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## Robert D. Kaplan: Eastward to Tartary Study Guide, 2002-2006

Steven Alan Samson

*Liberty University*, [ssamson@liberty.edu](mailto:ssamson@liberty.edu)

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**ROBERT D. KAPLAN: EASTWARD TO TARTARY**  
**STUDY GUIDE, 2002-2006**  
**Steven Alan Samson**

**PART I: THE BALKANS**

**CHAPTER TEN: “TO THE CITY”**

**Study Questions**

1. How do the everyday lives of Americans and Bulgarians differ? How are relations between Bulgaria and Turkey? Identify three of the great figures in the history of Istanbul (Constantinople). How did Kaplan’s impressions of Istanbul differ from those of East European cities? What had just occurred before Kaplan’s arrival? (85-90)
2. **Justinian**, a Macedonian, and **Theodora** were the great emperor and empress of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire in the mid-sixth century. Justinian was famous for his legal reform beginning with the *Codex Justinianus*, 529. During his long reign (527-65), popular domination ended with the crushing of the Nika Insurrection in 532. All of Italy was subsequently brought under imperial rule. The Church of St. Sophia (or *Hagia Sophia*, the best-known example of Romanesque architecture) was his greatest monument. **Süleyman I, the Magnificent** (1520-1566), was the most powerful ruler in Europe in a time that saw the likes of Emperor Charles V, Francis I of France, and Henry VIII. He conquered Rhodes (1522) from the Knights of St. John (who later were established at Malta), defeated the Hungarians at the Battle of Mohacs (1526), besieged Vienna in 1529, and made an alliance with Francis I against the Habsburgs (1536). In 1534 he conquered Baghdad and Mesopotamia from Persia.

**Review**

Justinian

Süleyman the Magnificent

Kemal Atatürk (father of Turks)

**PART II: TURKEY AND GREATER SYRIA**

**CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE “DEEP STATE”**

**Study Questions**

1. Summarize the succession of authority and rule in Constantinople/Istanbul since Roman times. What justifies Kaplan’s description of Turkey as “the most stable governmental dynasty in world history”? How and by whom was Turkey created? How has the military kept order since then? The military role bears comparison with the old Frankish *majordomo* (master of the household) and the *shogunate* of Japan. What reforms were instituted by **Turgut Özal**? How would you characterize the “**pashas’ coup**” against **Necmettin Erbakan**? What made the generals’ role a “soft, postmodern process”? What is the American view of this? **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, leader of the pro-Islamic Justice and Development (Virtue) Party, was elected prime minister on arch 11, 2003. Erdogan has moderated his positions since being jailed in 1998 for reading an Islamic

poem that allegedly incited religious hatred. Erdogan, who was banned from office until the law was changed, led a faction that split from Erbakan's Welfare Party. (93-99)

2. According to Gen. İhsan Gürkan, what are the characteristics of Turkey's military elite? Compare and contrast İlkey Sunar's view. How is the split between the military and society reflected? How would you characterize between Turkey and Israel as well as the historical relationship between Turkey and its Jewish population? What circumstances have drawn Turkey closer to Israel? In what manner is it flexing its muscles? (99-103)

### Review

Kemal Atatürk  
character of military elite

Gallipoli  
Turkey and Israel

Turgut Özal  
Turkey and Jews

## CHAPTER TWELVE: THE "CORPSE IN ARMOUR"

### Study Questions

1. Why are there such similarities between Turkey and the countries of the Levant: Syria, Lebanon, and Israel? What is **Topkapi** [Top Kapu Saray]? [It is also the title and setting of a 1964 caper comedy]. It is located at "Seraglio Point," which is known as the "still point of the turning world?" [The church, later mosque and now museum, of Hagia Sophia is also located there]. On the other side of the Turkish straits is the Anatolian peninsula (*Anadolu* = "mother lode"). What issues divide Syria (and other Arab countries) and Turkey? The **Alawites** are a Shiite spin-off sect that holds Ali to have been the bearer of the divine essence (something akin to a divine incarnation). Alawites do not practice the five pillars of Islam but, instead, add two others: *jihad* (holy struggle) and *waliya* (devotion to Ali and struggle against his enemies). They celebrate some Christian and Zoroastrian holidays. (104-07)
2. How had Ankara changed since Kaplan's first visit in 1983? How did this reflect the upward and perhaps outward mobility of the people? Drawing on Xenophon's *Anabasis*, what did Arnold Toynbee observe about the spectacle of the complete destruction of a once-great civilization. What were some of the characteristics of **Assyria**, "a corpse in armour" ruled by "history's first megalomaniacs," before it fell in 612 BC? For a Biblical report, see Isaiah 36-37. Tiglath-pileser III established dominion in the region by defeating Armenia (Urartu) to the north and conquering Syria and Palestine to the west. Sennacherib seized Judea (701). What "theme" does Kaplan detect when he compares Alexander's conquest and the Moslem Arab armies? What parallels does he find between Assyrian and present day militarism? What does he mean by "barren carapace" and "precarious voids?" NOTE: In the western Christian tradition, a host of mediating institutions – businesses, unions, schools, charitable associations, local governments, etc. – are part of the support structure of a civil society, distinct from the civil state at one end and the family at the other. This is the concept of **reciprocity**. Its absence in many parts of the world stunts political and economic development. (107-12)
3. According to Doğu Ergil, what do **Atatürkism**, **Ba'athism**, and **Zionism** have in common? In face of a crisis of identity, what is the future of such ideologies? How do Turkish differ from Western political parties? What does Ergil see as the solution to the Kurdish problem?

### Review

Topkapi

Abdullah Öcalan

Turkish-Syrian dispute

Alawites  
"corpse in armour" theme  
Zionism

Ankara  
Atatürkism

Toynbee on Assyria  
Ba'athism

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE NEW CALIPHATE

### Study Questions

1. What are some of the common features of Islamic movements? How do Turkish Islamists differ from those of other lands? What are the **gecekondus**? How does life there differ from the "lumpen-Islamism" of the "Islamic spaces" found elsewhere in the Moslem world? How would you characterize the current relationship between Israel and Turkey (particularly with Turkish Islamists)? Identify two tendencies within the Virtue party. Summarize **Abdullah Gül**'s views about "radical republicanism" and the treatment of Kurds, Christians, and Armenians. What is his view of the Ottoman caliphate compared with the Turkish republic and its secular ideology? What about relations with Syria, Iraq, and Israel? What might Turkey's future role be within the Islamic world? Turks gained control of the caliphate in 1071 and controlled it until Atatürk dissolved it in the 1920s. Gül served as prime minister from late 2002 until the party leader, Erdogan, replaced him in March 2003. He is currently the foreign minister. The caliphs were the traditional rulers of the Islamic world: commanders of the faithful who were elected to the office, chiefs (*sheikhs*) not of individual tribes but of the united tribes that formed the political community (*umma*) of Islam. Although the caliphate was also a religious office it was strictly executive rather than priestly. The caliph was not even a member of the *ulema* (religious interpreters). (115-21)
2. What is the origin of the name **Syria**? It is the Aram (as in Aramaic) of the Bible. Greater Syria once largely coincided with the Levant, meaning the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. What is the **Hatay** and its geopolitical significance? What roles did **Antioch** play on the stage of history? What view did the Arabs of Antioch take of the Syrian regime under Hafez al-Assad (who has now been succeeded by his son Bashar)? (121-25)

### Review

Turkish Islamists  
Abdullah Gül  
Hatay

*gecekondus*  
radical republicanism  
Antioch

Virtue Party  
Syria

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

### Study Questions

1. How do the differences between the Turkish and Syrian flags signify? How did life in Syrian villages contrast with what Kaplan saw in Turkey and the Balkans? How had Aleppo changed since Kaplan's last visit in 1976? What did the black market exchange rates and the faded glory of the Baron indicate about economic reality in Syria? (126-30)
2. What has been the historical role the ancient Silk Road trading center, **Aleppo**? According to local legend, Abraham stopped at Aleppo to milk (*halib*) his cow on the citadel hill, hence the name Aleppo (Halab), but this ancient city (rivaling Damascus as

- the oldest in the world) was also known as Berea (but not the Berea of the New Testament). What social and economic problems does Syria face? How has Aleppo changed? What did Kaplan learn at the Armenian restaurant about attitudes? (130-34)
- How was Greater Syria divided after the First World War? How did the French enlargement of (Greater) Lebanon affect Syria? Is Syria a real nation-state? What are Syria's four chief socio-cultural regions Kaplan should add (the Kurdish northern border areas as a fifth region)? How did the French encourage conflict in Syria (a variation on the old Roman divide and rule strategy)? How did the **Ba'ath party** originate? What was unusual about the rule of **Hafez al-Assad**? What sorts of vacuums did he fill? (134-37)
  - Who was St. Simeon Stylites? Who was Freya Stark (whose great travelogues were written in the 1930s)? Why were Palmyra and its queen, **Zenobia**, important during the days of the Roman Empire (specifically, during the time of the Barracks Emperors)? (137-43)
  - What are some of the consequences of personality cults? How had **Damascus** changed since Kaplan's 1983 visit? What is the conundrum (riddle or puzzle) of Arab society? (143-46)

### Review

Turkish and Syrian flags	black market	Silk Road
Aleppo's historical role	division of Greater Syria	Alawites
minority self-determination	Ba'ath party	Hafez al-Assad
Palmyra	Zenobia	personality cults

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE CORPORATE SATELLITE

### Study Questions

- How does Lebanon differ from Syria? How is life in **Beirut** following the civil war? What is the character of **American University of Beirut** and why? Why did Farid el-Khazen say that it was not a "classic civil war"? How was it settled? How free are the Lebanese? What is the nature of the Syrian police state? How is the Lebanese army used? What roles are played by **Emile Lahoud**, the president, and **Rafic Hariri**, the prime minister (and president of the council of ministers)? What was wrong with Lebanon's pre-civil war democracy? What does el-Khazen mean by his retort: "What about **civil society**?" What are some of the restrictions under Syrian hegemony? (147-55)
- What is the basis of cooperation between the Alawites who run Syria and the Catholic-influenced Maronites of Lebanon? What has been the price of Assad's backing of the Maronites? Why does Elias Khoury believe that such regimes continue to have a future? How (and why) do Syria and Lebanon differ? Why are the Turks compared unfavorably to the French? What does Lebanon suggest about the "end of history?" *The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama draws on Hegel and Nietzsche to develop his theme that history is a progression culminating in democracy and material abundance. How does the new wealth of Saudi Arabia (and Lebanon) contrast with America's? What is **Solidere**? What kind of hybrid regime does Lebanon have? What economic role is played by **diasporas** [those that are dispersed or scattered abroad]? This may take the form either of a brain drain or a brawn drain. Too often the young and able, especially, seek their opportunities abroad. What makes Syria so dependent upon Lebanon? (155-60)

3. What sort of man is **Walid Jumblatt**? Jumblatt is the son of the Druze warlord who played a major role in the civil war before he was assassinated. What is his assessment of Hariri? Whose interests are served in the new order? [*La Dolce Vita*, which means “the sweet life,” is a 1961 Italian movie by Fellini depicting Rome’s modern decadence]. Why did Jumblatt submit to the new order? How does Machiavelli’s observation apply? Describe some of the history of **Beiteddine**. How do the contrasting stories about Jumblatt’s and Moshe Dayan’s acquisition of relics illustrate the differences between the Lebanese and Israeli states? How did Nasser and Assad differ? What sort of man was **Kamal Jumblatt**? Who are the “movie stars” of the museum in the Chouf? (160-66)
4. How does **Tyre** (Soûr) differ from the rest of Lebanon? What has been its historical role? What would make it great again? (166-69)

### Review

Beirut	American University of Beirut	Lebanese civil war
Syrian occupation	Syrian police state	Emile Lahoud
Rafic Hariri	civil society	“end of history”
Solidere	hybrid regime	wealthy diaspora
Walid Jumblatt	Beiteddine	Tyre

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE CARAVAN STATE

### Study Questions

1. According to Kamal Salibi, how and why do the Syrian and Jordanian systems differ? What were the sources of the **Ba’athist ideology** (which also rules Iraq) developed by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar? Why did Salibi believe Moslem fundamentalism would also be a failure? Why is Syria ungovernable without coercion? Ba’athism is described, like communism, as a “god that failed. Elsewhere, the Iraqi-American professor Kanan Makiya has said much the same about Iraq: “Hussein rules through his face, through his ubiquitous presence in daily life. That is what his millions of larger-than-life posters are about” (Washington Post, March 30, 2003, B7). How might a civil society begin to develop? Who are the **Hashemites** and how have they fared since the First World War? What sort of a ruler was King **Hussein** (whose brutal suppression of the PLO in 1970 is known as “Black September) and why was he so effective? What sort of regional system does Salibi believe might evolve following Saddam Hussein’s demise? What is the Hashemite relationship with formerly Ottoman Turkey? (170-75)
2. What is the basis of **Amman**’s prosperity? Why is the country essentially a city-state? What is Petra? It is also familiar as an Indiana Jones movie setting. Why has the area around Azrak long been of strategic importance? (175-78)
3. What is Zarqa? [The Circassians, once a Christian tribe that converted to Islam during a period of Ottoman rule, fled the Caucasus after the Tsarist Russian takeover in the 19th century]. Why are such places growing? What economic challenges is Jordan facing? What might be the effect of democratization? What was behind the Palestinian **Intifada** in Israel? What might it take to prevent a similar uprising in Jordan? How have divisions in the Middle East hardened? What might bring down Jordan’s Bedouin monarchy? Who is Prince Hassan? What does he mean by **humanitas**? How were the states of the Middle East created, by whom, and with what effect? What is the intellectual (and sociological) character of Ba’athism? What were some of the merits of

the Ottoman empire, such as the *millet* system [a system of communal self-government of religious minorities that began under European pressure on behalf of the Christians] and the caliphate? (178-83)

### Review

Amman	Ba'athist ideology	Hashemites
Arab Revolt	King Hussein	nostalgia for the Ottomans
Petra	Zarqa	social problems
revolution of rising expectations	Intifada	Prince Hassan
millet system		

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: CROSSING THE JORDAN

### Study Questions

1. Who was **Muhammad Asad**? What did the author learn from life in Israel? Why is Bet She'an so backward? Why does Kaplan believe Israel will have to give up the West Bank? Why is the military reserve system weakening? What is **Shas**? [Iranian *bazaaris* are shopkeepers and middlemen]. The discussion of car theft as a stimulus to the Israeli economy illustrates what Henry Hazlitt called "the Broken Window fallacy." (184-94)

### Review

Muhammad Asad	military reserve system	Shas
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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: SEPPHORIS AND THE RENEWAL OF JUDAISM

### Study Questions

1. What is **Sepphoris** (Heb. Zippori, Arab. Saffuriyeh)? How did it help keep Judaism alive? Who was Simeon Bar Kokhba? What turned Sepphoris into a center of Jewish culture and an illustration of cultural osmosis [and syncretism]? What was the role of **Judah Ha-Nasi** (Yehudah Hanassi)? What is **Meimad** and how does it seek to strike a balance between cosmopolitanism and zealotry? With what does Yehudah Gilad seek to replace the mix of theology and nationalist politics (what Kaplan calls the "blood-and-soil" ideology that makes Judaism synonymous with "the land")? (195-200)

### Review

Sepphoris	Simeon Bar Kokhba	Judah Ha-Nasi
Meimad		

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: THROBBING HEART OF THE MIDDLE EAST

### Study Questions

1. How did Jewish-Arab social relations in Jerusalem differ from the Galilee? How had **Ramallah** changed? What is some of the evidence that a Palestinian state already exists? What does Kaplan anticipate for the future? What makes the **Temple Mount** thrice holy? Who was Hussein ibn-Ali? What holdover of Ottoman times still persists in Jerusalem? (201-06)
2. What does Kaplan anticipate for Syria's future? What is the inherent difficulty in holding together a Palestinian state encompassing the West Bank and Gaza? How do **Tel Aviv** and Haifa differ from Jerusalem and the West Bank? What is the future of Israel and the Palestinians in the eyes of Menachem Lorberbaum? What has taken the place of the **Great Game** in Central Asia? (206-10)

### Review

Ramallah

Temple Mount

Tel Aviv

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: BY BOAT TO TARTARY

### Study Questions

1. What are some of the unique features of the Caspian? Stalin's deportation of Azeris to Kazakhstan was typical of the way he thwarted possible sources of resistance to his policies. (282-85)

### Review

Azeri deportations

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: NEW KHANATES

### Study Questions

1. What are some manifestations of **Saparmurad Turkmenbashi's** personality cult? What is the origin and history of the **Turkmen** tribes? How did the Russians gain control of the Turkmen lands following the establishment of Krasnovodsk (now Turkmenbashi)? Who was **Junaid Khan**? What legacy did Stalin's rule leave? (286-91)
2. What were the unintended consequences of the Kara Kum Canal? Who lives in the towns? What is significant about the Geok-Tepe Mosque as an expression of the personality cult?

### Review

Saparmurad Niyazov [Turkmenbashi]

Junaid Khan