

The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate Study Guide

The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate by Robert D. Kaplan

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Plot Summary

Robert Kaplan, a prominent neoconservative foreign policy intellectual, wrote *The Revenge of Geography* in order to draw the focus of the American foreign policy community back towards the recognition of the relationship between geography and politics, a focus that has remained unpopular since the early part of the 20th century. Kaplan in particular seeks to revive a variety of geographical intellectuals who he believes offered a number of critical insights about the interplay between geography and political, military and economic power across the world.

The basic idea is to argue that geographical factors play a major role in determining long-term political outcomes without buying wholesale into geographical determinism, which holds that long-term political outcomes are determined by geographical factors alone. Kaplan focuses in particular on the center of "Eurasia" in the Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as holding the most potential for global political power. The region's geography ensures that it will remain disputed territory and that any nation that wishes to control the world must control this "heartland." Another important geographical factor is access to warm water ports, a deficit in Russian politics that leads Russia to act aggressively.

Perhaps the most important geographical claim that Kaplan advances is that the world will increasingly suffer from a "crisis of room." Due to rising population and the concentration of persons in large urban centers, the potential for conflict between nations increases. Higher populations will have more to fight over and less to agree on when it comes to the control of natural resources, strategic military points and simple, arable land. Kaplan also notes important features of U.S. geography, protected from invasion by two oceans, plush with arable land, natural resources and ports, and accordingly rich enough to dominate the globe. Its primary weakness is its southern border with Mexico, since the boundary is artificial and the influence of Mexican culture and immigrants will prove impossible to resist.

The Revenge of Geography is divided into three parts. In Part I, *Visionaries*, Kaplan rediscovers important early 20th century and late 19th century geopolitical intellectuals, including Nicholas Spykman and Halford MacKinder. These intellectuals can help the foreign policy community to focus on geography once again. Kaplan spends a good bit of time trying to separate their insights from what often prove to be unsavory political views of the day. Part II outlines the early 21st century map of the globe, covering divisions and conflicts in Europe, Russia, China, India, Iran and Turkey. Finally, in Part III, Kaplan discusses America's destiny as determined partly by geography. He predicts that in one hundred years the United States will have partly merged with Canada and Mexico and have a much more Hispanic racial and cultural cast. However, the US's friendly economic environment and intellectual communities will remain world class, as will its military power.

An important and not to be overlooked feature of the book is that it was written in part because Kaplan realizes that the 2003 War in Iraq occurred partly at his insistence and

he now believes it to have been a complete disaster. The Revenge of Geography is supposed to help explain why it was a disaster and how the US can maintain global dominance by paying attention to long-term geographical factors that would have dissuaded it from invading Iraq in the first place.

Preface, Part I

Preface, Part I Summary and Analysis

Author Robert Kaplan opens the book by claiming that to understand the present political state of the world one must focus on relatively permanent features of global geography. A first illustration is the mountain range separating Arab and Kurdish Iraq, a barrier that so enraged Saddam Hussein that he traversed it and killed 100,000 civilian Kurds. Mountains, Kaplan argues, are conservative, protecting indigenous cultures, but sometimes create conflicts due to increased differences. Naked and unprotected landscapes are constantly invaded.

Artificial borders are sometimes erected, such as the Berlin Wall, which Kaplan argues was just one of many historical manifestations of the need for political divides in Central Europe, which was often ravaged by war due to being so geographically open. The geography of a nation and its people stays relatively stationary, making geography a critical common element that stays the same while politics change.

The methods of communication and travel in the 21st century have obscured the continuing importance of geography. When people can communicate and travel around the world in a day's time, it is easy to minimize differences. Geography still matters, or so Kaplan will argue based on a number of important but unfashionable thinkers. Geography adds an important complexity to foreign policy analysis. The Middle East is an important case in point. It is no coincidence that the Arab Spring began there, since it has a very diverse ethnic and religious history and is a crossroads for historical economic and social traffic. The revolt began in the country physically closest to Europe. Geography can help the U.S. make sense of how to approach the world.

The aim of Chapter 1 is to begin to help the reader "recover our sense of geography" and figure out how we lost this sense. The catalyst for this loss was the fall of the Berlin Wall, because its artificiality made other borders seem artificial. People began to believe that democracy and globalization would conquer the world. This was not the first burst of idealism, however, given the enthusiasm following World War I. An illustration of this lost sense of geography was the revival of the use of the term "Central Europe" to refer to a grab bag of cultures that history would dismantle into Germany, Poland and the Balkans. This collapse, Kaplan argues, is reason to revive the ideas of philosopher and political theorist Isaiah Berlin, who defended political pragmatism and compromise over political experimenting.

The demise of the idea of Central Europe, always geographically and historically untenable, led to increased focus on the Balkans, which led to a formulation of a model of humanitarian intervention that cost little in soldiers and postulated that painless victory in war was consistently possible. This was why conflict in the Balkans came as such a shock to the Western world, because in their idealism they ignored historical reality about geographical and political/social differences. Only through idealism could



the U.S. conceive of so many interventions in different nations around the globe and expect the same results. Strikingly, Kaplan includes himself in this group, supporting the Iraq War as part of a small group of intellectuals and policy experts who urged the Bush Administration to invade. He was impressed by the power of the American military. But given the quagmire that followed, the term synonymous with his group "neoconservative" became derisive. And Kaplan seems to admit, rightly so given the fact that Iraq is now nothing more than a semi-stable democracy and quasi-ally of the United States. But given five thousand American dead, one hundred thousand dead Iraqis and a wasted trillion dollars, the ethical value is hard to see.

Iraq produced a new respect for foreign policy realism, following philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Strong, practical states are needed to restrain local violence. The Post Cold War leads us to see that sometimes dictators are the lesser of two evils. He says this as someone who supported the Iraq War.



Chapter II, The Revenge of Geography; Chapter III, Herodotus and His Successors

Chapter II, The Revenge of Geography; Chapter III, Herodotus and His Successors Summary and Analysis

True foreign policy realism is more art than science and realizes that need to hedge on two historical analogies, between appeasement at Munich prior to World War II and disaster in Vietnam. Human motivations must be taken into account, particularly the motives of fear, self-interest and honor. Pragmatism means admitting that states exist in a much more limited moral universal than individuals. States have to protect the well-being of millions and error can be disastrous. Human nature means mass conflict and force. Realism famously follows Hans Morgenthau.

And yet to be too much of a realist is to forget the importance of morality in foreign policy. It cannot all concern the pragmatic and ultimately unstable balancing of power. Realists value order over freedom, since the latter comes only after the former. But these concerns, morality and reality, can be balanced if we focus on geography, the backdrop of human history. A state's place on the map is what first defines it. By embracing realism after Iraq, Kaplan argues, we really embraced geography. This revenge of geography was to make us face reality. The aim of Kaplan's study is to show how an appreciation of the map means that we need not be limited by it. Overstretching resources and narrow-mindedness will otherwise lead to isolationism.

To make his case, Kaplan harkens back to a number of thinkers from previous eras, such as Nicholas Spykman. He claimed that Russia's need for sea access and the danger of the open German frontier makes many European conflicts hard to resist. And Kaplan adds that the Atlantic still matters, creating different foreign policy approaches for the U.S. and Europe. England's island status makes it in many ways more influential than mostly landlocked Germany. China matters more than Brazil due to its geographical location, commanding major sea lines of communication and China has a more temperate climate. America and England can only champion liberty because oceans protect them from direct invasion. If we can recognize geography, we can engage in a "modest acceptance" of fate that can curb zeal in foreign policy, something of which Kaplan himself admits to being guilty. If we curb zeal, we'll be better at the interventions we choose. We must bear in mind Berlin's warning against historical inevitability. Kaplan prefers a "probabilistic" determinism.

In Chapter III, Kaplan points to William H. McNeill and Marshall Hodgson who applied realism to the study of world history and the history of Islam respectively. They show



that geography is a way of thinking more broadly. McNeill's eight-hundred page, 1963 book *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, is a key book here. He emphasizes the interactions between the great civilizations, not on the great civilizations themselves. He focuses on vast movements of peoples across the map. Civilizations rise and fall like mountain ranges - very gradually and slowly through rain and erosion. Kaplan reviews McNeill's findings. He follows McNeill in concluding that world conflict is driven through the steady filling up of space across the world.

The filling up of space matters as countries grow closer together and as their populations focus in cities. These movements lead to transformations, unmooring peoples from their soils and traditional faiths, converting Islam and Christianity into more ideological forms and creating incentives for the flourishing of new doctrines to replace nationalism.

Kaplan then turns to Marshall Hodgson's focus on the Middle East, and his book *The Venture of Islam*. Hodgson wrote during the Cold War but still encourages us to focus on the geography of the middle of the world, the "Nile-to-Oxus" region. Islam emerged in this fluid area where Greek and Sanskrit traditions were not rooted. Due to less water, rural life was more insecure and cities formed. Mecca became an important point of commerce and trade. Geography does not explain Islam but it helps to show how geography helped its rise and spread based on merchant and Bedouin patterns. And while he contends that Middle East national boundaries are today somewhat the result of Western colonialism, they make a certain amount of sense since nations like Egypt and Iraq do represent proto-state civilizations that existed for a long period of time. Islam also reveals the most important intellectual, cultural and geographical trends that affect Afro-Eurasian societies.

Herodotus lies at the center of Kaplan's argument that McNeill and Hodgson are relevant. He gives us a partial determinism. The center of Herodotus's *Histories* is his geographical determinism and how decisions of all kinds are built around geography. We are free to make our own choices as nations but they are sharply bounded. Kaplan now turns to introduce new intellectuals, not philosophers, who will make liberal humanists uneasy. These men believed in the process of domination, both militarily and commercially.



Chapters IV-V, The Eurasian Map, The Nazi Distortion

Chapters IV-V, The Eurasian Map, The Nazi Distortion Summary and Analysis

Chapter IV begins with the introduction of geographer and father of geo-politics, Sir Halford MacKinder and his piece, "The Geographical Pivot of History." MacKinder emphasizes that the discovery of the New World led the imperial European powers to expand Westward but that eventually they would fill the space provided and we would enter a new political age. European wars would occur on a worldwide scale, he predicted in 1904. MacKinger also thinks that European history is "subordinate" to the history of Asia, because European civilization arose to repel Asiatic invasion. Further, European civilization was made possible by the divisions of European geography into smaller units, guaranteeing distinct cultures (contrast this with the flat plains of Russia). Mongol invasions of Russia were successful and ended up holding back its development. In the end, the geopolitical gravity of the world was in "Eurasia" packed between Europe, Africa, and the Indian and Pacific oceans. The "Columbian" epoch initiated by Columbus's discovery of the New World allowed Eurasian commercial routes to be avoided, as did the Suez Canal.

Kaplan thinks that while MacKinder was too deterministic that it prepared us for the rise of the Soviet Union and its great spheres of influence. The US projection of power into Iraq and Afghanistan also show that he had a key insight, since the US had to build power bases around the same area. He then defends MacKinder as not being so imperialistic or nationalistic that he should be ignored. Instead, MacKinder had the insight to push our gaze from the European continent to global geography. He did think that peoples could overcome geography, but only for a time.

MacKinder argues that Eurasia, containing 75% of the world's people and 60% of its GDP, would continue to dominate the calculations of the geopolitical. Eventually the whole landmass would unite, creating a World Island. MacKinger thought that if one could control Eastern Europe, one could control the "Heartland" of the World-Island, and if one controls the heartland, one controls the World-Island, which in turn grants command over the world. MacKinder missed the ability of Germany to dominate Europe, however, and ultimately backed off his stronger claims, adopting a liberal internationalism for the British Empire, moving towards Woodrow Wilson. However, MacKinder had the enduring insight that struggle over control of the "Heartland" would prove a decisive determining element in world geopolitics.

Chapter V focuses on Germany, arguing that while Russia believed in expansion to buttress itself against invasion, it was Germany that was most keenly aware of the importance of geography, from Bismarck through WWII. Prior to WWII, many German geopolitical theorists were influential. These theorists, such as Friedrich Ratzel, pushed



the idea of German domination of Europe, not in terms of conquest but in terms of influence. The most important of these theorists was Karl Haushofer, a Nazi geopolitician and admirer of MacKinder.

Haushofer would, via Rudolf Hess, influence Hitler's geopolitical thinker prior to his rise to power. Haushofer believed that the British were not powerful enough to stop Germany from dominating the "Heartland." If Germany could dominate the "Heartland," it would gain the use of warm water ports and could then challenge Britain. While MacKinder hoped to protect British power by ensuring the creation of a number of political powers between Germany and Russia, Haushofer wanted to eliminate them for the same reason, that is, to increase Germany's power. The Soviet Union could then hopefully be disassembled into its ethnic sub-units. Germans were entitled to national self-determination, since a third of Germans lived outside "the Reich." Japan was to control the East, the U.S. the West and the Germans the rest. This created the beginnings of the Nazi geopolitical ideology. Ironically, Hitler would imprison Haushofer after taking over his ideas.

The hope that Kaplan has is to rehabilitate MacKinder despite the Nazi distortion of his work. Work by Robert Strausz-Hupe has already moved things in this direction. Strausz-Hupe was critical of MacKinder in a number of ways, but he still thought MacKinder had important insights about the centrality of the "Heartland." He too thought a crisis of "room" was on the way. This crisis of room shows why America cannot withdraw from geopolitics. If liberal nations do not take up the reins of power, non-liberal nations will.



Chapters VI-VIII, The Rimland Thesis, The Allure of Sea Power, The Crisis of Room

Chapters VI-VIII, The Rimland Thesis, The Allure of Sea Power, The Crisis of Room Summary and Analysis

Strausz-Hupe along with a number of mid-century European immigrants to the U.S. (including Henry Kissinger) brought a strong form of foreign policy realism to bear on a country they found naïve. Nicholas Spykman was one of these men, and was a total geographical determinist. However, unlike the Nazis, he did not believe in domination, merely in self-preservation and a balance of power. Spykman and others also emphasized the importance of temperate weather in creating the economic preconditions for military power.

The U.S. is uniquely situated for power, because it can dominate an entire hemisphere and has the most geographically advantageous position of any country on earth, given its multiple harbors, decent climate and ocean-wide protection from invasion. South American nations are precluded by mountain ranges and other limitations that prevent the formation of large countries with big trade networks. Further, the U.S. therefore had no need to dominate South America and so could turn to Europe. However, South America could be lost to totalitarian powers, such as the Nazis, which would be problematic. The warning still stands even after World War II. Spykman, like Mackinder in a generation before, saw Eurasia as the "Heartland," and suspected it would always be fought over. Controlling the "Heartland" meant controlling the "Rimland" as well, with all of its many ports. Kaplan thinks Spykman was more insightful to focus on the "Rimland," since it explains many recent geopolitical conflicts. George Kennan's Containment policy was successful by implicitly recognizing this fact.

During World War II, Spykman already had the right worries - containing Russia and not demilitarizing Germany once they lost, along with forming an alliance with Japan to contain Russia. However, Spykman was a foe of a United Europe because it would threaten the U.S. Spykman's geopolitics, however, were rooted in his liberal ideals of a free society. Americans would also use air power to put the entire world in play security-wise. However, no one power could or should dominate all the rest. Instead, we would have multiple hegemons.

We can characterize Spykman as endorsing a "Rimland thesis," where the ports of the "World-Island," such as Europe, the Middle East, India and the Far East will check "Heartland" powers like Russia. But the "Rimland" will not be united.

In Chapter VII, Kaplan introduces American Navy captain Alfred Mahan, who was a strong proponent of sea power. While MacKinder saw Russia's strength on land, Mahan



saw its weakness at sea. He too was a geographical determinist but he did emphasize the sea too much over land. Sea power itself, however, relied on relative isolation in land, such as that possessed by England and the United States. When the United States finally gained control of the Pacific seaboard, Mahan rejoiced now that the United States would have extraordinary power.

India and China today pay a lot of attention to Mahan, leading them to make major naval investments. The US Navy is already shrinking, allowing more work to be done by its sea allies in India, Japan, Australia and Singapore. But China will eventually challenge the US's dominance.

In Chapter VIII, Kaplan introduces yet another new intellectual, this time a contemporary professor of political science at Yale who helped to formulate the idea of the crisis of "room" that is key for Kaplan's thesis. First, Bracken argues that while Americans and Europeans are focused on globalization, Eurasia is focused on nationalism and military power, such as Israel, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, India and China. The increasing reach of military technology has brought many of these nations within new striking distance of one another. In one way, then, these nations are being brought closer together, more in line with European nations. And because Asia is growing closer together, it starts to accelerate globalization and increase centers of power. Kaplan thinks that, as a result, Eurasia is gradually being constituted as a geopolitical whole.

We shall see increasingly crowded megacities with poor living conditions and shortages which will incubate radicalism. The megacity will be the heart of geography in the twenty-first century. Kaplan thinks radical Islam will be strengthened, as Islam is transferred from a rural, desert religion into a modern ideology. Eurasia will have overlapping missile ranges and will be vulnerable to outbursts of conflict. Crowd psychology will become more important, as will the connected role of media. Nationalism will not be overrated. Some states will grow stronger and others will weaken. Statehood will also be more challenging, since governing large, poor urban populations will prove problematic. Kaplan also expects a certain dullness to set in in terms of the meaning people find in their lives due to over-stimulation. Kaplan will now turn to apply these ideas to particular regions and make predictions.



Part II, The Early-Twenty-First-Century Map, Chapters IX-X, The Geography of European Divisions, Russian and the Independent Heartland

Part II, The Early-Twenty-First-Century Map, Chapters IX-X, The Geography of European Divisions, Russian and the Independent Heartland Summary and Analysis

Despite the fact that most geopoliticians focus on Afro-Asia, Europe remains incredibly important, aside from just its financial properties. Many of Kaplan's favored intellectuals were focused on Europe and thought it would remain primary in world events. Europe has always been shaped by its relationship with Asia and Asian threats like Russia. Strong Eastern European states will protect Europe from Russia. But its own internal divides, such as the present tension between Germany and Greece, will still affect it. Europe cannot escape its divided geography any time soon.

Geographically, Europe would have always had the capacity to dominate the world given its rich natural resources and wide access to the sea. As a result, Europe has dominated the seas, but its internal mountain ranges, rivers and valleys have kept it from uniting. The European Union is rooted in a liberal internationalist ideal, however, and geography will continue to threaten it. There are exceptions, such as the Roman Empire and the Hapsburg Empire. But the breakup of both gives us ethnic and nationalist groups that persist to this day. Geography thus pushes Europe to break up time and time again into smaller nations that squabble with one another. Kaplan then argues that population trends will push European centers of power south and towards influencing nations like Egypt and Tunisia, but that its internal divisions will always matter. Today those influential powers will be Germany, Russia and, surprisingly, Greece.

Germany's economic power is nothing new. Its people are friendly and predisposed towards trade and hard work. It has the greatest GDP in continental Europe and its cultural inclination towards a middle-class ethic will keep it that way. The question is how long German military power will stay controlled. Eventually Russia's military power may force their hand. Greece stands between the two and will be subject to attempts to influence from both sides due to its weak economic development.

In Chapter X, Kaplan argues that Russia is bounded by the Caucasus, which divide it from other nations. They help to explain the Russian story. Russia is the world's greatest land power, extending almost halfway around the globe, but its oceans are primarily Arctic, almost always blocked. It is insecure as a result. They have always



attempted to extend to prevent invasion from China and Europe. It is also very cold, colder than Canada, which makes it impossible to settle, with few exceptions. The cold has made the Russians communal and capable of handling great suffering. Geography has made them feel insecure due to the insecurity of the Eastern Plain. Further, the Russians are mystics and deeply religious, including their adherence to Bolshevik communism, a religion itself.

Russia expanded gradually from populations of Eastern European Slavs and Scandinavian Vikings, gradually extending from Muscovy to the Caspian, Black, White and Barents Seas from the 14th to the 16th century. Expansion was guided by autocrats like Ivan the Terrible. Kievan Rus was their first empire, the Cossacks the second, rising in the 17th century. The Romanov dynasty then came to define modern Russian, mechanizing Russia's economy and extending its imperialism. During their rule they subdued Poland, destroyed Sweden, humbled France, took the Ukraine and the Balkans, though they gradually lost it all. Peter the Great was their greatest leader. Thus the Russians see themselves as perpetually at war. Their own sense of manifest destiny stuck with them, but its source was insecurity, and the temptation of warm water harbors, especially on the Indian Ocean.

Of course, the most familiar Russian Empire was the Soviet Union, which, led by Lenin's Red Army, took unprecedented control of its surrounding areas. The Bolsheviks, despite their protestations, became proud imperialists and imprisoned many nations. It was especially aggressive because technology made it especially vulnerable. It is extraordinary that they were able to extend throughout Eastern Europe, deep into Germany after World War II. But the Cold War ended, the USSR collapsed, and Russia once again retreated to its smallest size since Catherine the Great. Russians then turned to create the Russian federation, giving up on ever recapturing its previous power. Today Russia will use soft power instead to influence its allies and enemies. Prior to World War I Russia seemed to have the same opportunity, and without the Bolsheviks it may have developed alongside Germany and France, though poorer. Vladimir Putin has not attempted unity with Europe, however, and has instead tried to reform Russia to make it more attractive to the peoples it once ruled, though Putin has tried to continue influencing the Ukraine. Russia must also deal with an insurgent Islam.

Kaplan does not think Russia's history will repeat itself due to geographical circumstances in Central Asia, since a rising Russia and China can be played off each other by adjacent ethnic groups, such as Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is Mackinder's "Heartland." If Putin is hard on it, it can turn towards China and vice versa. And of course China's rising power will threaten Russia as well. But they may attempt to unify their autocratic power to oppose the influence of the United States.



Chapter XI, The Geography of Chinese Power

Chapter XI, The Geography of Chinese Power Summary and Analysis

China is Kaplan's next subject. He argues that China has an obvious wealth of blessings with respect to their geography. It has a great many ports, great access to natural resources and a great deal of space. The only serious threat to China is the Eurasian steppe-land to the north and northwest. Due to their rivers, they have enormous agricultural lands, though there are important contrasts between their pastoral and agricultural populations. But China has spent a long time building barriers and bridges to unify itself, most famously the Grand Canal and the Great Wall. These changes made agriculture China's economic core, which tried to create buffers against nomadic peoples bordering it from Manchuria to Tibet. China was also populated from antiquity and was less militarized. It is in effect a large continent. Unlike Russia, China is extending its influence and power through commerce.

While China's great growth cannot continue forever, its culture suggests it will remain economically powerful. And it does have some incentive to expand outward and consolidate its borders. Kaplan denies that China's rise is an existential threat and instead argues that the possibility of war with the United States is remote. The challenge is indirect, its emerging area of influence. China does have some weaknesses, such as its relationship with Mongolia and potential tensions with Russia, though trade could make them friends.

Kaplan's thought is that China will gradually extend its economic influence out from its borders and in that way create great power. The idea is to settle border disputes, open trade routes and establish more centers of power. There are, of course, tensions with sea power, such as with Japan and the United States with its power in Taiwan. And it has been aggressive in contesting those regions but it still thinks of itself as a land-based power and does not care much for the sea. But it mostly acts to dissuade the US from exercising its power, rather than attacking it. But Taiwan will be a point of contention and the US will not always be able to preserve Taiwan's democratic government in case of challenge. Preserving US power in the region requires increasing alliances and military coordination with Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, along with India. But China will try to pry open American grip on the area.

The central drama of the 21st century, militarily, may be China's attempts to challenge the US's attempts to prevent it from becoming the hegemon of the eastern hemisphere.



Chapters XII-XIII, India's Geographical Dilemma, The Iranian Pivot

Chapters XII-XIII, India's Geographical Dilemma, The Iranian Pivot Summary and Analysis

The United States and China will gradually become power rivals in Eurasia. India is the ultimate "pivot" state required to control the area, and Americans do not understand their geographical and geopolitical situation. To begin, India is rooted in the Indian subcontinent and is divided by a great many rivers and hemmed in by the Bay of Bengal, the Murmere and Himalayan mountains and the Hindu Cush. It is internally vast but it lacks a single core of demographic organization. For these reasons, there is an entire civilization all India's own. And it lacks China's political unity.

India's quest for twenty-first century power is, like so many others, greatly affected by geography. Its main geographical factor is that despite its geographical coherence, its boundaries are quite weak, especially in the northwest, such as Afghanistan. Kaplan then reviews a number of previous Indian civilizations that were threatened by that border. Many achieved enormous land domination despite primitive technology in centuries past, such as the Gupta Empire (320-550). India was later vulnerable to Muslim immigration and infiltration. Choosing Delhi as the capital city was partly to block related invaders. But India also had the strength of being extremely culturally diverse due to its sometimes porous borders. The Mughal Empire was one of the most culturally and religiously diverse in history. Further, the Indian elites often thought that Afghanistan and Pakistan's land masses were naturally theirs in order to protect those borders.

The British ruled India by controlling the seas and while British rule brought some improvements, such as generating a modern governing bureaucracy and a rail system, still produced disunity by their withdrawal in 1947, generating a split between Pakistan and India. But their natural opposition should not surprise anyone. Though there may be advantages to the two nations' cooperation. Afghanistan is a different story. It is terribly poor and is hardly a nation at all, given how many mountain ranges divide it. A stable and moderate Afghanistan is critical to restraining the formation of radical Islamic states near India, since it could block intra-Eurasian trade. The Indian subcontinent and its contiguous states would be stable, but that is not the case now due to deep seated insecurities in the area. India also rivals China, but their rivalry is more abstract and less emotional. There are some border disputes but at the moment China helps to build or improve Indian ports on its Eastern side. It also provides military and economic aid. There is little history of hostility in the past but they may come to gradually threaten one another due to the crisis of room. India is also less secure, since its empires have had varying geographies as opposed to China which has natural borders.

Turning to Iran, Kaplan begins by claiming that Iran is stuck within the "vast quadrilateral" of national groups, between Europe, Russia, Asia and Africa. No one state



dominates this area, though its populations are young and may jointly produce positive change in the next generation. Other important factors are the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian plateau and the Anatolian land bridge, which Kaplan outlines.

The most important of these three features is the Iranian plateau, associating only with Iran. Its population is large, at 74 million and has reduced population growth. It has great oil and gas power. It also has an attractive political position by the Mediterranean in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. Iran is also not a contrived 20th century state but corresponds to the plateau. Further the Iranian people have an ancient ethnic and cultural unity, much like the Jews, beginning in 700 B.C. with the Medes. Kaplan then follows their history up to the present day. Its culture remained vital for a long period of time. Iran's Shiism grew out of that and in turn produced the clerical hierarchy that rules the nation. Even the Iranian revolution had a relatively high degrees of vitality and modernity. Kaplan believes that Iran's geography, history and human capital mean it will critically affect the Greater Middle East and Eurasia by virtue of its political institutions and how they evolve. Kaplan then illustrates by pointing to Iran's ability to influence political and religious movements in nearby nations.

As Kaplan wrote the book, Iran was creating a postmodern military empire, the first one, that lacks colonies and has few armaments. It instead engages in proxy warfare, asymmetrical weapons and appeals to the marginalized. It acts mostly out of fear and intimidation, however, which suggests an ebb in its power and its ultimate downfall. Iran is also vitally affected by the evolution of Iraq. Kaplan hopes for another Green Movement for democracy, since a liberal Iran could produce a better power balance between Sunni and Shia Muslims to keep the region stable. It would also help produce a cultural continuum with the great Persian empires of the past.



Chapter XIV, The Former Ottoman Empire, Part III, America's Destiny, Chapter XV, Braudel, Mexico, and Grand Strategy

Chapter XIV, The Former Ottoman Empire, Part III, America's Destiny, Chapter XV, Braudel, Mexico, and Grand Strategy Summary and Analysis

Turkey, the core of the former Ottoman Empire, is well situated vis-à-vis the Arab world to influence Arab politics in part because it controls the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, though it cannot simply deny water to the Arab nations to its south. Turkey also has a closer relationship to Europe, in large part due to a history of entanglement with European powers and the attempts by post-WWI ruler and founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who forcibly secularized much of the country, though these moves towards a Western form of life were the result of centuries of relationships. Turkey, accordingly, was shocked by the fact that the EU rejected Turkish full membership. Turkey was democratic and a member of NATO, but it was Muslim. However, Ataturk also indirectly encouraged a return to Muslim identity when he moved the capital city from Istanbul to Ankara.

When the economy was liberalized in the 1980s by prime minister Ozal, a middle class Muslim population arose and claimed political influence. But Ozal died in 1993 and his Muslim identity and good relationship with the West was no longer reflected among the people. In late 2002, an election gave a strong parliamentary majority to the Islamist Justice and Development Party, and installed Prime Minister Erdogan in power. Revived Islam has competed with fascism and Marxism. And over time Turkey became less European and more hostile to Israel and the U.S.

Today, in the light of the Arab Spring, Turkey is seen as an exemplar of an Islamic democracy. Turkey is coming to have more authority in the region. It has a lively Islamist political movement, a strong military capacity and access to water. It can therefore compete with Iran for ultimate Arab influence. And Turkey has even reached out to Iran. Turkey will remain important as a conduit for oil transportation from Iran and the Caspian Sea to Europe. While Turkey seems to support Iranian nuclear power, the silver lining for the West is that without a powerful Turkey, Iran will dominate the Arab world. Further, Turkey is still part of NATO and has limited relations with Israel.

Before the 20th century, the Arab nations between the Mediterranean and Iran mattered little. Today they matter as threats to Israel, terrorist harborers and potential new democracies. Iraq will have a distinct contribution as well due to its large population and



oil reserves. Iraq is an inevitably conflicted nation, with many ethnicities and a brutal history. Factions and revolutions have plagued Iraq for a long time. If Iraq stays democratic, it will be uncertain and corrupt. It will be a weak state at best. Syria too will continue to be a center of political turbulence, if not the epicenter of Arab political instability. It is a weak state with a weak history of its own. Following Iraq and Afghanistan, the next heart of Sunni jihad may be Syria with a future regime. Kaplan is not totally pessimistic, however, as it could be peaceful as an agricultural society with commercial trade routes.

In general, the Arab world is the result of a limited crisis of room all of its own, as part of the center of the Eastern Hemisphere and the great civilizations that frame its borders. And while the nations differ, they are unified in virtue of horror at the plight of the Palestinians under the Israelis, especially in the West Bank. And as time progresses, the Arab population, including the population in Israel, will simply dwarf Israeli populations. Kaplan prays for a Hashemite Jordan to continue, a united post-Assad Syria, a democratic Iran, and the taming of Hezbollah and Hamas.

After Chapter XIV, Kaplan turns to Part III, a discussion of America's destiny in Chapter XV. Kaplan begins by turning to another geographical intellectual, a mid-20th century Frenchman named Fernand Braudel who moved historians to focus more on geography. Braudel, Kaplan thinks, will help us to understand the future. He speaks of varying wavelengths of time, the most important being the slow change of geography, and then medium-term cycles that consist of demographic, economic, agricultural and political change. The shortest cycles are those of daily politics and diplomacy.

Braudel leads us to ask whether our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are transient or part of a deeper part of American destiny. Could WWI and WW2 also have been part of that destiny? Kaplan starts to apply Braudel by discussing a 2009 conference in Washington on a panel discussion about the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan and some later, related events. The question is what we're doing in the Middle East. Stability helps China primarily and keeps us from stabilizing the potentially failed state of Mexico.

In fact, Kaplan thinks America faces three geopolitical dilemmas, a chaotic Eurasian heartland in the Middle East, a rising China and a troubled Mexico. We can deal with China and Mexico best by withdrawing from the Middle East. But Kaplan questions this, wondering how nations would respond to an immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. Would respect for American power decline? We have too much of a stake in the Middle East. The Iraq War had benefits, with a better position militarily in the world and we did not lose anywhere near as many troops as we could have. Further, the Army is now well trained, as is the Marine Corps. Our wars in the Middle East have not doomed us. We are not set to decline as Rome did. In fact, our military presence may keep parts of the world stable, just as the Roman Empire did. Rome failed because it had no way to gracefully retreat from its military commitments, but we may have the ability to do so.

Surprisingly, Kaplan thinks the best way to cement American military power is to prepare the world for it to retreat. How can it prepare itself for a long, careful exit from being the global superpower? By avoiding costly interventions, using diplomacy and



intelligence services. It must also help to stabilize Mexico, where its coherence as a nation can be threatened by Hispanic continuity inside and south of the country. Latin movement north could change the nation, since its boundary with Mexico is purely artificial, not geographical. At present, Mexico does not get enough attention from East Coast elites.

Mexico is naturally at danger itself, because it has no geographical unity. Drug cartels ravage the country and its people continue to move north, challenging America's Anglo-Protestant culture. In the past, American immigrants have been diverse, keeping them from changing the culture entirely and requiring them to assimilate, but not so with Mexican immigrants. We have no comparable experience historically. Some think that in sixty to eighty years a Latinized Southwest will join Mexico to form a new country. Kaplan doubts that American nationalism is enough to resist this fact.

Instead, over the next century, America will change into a "Polynesian-cum-mestizo" civilization, a multiracial assemblage of many large suburban city-states. It will be a duty-free zone for business and use immigration to bring the best and brightest and diverse to its shores. Nationalism will be diluted but America will still be a military power. It is no longer an island. But this rosy future requires that Mexico not become a failed state. Mexico could be a disaster. Kaplan thinks US military involvement could help. Only in the short run can strict immigration policy solve the problem of avoiding negative influence from a failed Mexico. If Mexico reaches first-world status, however, that is all to the good. We still have our geographical strengths, however, from coast to coast, but it will be integrated with north and south. Ultimately the US must be prepared to gradually move into a tighter, cohesive arrangement with Mexico and Canada or try to maintain a dangerous, unstable border with Mexico.

Kaplan ends by arguing that America must balance power in Eurasia and unify North America. It will be easier to do them both at once. And we should do so to advance the cause of the liberal intellectual, spreading capitalism, democracy and liberal attitudes towards ideas across the world.



Characters

Robert Kaplan

Robert David Kaplan, the author of the book, is a major character in *The Revenge of Geography* in two senses. First, he actually places himself in various parts of the story, mostly in attempts to add narrative to what is an otherwise rather dry academic read. He is a character in a secondary sense in that it is his arguments and his thought process that are on display throughout the book. That is, Kaplan actually describes how his concept of geography and foreign policy has evolved over time.

Kaplan is known as an American journalist who has been published in all the major print outlets in the United States. While he is outside of the academic world in terms of his job, he is very much discussed in foreign policy academic circles and in government. An overarching view of his is that cultural, historical and geographical tensions will determine much of global politics and that these factors were only temporarily suspended during the Cold War. Kaplan is also well known for supporting the Iraq War along with a number of other American Intellectuals.

While not always hawkish in the past, Kaplan thought that American military power could improve the Middle East's political situation. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he became especially focused on the defense of American imperialism, including supporting the 2003 Iraq War, support that he later came to deeply regret. *The Revenge of Geography* is in many ways his explanation of why he had been wrong before.

American Foreign Policy Intellectuals

The primary way in which contemporary American foreign policy intellectuals are featured in the book is as an open audience for Kaplan's arguments. He does not name particular figures, but it is clear that he has a number of them in mind, including the liberal and neoconservative intellectuals who had helped to plan and advocate the 2003 Iraq War. A common view among these individuals at the time was that Americans had an interest in being the global hegemon. In particular, the American military could effectively spread markets, human rights and democratic government in minor authoritarian nations like Iraq and Afghanistan.

After 9/11, these intellectuals became especially aggressive, arguing that the conversion of Arab nations that had links to Al Qaeda and other forms of Islamic terrorism was a national security necessity. Using the pretext of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, these intellectuals convinced many that war with Iraq was necessary for the defense of the United States, its allies and its interests.

However, Kaplan admits, and asks his reader to admit along with him, that the concept of military power and strategy that had led to the Iraq War was responsible in part for the disaster that was the war in Iraq, which lasted from 2003 roughly to 2012. Far too



many lives were lost for far too little. In the end, Iraq will now be a failed state, which will increase the relative power of Iran and provide a state that authoritarian nations like China can control. The Iraq War could have been avoided if people had taken note of these factors.

Nicholas Spykman

Nicholas Spykman was an early 20th century, Dutch-American geo-strategist on whom Kaplan draws in order to employ his geographical concepts of the "Heartland" and the "Rimland."

Halford MacKinder

Halford MacKinder was a turn of the 20th century English geographer who founded geopolitics on whom Kaplan draws heavily.

Karl Haushofer

Karl Haushofer was a German general and geo-strategist who influenced Hitler's geopolitical theories whom Kaplan criticizes for misapplying geopolitical ideas.

Robert Strauze-Hupe

Robert Strauze-Hupe is an Austro-American geopolitician of the mid-20th century who defended a weak form of geographical determinism.

Fernand Braudel

Fernand Braudel is a mid-century French historian on whom Kaplan draws.

The United States

Analyzed as a global actor, the United States is protected from invasion by two oceans and has a strong position as world hegemon. This power can be used for good but must be used carefully, in Kaplan's view.

Europe

Europe is a geopolitical unit that Kaplan argues will remain important throughout foreseeable geopolitical history.



Russia

Russia is made insecure by its borders and lack of warm water harbors, Russia is perpetually aggressive.

China

Geographically secure and potentially economically the most powerful country in the world, the rise of China threatens to rebalance world political power.

India

The Indian subcontinent that contains India is potentially quite powerful insofar as it can peacefully relate to China and Pakistan.

Iran

The major power player in the Middle East, Iran is perpetually insecure and may be able to become roughly democratic.

Turkey

The political and intellectual leader of much of the Middle East, Turkey presents a development model of democracy to other Arab Nations.

Mexico

Mexico is the greatest challenger to the security of the United States's geopolitical future, due to its large immigrant populations, its nearness to failed state status and its unnatural border with the US.



Objects/Places

The Map of Earth

The most important single object in the book, the map of earth is the subject of *The Revenge of Geography*.

Geographical Determinism

Geographical determinism is the view that geographical factors determine the course of history. Kaplan flirts with this view but typically draws back from it modestly.

The Heartland

The "Heartland" is Mackinder's description of the center of the "World-Island" comprised of Europe, Asia and Africa. The "Heartland" stretches from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic.

The Rimland

The "Rimland" is Spykman's term for the European coast land, the Arabian-Middle Eastern desert land and the Asiatic monsoon land which holds great importance for naval control of the world.

The World Island

The "World Island" is Mackinder's term for the interlinked continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, the most populated and richest of contiguous land combinations.

The Crisis of Room

The crisis of room is the geopolitical crisis brewing as populations increase and fill up available geographical space.

The Middle East

Kaplan spends a great deal of time analyzing the geopolitical circumstances of Arab nations in the Middle East.



The 2003 Iraq War

The 2003 Iraq War is a political and humanitarian disaster that Kaplan once supported and now regrets.

Mexican Immigration

The influx of Mexican immigrants promises to change the face of the United States.

Mountain Ranges

Mountain ranges are important natural barriers to expansion and sources of conflict.

Warm Sea

A warm sea is critical for having productive naval harbors.

Population Growth

Population growth is one of the main drivers of the crisis of room.

Natural Borders

Natural borders result from geographical factors like rivers and mountains.

Unnatural Borders

Some borders are drawn merely based on political expediency. They are thereby unnatural and less secure than natural borders.

Themes

The Revenge of Geography

The book's main theme corresponds to its title. It claims that geography is a critical feature in determining social, political, economic and military outcomes of conflicts between and within nature. Kaplan appeals to a number of ideas and theories of geopoliticians and intellectuals both in the relative past and the present. The idea is that critical changes in history can be tied to the evolving relationship between populations and geography. In his brief history of historical hotspots, Kaplan covers their climates and topographies as much as anything else. For instance, Russia is both cold and mostly flat, leaving it with few warm water ports and natural barriers to invasion, making it especially insecure. This is why the Soviet Union sought to control Eastern Europe.

So the revenge of geography is the fact that whether we like it or not, geography will determine much of history. Geography gets its revenge in the post-Cold War world, where it will simply not allow itself to be ignored by the global foreign policy establishment.

But the theme of geography's revenge has another element as well. Specifically, geography got its revenge in showing that the war in Iraq, that Kaplan once arduously supported, was doomed to failure in protecting American national security. A weakened, failed state Iraq makes Iran and China, two potential enemies, relatively more powerful, and overextends the US military, making resisting or embracing Mexican immigration and eventual alteration of the US more difficult.

The Crisis of Room

The crisis of room refers to a set of present and anticipated global conflicts that arise from population growth and expansion across the globe. As countries become increasingly full of people, they will want more natural resources, viable ports and land control, but they will be increasingly unable to meet those goals. These global conflicts include the increasing appeal of nationalism and military power in Eurasia, leading Arab nations, Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korea to seek nuclear weapons, among other things. This "belt" of populated nations will only increase in tensions. Further, alliances in Asia will become more important as many of its empty areas will fill up. Further, the US will ultimately face deep cultural and political change due to Mexico's expanding population.

The more "global" crisis of room results from the increasing power and speed of military and transportation technology. At present, many nations can strike one another with deadly nuclear missiles from across the world, drawing these nations much closer together politically and putting them in conflict with one another. Further, air travel and high-speed rail makes nations socially nearer to one another by virtue of making travel



easier. These technologies, as they advance, generate uncertainty and threaten global stability as a result. The peoples of the world are gradually becoming more claustrophobic. This trend will only be amplified by increasing urban populations.

Resisting Geographical Determinism

Geographical determinism is the view that, with respect to historical outcomes, geography is the only factor that matters. A weaker form of geographical determinism holds that while, in the short-run, factors like culture and politics determine outcomes, in the long-run geography dominates. Looking at history over the span of fifty years, a century or more, geography provides powerful explanatory and predictive power with respect to geopolitical events such as wars, population growth, expansion, contraction and the like. Geographical determinism is a position that attracts Kaplan, but he ultimately wishes to avoid it. Instead, he not only resists the position but tries to exonerate his preferred intellectual heroes from the charge as well, though he admits that some figures are closer to geographical determinism than others.

Why does Kaplan flirt with geographical determinism? Largely because he is convinced the best way to explain geopolitical events is by appealing, in large part, to geographical factors and tightly related demographic factors. *The Revenge of Geography* is just an extended attempt to establish this claim. But then why does Kaplan resist geographical determinism? In large part because the claim is just too strong to be plausible. Kaplan wants to leave room for culture and politics to play explanatory roles, so he has to show throughout the book that his position is not geographically deterministic. There is more to history than geography, but not much more, in other words.

Style

Perspective

Robert Kaplan, the author of the *Revenge of Geography*, is rather forthright about his perspective as a partially recovering American neoconservative foreign policy intellectual. Kaplan is a journalist but also a scholar whose academic work is highly influential at the highest levels of the US government, including presidents. And it was partly due to his support for the 2003 Iraq War, that most leading national American politicians supported the war. However, he has since come to deeply regret his support, so much of *The Revenge of Geography* is driven by his need to explain why Iraq was a disaster.

His solution, more or less, is to blame geography. Kaplan's status as a quasi-geographical determinist is clear. Over the long-run most geopolitical outcomes are determined by geographic factors combined with demographic trends. Together these factors demonstrated that the US had no strong interest in controlling Iraq despite its presence in the "Heartland" due to the fact that a weak Iraqi state gave Iran and China, two geopolitical threats, more relative power. The war also tied up some of our resources to protect against and focus on our porous Mexican border.

So in general, Kaplan should be understood as defending a quasi-geographic determinism. But he is doing it in part to try to make sense of the US's foreign policy future especially in light of recent foreign policy failures in the Middle East.

Tone

The Revenge of Geography is an academic work written by an academically informed journalist. As a result, it combines the tones of a dry academic work on geopolitical theory with personal and historical narratives with a considerably more literary style that makes these sections readable. The dry academic style is most prominent in the "theory" portions of the book, where Kaplan is explaining or summarizing some article written by an early 20th century geopolitician like Halford MacKinder or when he is explaining features of the global map such as discussing the place of the Caucasus in Russia or the importance of the balanced power relationship between Turkey and Iran. The prose becomes especially dry in discussions of the "Heartland" and "Rimland" theses.

On the other hand, the tone picks up when Kaplan is telling a historical tale, such as the evolution of Russia's political class or the course of a series of wars. He is able to make vivid the personalities of various nations, especially Russia and Turkey. He is also able to present in a compelling light a narrative about the future of the United States and its relationship to Mexico. But perhaps even more powerfully, Kaplan places himself in the story by describing his travels across the world and his struggles with the disaster that

was the War in Iraq. Between the two types of narrative, the latter is more compelling as prose, though the former is more relevant to the book's main aims.

Structure

The *Revenge of Geography* is a relatively large book, clocking in at 350 pages of text. It is composed of a preface and fifteen mostly lengthy chapters, themselves divided into three large parts. After the preface begins Part I, "Visionaries," which is devoted largely to Kaplan's attempts to revive a series of early 20th and late 19th century geopolitical theorists, such as Halford MacKinder and Nicholas Spykman. It also introduces Kaplan's quasi-geographical determinism and defends it against other theories of geopolitical change. Kaplan follows his "visionaries" in rethinking the map of the world, dividing it roughly into hemispheres and arguing that most important events will take place in Eurasia, on the "World-Island" and in the "Heartland." Kaplan is also keen to resist full-blown geographical determinism in a number of places and he outlines his concept of a "crisis of room."

Part II, "The Early Twenty-First Century Map," applies the theory that Kaplan develops to a number of important geopolitical zones. He begins with divisions in Europe and moves to Russia. A discussion of China follows, along with India. Part II is rounded out with an analysis of two Arab powers, Turkey and Iran. Part III, "America's Destiny," contains only one chapter that focuses on the future of the United States especially in its complicated relationship with Mexico. The bottom line here is that if America can learn from a geographical view of history, it can survive over-extension in the Middle East and an increasingly Latin culture at home.

Quotes

"A good place to understand the present, and to ask questions about the future, is on the ground, traveling as slowly as possible." (Preface, xiii)

"With the political ground shifting rapidly under one's feet, the map, though not determinative, is the beginning of discerning a historical logic about what might come next." (Preface, xviii)

"The Berlin Wall's erasure made us blind to the real geographical impediments that still divided us, and still awaited us." (Chapter I, 3)

"In other words, true realism is an art more than a science, in which the temperament of a statesman plays as much of a role as his intellect." (Chapter II, 24)

"Geography is the backdrop to human history itself." (Chapter II, 28)

"I wish to argue for a modest acceptance of fate, secured ultimately in the facts of geography, in order to curb excessive zeal in foreign policy, a zeal of which I myself have been guilty." (Chapter II, 36)

"Space—precisely because it is more crowded and therefore more precious than ever before—still matters, and matters greatly." (Chapter III, 49)

"Herodotus is at the heart of my argument for the relevance of McNeill and Hodgson in the twenty-first century." (Chapter III, 56)

"The brilliance of 'The Geographical Pivot of History' lay in its anticipation of a global system at a time when Edwardian-era minds were still employed in exertions over a European continental system." (Chapter IV, 70-1)

"Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World." (Chapter IV, 74)

"Spykman's Rimland thesis fits neatly with this scenario, with the marginal zones of Europe, the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Far East together dominating the seaboard continuum around Eurasia in the Indian and Pacific oceans, buttressed by their substantial populations, economic development, and hydrocarbon resources: together, they check the Heartland power of Russia, even as Russia gains the warming waters of its northern Arctic seaboard." (Chapter VII, 102)

"It is the very compression of geography that will provide optimal circumstances for new and dangerous ideologies—as well as for healthy democratizing ideas." (Chapter VIII, 123)



"As Greece ably demonstrates, Europe remains a truly ambitious work in progress: one that will be influenced by trends and convulsions from the south and east in a world reeling from a crisis of room." (Chapter IX, 153)

"The United States, as the regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, will seek to prevent China from becoming the regional hegemon over much of the Eastern Hemisphere. This could be the signal drama of the age." (Chapter X, 227)

"The key to understanding India is the realization that while as a subcontinent India makes eminent geographical sense, its natural boundaries are, nevertheless, quite weak in places." (Chapter XII, 233)

"To speak in terms of destiny is dangerous, since it implies an acceptance of fate and determinism, but clearly given Iran's geography, history and human capital, it seems likely that the Greater Middle East, and by extension Eurasia, will be critically affected by Iran's own political evolution, for better or for worse." (Chapter XIII, 276)

"The silver lining for the West is the following: without the ascent of Turkey, revolutionary Iran becomes the dominant power in the Middle East." (Chapter XIV, 301)

"America faces three primary geopolitical dilemmas: a chaotic Eurasian heartland in the Middle East, a rising and assertive Chinese superpower, and a state in deep trouble in Mexico." (Chapter XV, 326)

"A world balanced is a world free." (Chapter XV, 346)



Topics for Discussion

Explain Kaplan's change of heart on the Iraq War. Why did he change his mind? And how does the book explain the rationale for his change in view?

What is "the revenge of geography"? In other words, how does geography get "revenge" in Kaplan's view?

What is geographical determinism? Why is Kaplan attracted to it? Why does he distance himself from it?

Outline Kaplan's conception of the "crisis of room." Is it a real crisis? Why or why not?

Explain in detail whether you think that Kaplan's emphasis on geographical factors is adequately defended and why.

Analyze the concepts of the "World-Island," the "Heartland," and the "Rimland." Who originated these ideas? And how does Kaplan employ them?

Discuss Kaplan's predictions for the future of the United States. Do you think they're well-grounded?