

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

Random House Trade Paperback, New York, 2012.

In this book, Robert Kaplan has offered an innovative prism through which to view global crises and understand what lies ahead for countries based on their geographical settings. He builds on the insights and theories of renowned geographers and geopolitical thinkers to retrace critical pivots in history and analyze the evolving global scene. Kaplan describes the history of the world's power centers by examining their climates, topographies, and proximities to troubled lands. He then applies the lessons learned to the contemporary crises in Europe, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. Finally, Kaplan posits that the U.S. might regret engaging in conflicts in distinct regions like Iraq and Afghanistan rather than tending to its immediate neighbor Mexico, which is on the verge of becoming a semi-failed state.

The book is divided into three parts and fifteen chapters. Part I discusses the theoretical foundations of geopolitics and explains the idea that geography remains a relevant if not a defining factor in geopolitics. Kaplan cites theories of renowned geopolitical scientists from the nineteenth and the twentieth century to support this argument. What makes the book worth-reading is its multi-perspectivism, through its incorporation of the writings of various geographers and strategists including Herodotus, Mackinder, Spykman, Morgenthau, Mahan, McNeill and Hodgson. Building upon the assertions by these theorists, Kaplan exemplifies that “the Eastern Europe, despite the collapse of the artificial boundary of the Berlin Wall is still under threat from Russia, as it has been for centuries”. Similarly, Brazil can never be more important compared to China despite its vastness and economic growth because unlike China, it lacks a temperate zone, disease-free climate, and command on strategic sea lines. Geography goes far in explaining the backwardness and poverty in Africa despite its relative proximity to Eurasia due to natural barriers like deserts, thick forests, and rivers, which

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barred their exposure to great civilizations of Mediterranean. Kaplan mentions Iraq and Pakistan as “arguably the two most illogically conceived states” on geographical grounds. However, he fails to provide reasoning for his statement.

Part II of the book focuses on various regions of the globe, with an emphasis on the super continent of Eurasia. It aims to describe the geography of Europe, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, the Middle East, and North America. This examination seeks to explain how geography both helps and hinders them in achieving their geostrategic aims of regional or global hegemony. Sighting Europe’s critical energy dependency on Russia due to geographic compulsions, Kaplan predicts the possibility of yet another effort by Russia to pose threats to Europe, not through land forces, but through political and economic pressure. He believes that despite its steady economic progress over the last three decades, China does not pose an existential threat and the possibility of war. Part III discusses America’s role in the world and how it is influenced by geography. The main theme is that the country's geopolitical orientation will change from east–west to north–south, reflecting Mexico's growing population and the power of drug cartels. Kaplan further asserts that America faces three major “geopolitical dilemmas: a chaotic Eurasia in the Middle East, a rising and assertive Chinese superpower, and a state in deep trouble in Mexico”. He believes that a stable and prosperous Mexico, working in organic concert with the U.S., would be an unbeatable combination in geopolitics. While emphasizing the importance of geography in contemporary geopolitics, Kaplan predicts that by 2050, the U.S. would be a super-state consisting of Canada, the current U.S., and Mexico.

The book appears to be a rebuttal to thinkers who suggest that globalism and technological advancements have severely undermined geography. Kaplan advocates that geography, despite its limitations, will continue to influence future geopolitics and must be used for better policy decisions. However, the very idea of exalting geography sounds outdated in a world where air power has replaced sea power and forbidding mountain ranges no longer matter much; a world where geo-politics have largely been replaced by geo-

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economics and transactionalism; and where there are no more permanent interests but issue-based alliances. Notwithstanding its inherent biases, the book should be read by policymaking bodies, geopolitical experts, and students of international relations and American Studies to educate themselves on the importance of geography as one of the factors in understanding threats and preparing policies. Kaplan certainly makes his case that foreign policy must not overlook geography if one is to understand the nature of a country and its geopolitics.

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