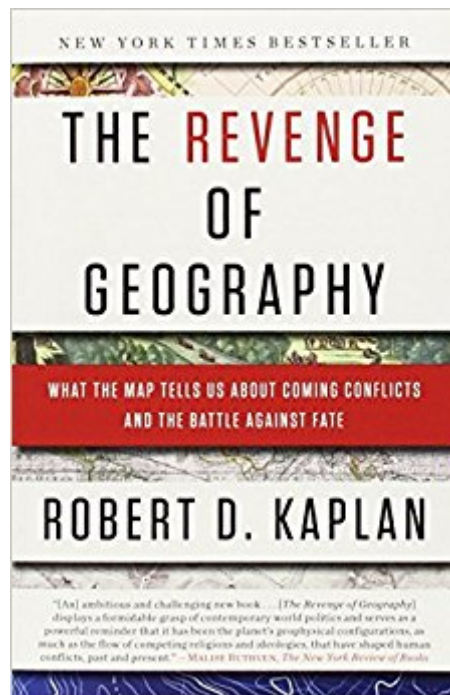




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# The Revenge Of Geography: What The Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts And The Battle Against Fate



## 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" âKaplan plunges into a planetary review that is often thrilling in its sheer scale . . . encyclopedic.ââ "The New Yorker" â[The Revenge of Geography] serves the facts straight up. . . . Kaplanâ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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (September 10, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812982223

ISBN-13: 978-0812982220

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 334 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #28,979 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Geography #64 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Human Geography #88 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography

## Customer Reviews

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valuable antidote to the feel-good manifestoes that often masquerade as strategic thought.â••â•• "The Daily Beast" [A] remarkable new book . . . With such books as *Balkan Ghosts* and *Monsoon*, Kaplan, an observer of world events who sees what others often do not, has already established himself as one of the most discerning geopolitical writers of our time. *The Revenge of Geography* cements his status.â••â•• "National Review" From the Hardcover edition.

Robert D. Kaplan is the bestselling author of sixteen books on foreign affairs and travel translated into many languages, including *Asia's Cauldron*, *The Revenge of Geography*, *Monsoon*, *The Coming Anarchy*, and *Balkan Ghosts*. He is a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and a contributing editor at *The Atlantic*, where his work has appeared for three decades. He was chief geopolitical analyst at Stratfor, a visiting professor at the United States Naval Academy, and a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board. *Foreign Policy* magazine has twice named him one of the world's Top 100 Global Thinkers. From the Hardcover edition.

As I read *The Revenge of Geography* I found myself wishing that it had been published a few years earlier, or that I had not retired from my job teaching high school Advanced Placement World History a couple of years ago, so that I could have used the rich material Robert D. Kaplan presents here in my classroom. That is high praise indeed, but it is no understatement to say that this book, alongside the works of Jared Diamond, Samuel Huntington, and a few other geographers/historians/researchers, is enormously valuable for those seeking a better understanding of our world and our future. Kaplan's greatest achievement here is his ability to explain the effects of geography on our past, present, and future. In the first of three segments, he provides the historical background to his study, tracing the work of historians and geographers from Herodotus through the twentieth century. In the second section, he analyzes the early twenty first century map, describing the ways in which geography influences the development of Europe, Russia, China, India, and the Middle East. Finally, the third section examines the fate of the United States and Mexico, two nations inevitably bound together by the map and whose futures will inevitably see us growing more intertwined. Throughout this meticulously researched work Kaplan provides "local color" through a series of fascinating anecdotes, many of them based on his own travels through the regions under discussion. These enhance what is already an impressive and scholarly account, one that I believe and hope will become essential reading for diplomats and strategists around the world.

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.<sup>2</sup> You're interested in the part of the book I was, which is to glimpse ahead into the USA's future.<sup>3</sup> 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).

Interesting book. The author has a lot of historical knowledge that makes this book rich in information as well as in personal experience. However, the first section was extremely difficult to get through because it was repetitive and seemingly endless. After passing this section, I enjoyed very much brief world history lesson of common era along with some in antiquity as it related to geography. I appreciated the authors main points regarding the importance of geography along with decision makers. I disliked the constant 1-2 lines of preamble to each quote presented. Overall a good read once you get past the fact that the main point of the book could be explained in one example rather than the using all examples in common era history; and I enjoyed his take on the geopolitics on the world today.

I found this book to be very interesting on a few different notes. First and foremost, the amount of topics touched on in this book which are actually coming to fruition right now across the globe. Although this book was written pretty recently, new developments within our world are things described by Kaplan right now. Examples:-He says that the largest threat to Western Europe would be the threat of refugees streaming across from N. Africa and the Middle East.-He proposes that Russia will try to impose their will upon Ukraine.-There will be tensions between China and others within the South China Sea as China begins to build up its naval fleet and expand its island chain (China is literally BUILDING islands now). I also found this book rather simple to read, which made it pretty enjoyable. All in all, a pretty solid book, and I would recommend it to all who are interested in either current events or geopolitics.

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