

Of paradise and power by robert kagan

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A book that has had a big influence on my thinking about conflict resolution and identity conflicts is Robert Kagan's book *Of Paradise and Power*. In it he suggests the reason Americans and Europeans sometimes act differently with regards to conflicts is that Americans are big and strong (both economically and militarily) whereas Europeans are relatively weak (especially militarily). The author is troubled by that fact, mostly because it means that America has to fight alone to preserve stability and peace around the world and resolve other countries conflicts. They self-identify as tough. In the end, Kagan claims America is much more technologically advanced and that it can attack safely other countries because it has the means to do so with technological warfare. However, as has been seen over the last few years in Iraq, American military power can get very tied up and may not always be very effective; it can sometimes be limited in its ability to reshape a society or political system or deal with an intractable ethnic conflict. That said, I really do believe that Kagan's argument more or less makes sense and that the Europeans need to take a more proactive, robust role in the world today in order to help solve all the problems and conflicts. This theory has inspired me to potentially work as a diplomat in the future. I started out thinking about conflict in an idealistic way, but now am much more realistic about these sorts of things.

It's important to ask the question when thinking about conflict and politics, What is power? Kagan suggests it is purely military force. The US is the lone power in the world with the ability to conduct expeditionary warfare on

multiple fronts across the globe whenever it wants to. As was demonstrated in the Balkans in the 1990s, Europeans aren't able to project a credible military force even within Europe. Therefore the Europeans resort to the only thing they have for managing international conflicts, international institutions such as the UN. The success of European integration and solving the "German problem" has a lot of Europeans, Kagan says, to believe that they live in a Kantian paradise where international institutions can banish war forever. Americans have a different historical reality, and think of the world as a Hobbesian jungle where hard power rules. All of this I agree with. However, I do have a few hesitations when it comes to this erudite and enlightening book

Yes, Europeans don't have a right to tell us that the use of military force in some situations is morally wrong and no you can't do that, because they really do depend on us, but they are also somewhat correct in being apprehensive about our decisions because they are so significantly affected by them. I think Kagan would argue that it is better for them to have an iron in the fire to sit outside of the campfire and complain about the lack of heat reaching them. They should take more responsibility in helping to resolve the world's conflicts.

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