly, my family is bi-national American/Colombian, with family and businesses in both countries, and therefore is attuned with author Robert Kaplan's future vision of the USA evolving to become the center of an Anglo-Hispanic "supra-state." Although this book is supposedly focused in on the influence of geography in making and breaking nations, it is actually what we used to call "Social Studies" --- a combined analysis of all the factors of geography, demographics, history, economics, and politics that go into constituting a nation state. PART III. AMERICA'S DESTINY is the 25% of the book that most interested me. The other 75% is just OK, because it is an agglomeration of themes that students of world history and current events will probably already be familiar with. I didn't care for the lack of focus among so many topics. The chapter on Mexico starts with a rambling history of the

Roman Empire followed up by a digression into our wars in Iran and Afghanistan, the history of China, India, Venice and the 18th Century mutiny of Indian troops against British Colonialists. However, those who aren't already familiar with these topics of World History 101 and are looking for the widest possible introduction to the geography, demographics, history, economics, politics, and current events in all parts of the world may enjoy Kaplan's "stream of consciousness" approach. Kaplan can also be a bit pedantic ("history and geography tell us") and prone to over-comparing motivations of current nation states to what their forebears did thousands of years ago ("Ancient history, too, offers up examples that cast doubt on whether Afghanistan and Iraq, in and of themselves, have doomed us"). He also says that he is "aware that I am on dangerous ground in raising geography on a pedestal" but actually covers so much material of a political, demographic, and economic nature that geography seems to be secondary. He might just as well have titled the book THE REVENGE OF (GEOGRAPHY, ECONOMICS, DEMOGRAPHICS, POLITICS, ETC. ETC.). My interest perked up in PART III AMERICA'S DESTINY. This is the part that Kaplan put his heart into, as he explains:=====As a visiting professor at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis some years back, I taught a course about future challenges in national security.=====In fact the book becomes especially interesting because Kaplan expands on the topic of "future challenges in national security" to include the future composition of our country in the combination of ALL factors that make us the nation we are, including geography, demographics, politics, and economics. Kaplan starts out by pointing out how fantastically blessed by geography we Americans are. We have 6% of the world's land area, but perhaps 25% to 30% of its arable farmland. Our entire country, except for the Desert Southwest, is drained by the Mississippi/Ohio/Missouri, and the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence. Our East Coast ports were perfectly positioned at the head of navigable waters to facilitate settlement, commerce, and the extension of political sovereignty for hundreds of miles inland. We ARE the center of the world's trading routes, with our East Coast facing Europe, our West Coast facing Asia, and our Gulf Coast facing Latin America. Kaplan perhaps overplays the idea that the United States is a superpower PRIMARILY because of our geography (the ambitions of our people also had a lot to do with making us what we are) but he makes it clear that no country has been favored by geography as we are. He then makes the point that in regard to the vision of what the United States wants to become as a nation, we are coming back to our starting point. Our country is named "The United States of AMERICA" (not NORTH AMERICA) because it wasn't until around 1900 that the word "America" stopped being used as a synonym for "Western Hemisphere" and the words NORTH AMERICA and SOUTH AMERICA began to be used to distinguish the continents. As late as the 1870s some prominent

Americans continued to believe that the United States was destined to become coextensive with the entire hemisphere. Something of the reverse has actually happened. Instead of Anglo Americans going forth to colonize Latin America and incorporating it into the United States, tens of millions of Latin Americans have been attracted by our free political system and vibrant economy to come live among us. Kaplan makes a point that I (an Anglo American) and my Latin American family talk about almost every day, that the elderly Anglo population is passing, and America is being repopulated by a younger, more Latin American generation. Kaplan thinks, as I do, that we're on our way to becoming an even more powerful Anglo/Hispanic Superpower whose economic perimeter includes not only Canada but also Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and much or even all of South America. He thinks our population will be browner, but we'll still be Americans living under the same Constitution, and a rising prosperity in Latin America will boost our own prosperity (I see this happening in the microcosm of my own family). My takeaway from this book is that Mexico and Latin America REALLY are vital to our own well being. Before reading this book I leaned toward the view that America's free trade partnership shouldn't extend beyond Canada. Now I am wondering whether free trade with Mexico and most of the rest of Latin America may not after all be necessary for our security. These free trade agreements have put millions of Americans out of work, but they are accomplishing their purpose of helping to stabilize fragile countries like Colombia and Mexico. Eventually the trade agreements may serve their full purpose by boosting American exports, and therefore restoring employment, to the newly prosperous countries of Latin America. You'll find this book a worthwhile read if:

1. You're looking for an education in Global Social Studies 101 (i.e. a basic literacy in global geography, demographics, politics, military strategic theory past and present, and current events). None of these subjects is covered deeply, but the reader will become away conversant in just about every factor that influences the world today.
2. You're interested in the part of the book I was, which is to glimpse ahead into the USA's future.
3. You want to acquire a more open-minded view of the cost/benefit analysis of U.S. free trade with Mexico and Latin America. It led me to wonder if perhaps the USA should include Mexico in its continental integration perimeter to the same degree as Canada (an objective that Mexico's former President asked for).

Unlike most of Kaplan's earlier work (examples include *Surrender or Starve: Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea* or *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Vintage Departures)) which relied on Kaplan's first-hand impressions and a lot of 'man in the street' perspectives, "The Revenge of Geography" takes a relatively detached and scholarly approach to illustrating Kaplan's view of the world we live in. Using a very broad definition of

geography to include a lot of what might otherwise be called social science, Kaplan seeks to describe real constraints on how nations and populations can and will act in order to chart a middle course between an overly idealistic liberal internationalism (or its close cousin, neoconservatism) or an excessively pessimistic and ethnically/geographically deterministic IR realism. The net effect is an attempt to, as he approvingly quotes Braudel, make us more aware of our limits in order to have "more power to affect outcomes within them". Divided into three parts, the first draws upon a range of mainly western thinkers (including Mackinder, Braudel, Spengler and Mahan) to explain various IR streams of thought with particular reference to the impact and constraints of (broadly defined) geography, while the second focuses on the history, geography and constraints of six key regions or powers (Europe, Russia, China, India, Iran and Turkey) and surrounding nations. A previous reviewer has pointed out that Kaplan tends to approach his subject in an eclectic manner and digress from his theme, but (while I don't agree with all of Kaplan's assertions) I consider this a strength rather than a weakness - if the number of 'clippings' I have made in my Kindle editions of unconventional or little-known observations to research and think about later is any guide, there is a lot here to interest the reader, provoke thought and look at the previously familiar from a slightly different perspective. The final section of the book deals with Kaplan's assessment of the future prospects of the USA and the wider North/Central Americas - while Kaplan draws upon the views of Samuel P. Huntington's *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* to illustrate the way demography is likely to change the USA's sense of identity and role in the world, he is (while noting some real risks) far more optimistic and paints an interesting picture of a vibrant North/Central American community with a slightly reduced but still pivotal - and positive - role in the world. His perspective on this issue is one I had not considered in this way before and I will be very interested to see the views of US, Mexican and other Central American/Caribbean readers. Overall, "The Revenge of Geography" offers an approachable, thought-provoking read that offers some interesting and unconventional - and largely optimistic - perspectives on the world we live in. While I doubt that every reader will agree with all of Kaplan's observations and arguments, this is a distinctly original look at our world and a book I highly recommend.

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