

Elizabeth Bernstein
Dr. Barney
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The World America Made

Since the end of WWII and the establishment of the Truman Doctrine, nations throughout the world have anticipated the retreat of America's dominance over the new world order. The 2012 non-fiction book, *The World America Made* by Robert Kagan argues against the decline of the United States as the global superpower that many believe to be true. Kagan states that the current world order relies on American military and economic power as opposed to the admiration for American culture, wisdom, or ideals around the globe. In order to preserve a United States led democratic world order, the book identifies that the United States must accommodate the pillars of American power at home and deploy that power abroad. Today, the United States maintains its position as the global superpower, which as Kagan expresses throughout the book is essential for the stability of the world both militarily and economically. Robert Kagan, through his book *The World America Made*, makes the assertion that the United States not only retains its position as the World's preeminent superpower, but that the world is a better place because of it. Without the United States, democracies throughout the world would succumb to authoritarianism. Kagan argues that the combination of military might and economic superiority allow the United States to maintain its place in the world and thus retain the world order since WWII.

The World America Made is an intriguing and enjoyable read. Both Kagan's rhetoric and the book's structure are easy to comprehend, allowing it to be appreciated by a wide audience in government, industry, and the general public. The book is divided into six sections, beginning with a brief overview on what's to come in the succeeding pages and an understanding of

American order and the American perspective of the concept of world-order. The third section explores elements of democracy before delving in on the era of American dominance that has been marked by peace amongst the great powers. The following two sections analyze a world in which American predominance no longer exists and contradicts the notion of American decline through examining the basic indicators of decline. Finally, the book closes by reflecting on the world America has shaped and what must be done to preserve this world order. A particular strength that allows this thought provoking book to be read and understood by a large audience is within the formatting. From the very beginning and scattered throughout the distinct sections of the book, the reader is provided with sufficient context and background information on terms and events prior to the claims that support his thesis. This allows an audience with little knowledge of the subject the ability to adequately comprehend the concepts derived within the main idea. Additionally, Kagan consistently backs up his statements and evidence with facts, both historical and statistical. For example, as he discusses the concept of a world order where the United States shares global power evenly with nations such as China and Russia, he expresses how this would negatively affect the current and future prospect of democracy on a global basis. He provides context of the general trend of the shift in balance through history by expressing “When the Soviet Union became the world’s second superpower after World War II, communist movements sprang up around the world, and leaders took up the cause of revolution. When the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States emerged as the sole superpower, the number of democracies around the world shot up” (75). This is one of numerous examples where Kagan is seen supporting his statements with historical context. There were no significant weaknesses that stood out within the book, yet since historical events are predominantly biased by perspective, it would be interesting to read both the counter argument of Kagan’s thesis and a debate between

Kagan and those offering the opposing view. Overall, this book delivers a powerful case for America's role in the world order and supplies ample historical examples to offer a strong and compelling argument that is easily understood.

Kagan provides a compelling argument around American power being crucial to the spread of democracy and continuity of peace among the world's great powers. Right at the beginning of the book he states "the most important features of today's world — the great spread of democracy, the prosperity, the prolonged great-power peace — have depended directly and indirectly on power and influence exercised by the United States" (8-9). This notion, which is carried out through the entirety of the book, significantly aligns with that of the Truman Doctrine. President Harry S. Truman's speech from 1947, states that the United States will support democracies throughout the world against authoritarian threats. The doctrine originated two years after what Kagan declared as the "birth date" of the American world order, with the objective to contain the Soviet Union's expansion of communism during the Cold World. Kagan provides numerous examples of events where America is seen backing democracies around the world against geopolitical competitors. When addressing the third wave of democracy that began in 1974, Kagan reflects on the "Carnation Revolution" in Portugal where American and European democracies played a key role in ending a fifty-year dictatorship through vast investments in support of the democratic parties. For the years to come "the United States used a variety of tools, including direct military intervention, to aid democratic transitions and prevent the undermining of existing fragile democracies all across the globe" (28). Yet, it is important to note that democratic transitions are not inevitable, and the continuation of democratic international institutions is not self-sustaining.

In order to maintain this current democratic world order, as highlighted repeatedly by Kagan, it requires persistent American leadership and commitment. This is represented in the book through American military and economic support for democratic nations globally. According to Kagan, the United States military capacity remains unmatched and superior as it underpins hegemony. Not only does it spend more money on defense than the rest of the great powers combined, \$600 billion, but in 2012, when Kagan published this book, America had half a million troops deployed overseas. Although the Iraq war is a highly controversial event, the United States displayed its military dominance and eventually toppled Saddam Hussein and “Its efforts to root out and destroy al-Qaeda have been remarkably successful” (124). Additionally, within the first Iraq war the United States showed great military might to defend Kuwait from Iraq’s unprovoked invasion. America has influenced numerous outcomes and has been seen attempting to regionalize democracy, rather than targeting individual countries. Throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s Kagan states that American support was vital “to democratization in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, and the Philippines” and was a major component “to democratization in Portugal, Chile, Poland, Korea, Bolivia, and Taiwan” (29). With few outliers, a majority of these countries listed are located in the same region. This strategy projects that this expansion approach was designed to produce “stable zones of democracy” (29). As explained, a broader grouping of regional countries will be more powerful together than in isolation. As Kagan proclaims, “The lack of legitimated military force would make it increasingly difficult to defend core principles” of the current world order “against the inevitable challenges” (97). According to the text, with the considerable amount of economic revenue going into leading weaponry and the vast number of

highly trained troops that constitute the United States military, America is able to defend democracies and maintain peace in the international order.

The World America Made by Robert Kagan asserts that the United States not only maintains its status as the world's leading superpower but also makes the world a better place in general. Without the United States, authoritarianism would take hold throughout the world's democracies. Kagan proclaims that the United States has been able to sustain its position in the world and the international order that has existed since World War II due to a combination of military might and economic dominance. The text revolves around his idea that, contrary to what many believe, the American world order is in fact not in decline. By virtue of the work's thoughtful structure and Kagan's easily comprehensible rhetoric, this book is able to promote this idea of American superpower and numerous other concepts to an extremely vast audience. Robert Kagan's strong and compelling argument on the present and future of U.S. foreign policy makes for a good read, however it can appear quite contradictory for those with differing ideas and views. Today, Kagan views that the United States continues to stand as a leading world power, although one day, we could be left with no option but to watch it disappear.

Works Cited

Kegan, R. (2012). *The world America Made*. Vintage Books.