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Think Piece # 6

The thought of worldwide anarchy is one that would strike fear into most Americans, or into most citizens of any developed country. The warm umbrella of a well established central government seems to be one that is not only necessary for our (meaning populations in developed countries) way of life, but it is also an entity that we take for granted, and simply expect to always be there to maintain the status quo. Therefore, the predictions made by Dr. Robert D. Kaplan in his essay "The Coming Anarchy" create logically a true sense of fear into the developed country, not to mention other emotions such as denial, condescension, and anger. With such a controversial beginning, Kaplan's forecast is one that is worth investigating, or at least understanding, so that, assuming that the search for democracy is one that is truly in the best interest of humanity, we can fight the coming anarchy.

In his article, Kaplan describes the world with the metaphor of a stretch limo in one of the poorer sections of New York City. In this metaphor the developed countries (i.e. U.S.A., Great Britain, France...etc.) are represented by the stretch limo. They have the comfort of a controlled environment while enjoying the benefits of luxury brought on by wealth. On the outside of the limo, is the poor side o^F town, or slum. This represents, rather obviously, the third world countries and poorer aspects of the world culture. This

representation of the world superficially describes the conditions that characterize it very well. But is it truly a valid description of how our world works and interacts within itself..

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The answer is, in my opinion, rather shady. In the metaphor Kaplan employs, there is an inherent and almost impenetrable separation between the two entities. While the separation is evident and practiced in the world society today, it would be false to claim ultimate distinction and a sense of disgust from the developed countries toward the third world. The world community is simply not that completely snobbish. The relationships between the wealthy states of the world and the poorer states of the world is simply put not that segregated. One of the main factors of this situation is the growing awareness of globalization.

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On the other hand, one of the aspects of the metaphor that touches on and actually develops very well is the concept of weak states in the world today. Among developed countries, of course, this statement is not necessarily true, but among the poorer and especially warring nations of the world, the distinctions made by political nations and borders become very hazy. Kaplan sites the region of West Africa as the best example of the loss of national identity and central state governments. States such as Sierra Leone and others give insights into the world of the state that controls only the capital and the political borders really meaning nothing, as tribal influences rule the day and the land.

Kaplan also makes convincing arguments that current conditions around the world will lead, very soon, to inter and intra-state conflicts. In his piece, Kaplan states, "It is time to understand the environment for what it is: the national-security issue of the early twenty-first century." He cites the growing problems of deforestation, soil erosion, population explosions, disease spread, and others as environmental factors that are

leading to the eventual outcome of conflict. It can be derived from these factors that poverty and famine and discontent will spread. If these aren't the seeds of war, I am not sure what are.

In addition, human beings are facing common and global problems like ozone layer and global warming, diseases, nuclear weapons and other environmental, political, socio-economical challenges which have to do with everyone, no matter where you live, and we have to get united to meet those challenges. Yet, our world continues to be separate, clashing and diverse. Integration doesn't always bring good things and is not the desirable, preferable choice for all the people in our globe. The gap between rich and poor, strong and weak, cultural and social controversies in the states and between the states still exists and appears to be endemic. People living in nearly 200 states on this globe want their independence, separate cultures, and different cultures. In fact, rather than melting away, nationalism /tribalism/ and demand for separate states have increased. Rather than fewer states, this new century will probably see more. As Kaplan remarked "the breaking apart and remaking of the atlas is only now beginning".

With the rise of these tribes and the fall of the nation-state, increased conflict is a logical outcome. Without large, centralized governments, the law of the land will become power, most specifically militarily. As people find themselves being segregated constantly by their race or their origins, the growth of tribal pride and the lack of overseeing power and authority and subsequent lack of fear of retribution can easily be seen as the steps to violent outbursts between, not nations, but ethnic groups, religious groups, and other culturally specified differentiations.

TRY TO AVOID CONVICTIONS

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The social conditions of the world today as observed and described by Kaplan have already been touched on in this paper. Kaplan describes his experiences with the growing tendency of sentiment in the world for people to identify themselves with social constructions rather political or national institutions and governments. In other words, more and more people are starting to think of themselves as Christians or Muslims or Jews or ethnic Turks or of a certain race in general. This trend supports Kaplan's overall theory of the coming anarchy by illustrating the roots of a movement with the potential to undermine the entire nation-state system and reduce it to civil and outright war.

Kaplan uses the United States as an example of this stratification of identities. Throughout its history, America has always been a haven for any and almost all ethnicities, religions, or minority groups. It is easy to see then, where Kaplan takes us as he illustrates how the lack of a true national fabric or as he puts it "homogenous society," often remarked as one of the strengths of this country, proud of its first "melting pot" and then "mixed salad" nicknames in regards to its culturally diverse and distinct society, actually proves to be, in Kaplan's eyes to be the source of a fragility that has the power and probability of toppling the world's current military and economic power.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan was also analyzed in order to elucidate on the current social trend towards personal ethnic identification. His own experiences in the region have led him to conclude that the Armenians do not identify their enemies because they are Azeri, nor do they actually see their enemies as being Muslim. Rather, the Armenians identify the Azeri people as enemies because they are a Turkish ethnicity descended from the same Turkish race that performed nothing short of

a massacre on Armenia in 1915. Evidence of such social trends throughout the world are another factor in determining Kaplan's prediction of a worldwide anarchy.

To discuss the validity of said prediction in the world of today when compared to when it was written, we have to recognize the changes that have occurred. In the environmental sphere of the theory, not much has changed. All of the same ecological problems still exist. In fact, the United States as peeled back its Environmental Protection Legislation, thereby allowing more harmful practices go on. So in terms of the environment, Kaplan's prognostication still holds weight.

On the social side of things, one observes that the same trends discussed earlier, the stratification of ethnicities and the subsequent self identity defined by ethnicity, are in effect today. Most notably in conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, anti-Christian fanaticism among radical sects of Islam, the same kind of radicalism among radical Christians, particularly in the U.S., the still raging war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, etc.. Therefore one can see that the social arguments for eventual anarchy are still intact in the modern world community.

It is then clear that the predictions that Kaplan made in his article are just as compelling today as they were when he first penned them. We still live in a world in which the factors and actors described by Kaplan can, and presumably will eventually lead to a system without a system (according to the article). But is the coming anarchy imminent, are there ways in which the world will escape it, and should it? Those are questions that right now only time can answer.

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