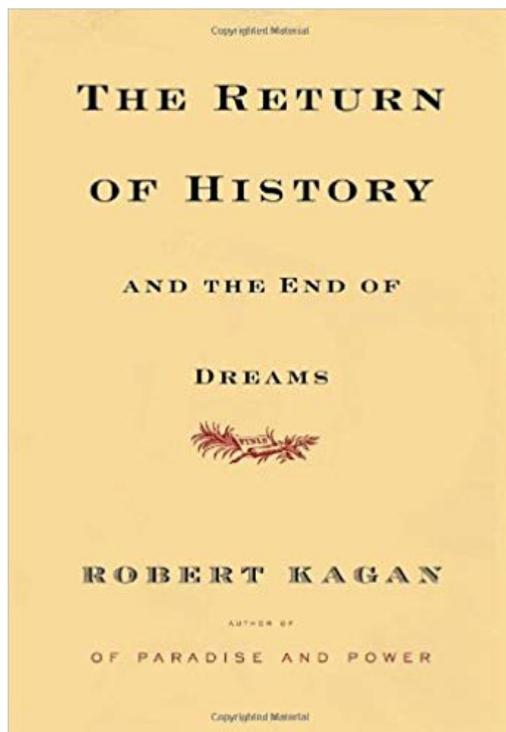


The Return of History and the End of Dreams *by* Robert Kagan



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Hopes for a new peaceful international order after the end of the Cold War have been dashed by sobering realities: Great powers are once again competing for honor and influence. Nation-states remain as strong as ever, as do the old, explosive forces of ambitious nationalism. The world remains “unipolar,” but international competition among the United States, Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, and Iran raise new threats of regional conflict. Communism is dead, but a new contest between western liberalism and the great eastern autocracies of Russia and China has reinjected ideology into geopolitics. Finally, radical Islamists are waging a violent struggle against the modern secular cultures and powers that, in their view, have dominated, penetrated, and polluted their Islamic world. The grand expectation that after the Cold War the world would enter an era of international geopolitical convergence has proven wrong. For the past few years, the liberal world has been internally divided and distracted by issues both profound and petty. Now, in *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, Robert Kagan masterfully poses the most important questions facing the liberal democratic countries, challenging them to choose whether they want to shape history or let others shape it for them.



Reviews of the [The Return of History and the End of Dreams](#) by Robert Kagan

Uanabimo

The Return of History and the End of Dreams is an interesting book which presents some intriguing ideas about the world that we live in now. Written by Robert Kagan, this book takes a realist perspective of the future of international politics and America's role in this new world.

The problems stem from this optimism that was produced by the fact that people in democratic nations saw the worldwide decline of communism as being equivalent to the rise of democracy. However, in reality, countries such as Russia and China, while not being communist, have been increasingly autocratic. There are other smaller examples such as Venezuela and some Islamic countries of the Middle East, but the powerhouse countries of Russia and China tightening things up will definitely equate to a decline in democracy and a rise in autocracy.

The book is OK. If the reader is well experienced in international politics, this book is very short and offers some (not many) insights. For the newcomer to the topic or someone just trying to get an initial perspective on it, there are definitely other better sources.

Ausstan

I am a high schooler in APCP and AP Government. If you want to get a better understanding read this book. Its about a 2.5 hour read and it is worth every second. The author gives great insight into all the countries and gives you his views while at the same time remaining unbiased. This is a must for anyone looking to understand international relations.

Kagda

The Return of History is a concise and clarifying explanation of the state of geopolitics in early 2008 from a very Thucydidean point of view. The author at a point alludes to the ancient Greek concept of thumos, or a spirited connection with kin, not so much as the unifying concept of our time (as Huntington on a larger scale or Ralph Peters on a tribal scale would have it) but as one of the myriad rocks of man's permanent nature on which the ship of pre-ordained international democratic liberalism has foundered since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The main theme of his book is that there is no Marxian march of history towards a single conclusion, no guarantee that liberal democracy as seen in the west in general and as most powerfully crystalized in the US in particular is the ineluctable result of social progression.

The brief illusion that this was the case in the early to mid nineties started to unravel first with the Balkans, then with 9/11, and has, since the publication of this book, come full circle with the Russian invasion of Georgia (not per se predicted by the author who wrote before the event, but was put forward as both highly plausible and consequential) and the liberal democracies' complete inaction beyond empty words in response. Like the shot heard around the world at Concorde the Russian invasion of Georgia bears out the thesis of this book, that liberal democracy is challenged by other legitimating forms of government, namely autocracy born anew in Putin's Russia, and reformed anew in post Tiananmen China. Towards these pole stars of autocracy much of the world aligns, including North Korea, Burma, Iran, Syria, Venezuela (oddly never mentioned in the book) and a growing number of Central Asian and African countries. Radical Islam is also on the rise, a complicating and consequential factor which can wreak much devastation if unchecked, but one which the author believes can never legitimate itself as a viable alternative to liberal democracy and autocracy. But, importantly, one which autocracy does not mind seeing tying down democracy.

The import of the author's thesis is that the liberal democracies must band together and continue to take an active role in the struggle for what form of government people find most desirable and beneficial, and therefore most legitimate to their needs. To believe otherwise he seems to suggest, to believe that liberal democracy is where human nature evolves to, would logically be to bear as a corollary a belief that the democracies need not have fought either world war or cold war of the past century, and to believe that we are free from having to defend and promote liberal democracy today is just as foolish.

A good, quick and easy to read treatise. Recommended.

Yozshubei

Kagan (2008) takes his title from Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1992).

According to Kagan, the fall of Soviet Communism and the apparent hegemony of the United States lead some thinkers such as F. Fukuyama to believe that history had come to an end, and that specifically the ideal of liberal Western democracy had replaced narrow national interests of the past. But Fukuyama, Kagan says, was dreamy and wrong.

Kagan reminds us, forcefully, that nationalism trumps ideology in the long run, although there may be brief periods, historically speaking, when the flashbulb of ideology blinds us (or a nation's people).

Country-by-country Kagan catalogs the strong, strategic, historical, national focus of Russia, India, Japan, Iran, and the United States. He does not let America off any less than he does, say, China. (In this regard he skips over the nations of Europe, lumping them as one, the EU, naïve nancies.)

At the end of his book Kagan argues for a worldwide association or confederation or - dare it be said - a league of nations, of liberal democracies, counties that embrace democracy, free markets, women's rights (an unexpected tenet for a neo-conservative), and so on. An interesting idea, and maybe a good one, but isn't Kagan at the end of his book guilty of the same ideological naivety as his straw whipping boy, Francis Fukuyama?

By different routes, Fukuyama and Kagan come to the same conclusion: "the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." (Who wrote that? Fukuyama or Kagan (alphabetic order; no hints).

Fukuyama in his 2002 book, *Our Posthuman Future*, modified his argument (never acknowledge by Kagan), writing that "there can be no end of history without an end of modern natural science and technology". Perhaps Robert Kagan will also sequel his book with something appropriately titled, such as *The Return of Ideology*.

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