

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

By Robert D. Kaplan
Random House, 2012
403 pp. \$28
ISBN 978-1400069835

Reviewed by
Francis P. Sempa

Ever since the rise of Hitler and the Second World War, international events and circumstances have led to periodic revivals of interest in the ideas and concepts of classical geopolitical theorists. As the Wehrmacht surged into the vast expanses of Soviet Russia and Imperial Japan sought to carve out a greater East Asia and Pacific empire, Western strategists and even popular media outlets such as *Time* magazine “discovered” the “Heartland” theory first propounded by British geographer Halford Mackinder in his 1904 address to the Royal Geographical Society entitled “The Geographical Pivot of History,” revised and expanded in his 1919 masterpiece *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, and further revised and updated in a 1943 *Foreign Affairs* article, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace.”

Mackinder identified the northern-central core of the Eurasian landmass as the “Heartland” and “pivot” of world politics and the potential seat of a global empire. He viewed Germany’s two wars with Russia in the 20th century as struggles for command of the Heartland and preeminence in Eurasia. He also discerned a pattern to international politics that repeatedly pitted insular sea powers against continental-based land powers.

With the onset of the Cold War in the mid-to-late 1940s, some Western strategists perceived that the U.S.-Soviet struggle for the world could best be understood not solely as a conflict between competing ideologies, but more by reference to classical geopolitics. Indeed, George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, James Burnham, and Raymond Aron were among those who viewed the Cold War through Mackinderesque lenses. Containment’s intellectual origins can be traced back to “The Geopolitical Pivot of History.”

The advent of atomic weapons, however, convinced many in the West that classical geopolitics was outmoded and irrelevant. Nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery systems, it was argued, made geography less pertinent to international politics. After the U.S. defeat in Southeast Asia and the Soviet offensive in the Third World during the 1970s, Western strategists such as Colin Gray resurrected classical geopolitics to explain the growing threat to the West posed by Soviet expansionism. In the 1970s Gray wrote a monograph entitled *The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era* that introduced a new generation of scholars and policymakers to the works of Halford Mackinder, Yale professor Nicholas Spykman, and American sea power theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan.

The end of the Cold War, with its promise of a “peace dividend” and a “new world order,” once again seemed to consign classical geopolitics to the ash heap of history. Europe, the center of great power struggles for centuries, was at peace. There was no peer competitor to challenge America. Strategist Edward Luttwak argued that “geo-economics” was replacing geopolitics. Francis

Fukuyama provocatively proclaimed the “end of history.” Thomas Friedman pointed to “globalization” as the key to understanding world politics.

Then, quite suddenly, the United States was fighting two wars in Asia (in Afghanistan and Iraq), conducting a global “war on terror,” attempting to prevent two Asian countries (North Korea and Iran) from getting nuclear weapons, and dealing with the rising Asian powers China and India. Geography, it seemed, mattered after all.

That is why the geopolitical writings of Mackinder, Spykman, and Mahan are front and center in Robert D. Kaplan’s new book, *The Revenge of Geography*. Kaplan in the recent past has traveled to the world’s hot spots to observe up close and write about the difficult and brutal work performed by the U.S. military. With the end of the Cold War and the relative rise of great powers in Asia, Kaplan has taken a broader view of global events. This was first evidenced in his 2010 *Monsoon*, in which he identified the Indian Ocean and its surrounding landmasses as the pivot of world politics in the 21st century. Now, in *The Revenge of Geography*, he uses Mackinder, Spykman, Mahan, and lesser geopolitical thinkers to explain the global politics of today and tomorrow.

Kaplan’s is a realist’s view of the world that accepts human nature as the “Thucydidean pantheon of fear, self-interest, and honor,” resulting in a “world of incessant conflict and coercion” (p. 25) that forces strategists and policymakers to recognize “the most blunt, uncomfortable, and deterministic of truths: those of geography” (p. 28). “[G]eography,” he writes, “is the preface to the very track of human events” (p. 28).

Kaplan reviews what he calls “the grand pattern of world history” (p. 37) using the theories and concepts of the great classical geopolitical thinkers to establish a framework to understand the past, contextualize current world events, and foresee the emerging trends in global politics.

That framework—a synthesis of the ideas of Mackinder, Spykman, and Mahan—posits the centrality of the

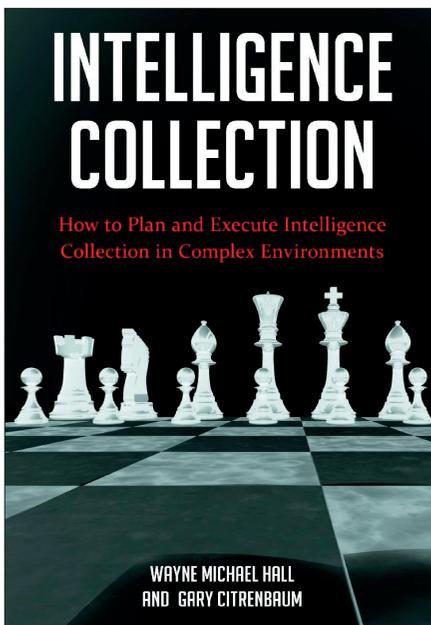
Eurasian landmass to the global balance of power, the distinct and rival geographical power centers of Eurasia, and the historic rivalry between land powers and sea powers for regional and global preeminence.

Kaplan contends that power in Eurasia has shifted from Russia and Western Europe to what Spykman called the Asian “Rimland” and Mahan termed the “Debatable and Debated Ground.” This region includes the Middle East, Southwest Asia, Central Asia, and the Far East, the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and the rising powers of China and India, five nuclear powers (China, India, Russia, Pakistan, and Israel), the volatile Korean peninsula, lands with vast reserves of oil and natural gas, and important maritime chokepoints. He reviews in separate chapters the geo-history of the key countries and power centers of Eurasia including Western Europe, Russia, China, India, Iran, and Turkey and explains their relative importance to the geopolitics of the 21st century.

Kaplan writes that although the United States is in relative decline as a world power, it does not have to go the way of previous empires such as Rome, Venice, and Great Britain. He recommends that the United States avoid getting bogged down in small wars, prioritize its sea and air power assets, and become a “balancing power in Eurasia and a unifying power in North America” (p. 346).

While one can quibble with Kaplan’s specific recommendations, he deserves much praise for reintroducing and applying classical geopolitical analysis to the 21st-century world. JFQ

Francis P. Sempa is an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, an Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Wilkes University, and a contributing editor to *American Diplomacy*.



Intelligence Collection: How to Plan and Execute Intelligence Collection in Complex Environments

By Wayne Michael Hall and Gary Citrenbaum
Praeger, 2012
505 pp. \$63
ISBN: 978-0313398179

Reviewed by
Todd M. Manyx

In this companion piece to the authors’ 2010 work, *Intelligence Analysis: How to Think in Complex Environments*, Wayne Hall and Gary Citrenbaum have brought forth a superior forum by which to consider the challenges associated with intelligence collection in complex environments. Each author brings with him a lengthy résumé of credible service in the intelligence field. Hall is a retired U.S. Army officer with over 30 years of intelligence experience, and he has remained active within the intelligence field by participating in numerous seminars on intelligence training and intelligence transformation. Citrenbaum is actively involved in issues associated with intelligence transformation. Accordingly, both speak with authority on the issues they raise.

The authors’ background as educators clearly influenced the organization and prose. On a most positive note, the book is written clearly and in a conversational tone that educates and informs without being didactic. It follows a well-constructed framework that systematically scopes the issues the authors feel are restraints on the current intelligence enterprise’s structure and processes. The technical organization of each chapter will be familiar to professional students in that each chapter opens with a brief discussion of the issue followed by a logical and detailed examination. At the end of each chapter, the authors provide a synopsis that specifically details the central points and then explains how it ties into the next chapter. The benefit of this model is that it allows readers to quickly review the salient points with the option of delving into a deeper, more nuanced reading, should they desire.

The book is divided into 15 chapters that comprise the introduction followed by four principal sections in which the authors utilize an inductive reasoning model to organize and present their thesis. The nonintelligence professional will find the introduction and the sections on underpinnings and synthesis to be the most informative. The lengthy sections on operations and specifics can be appreciated by reading the synopsis at the end of each chapter.

The introduction provides a useful discussion of the conceptual framework that should underpin intelligence collection and analysis in complex urban environments representing the dynamic nonlinear conditions that produce the Complex Adaptive Systems that confound the ability of our national-level intelligence collection capabilities to react nimbly when supporting lower-level commanders. It also notes that the enterprise is essentially protecting itself from making the changes required when it resists the calls from experienced junior leaders who understand the changes needed but lack the seniority to effect them.

The introduction also presents the authors’ concept of what Advanced Collection should seek to do. At its most elemental level, Advanced Collection