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Robert D. Kaplan: On Forgetting the Obvious Study Guide

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ROBERT D. KAPLAN: ON FORGETTING THE OBVIOUS

STUDY GUIDE, 2007

Steven Alan Samson

<http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=289>

Study Questions

1. **Believing** What did both **Sun-Tzu** and **Clausewitz** assume? How did this assumption color their advice? How were both of them able to rise to the level of theory? What does the author mean by “**moral hardiness**?” How is this quality illustrated by **Joseph Conrad**’s Captain McWhirr? How does he differ from Martin Decoud?
2. According to Ralph Peters, what is the great strategic factor that unbelieving academic faculties and bureaucracies ignore? What did **Rudyard Kipling** observe about “Arithmetic on the Frontier?” What makes the suicide bomber “the distilled essence of jihad?” How do the enemies of the West “amplify the concept of total war?” What is important about “holding or not holding a place for warriors in our midst?” What does Paul Bracken observe about nationalism in Asia? To ask whether the West remains able to maintain its technological lead is to ask the wrong question. Why?
3. **Dividing** Where is “never-say-die faith” largely confined in this country? Why does Kaplan believe that “universal values may pose an existential challenge to national security.” [Kaplan promotes a pagan warrior ethos in his book *Warrior Politics*, but the real problem is Bastiat’s “false philanthropy:” what James Kurth characterizes as “the Protestant Deformation” and Roger Scruton calls “the culture of repudiation”]. What obstacles have been thrown in the way of military recruitment? What accounts for “the emergence of a separate American warrior caste?” How do they differ from and how are they regarded by the cosmopolitan classes they protect?
4. **Fighting “In-Between”** What kinds of wars do middle-class democracies fight well? Why do they have difficulty with middle-sized wars? What is the **Powell Doctrine**? What are some of its limitations? What makes Iraq an exception? How have national militaries been changing? What radical changes in the political-military map of Eurasia are taking place? What can be expected to accompany the rise of non-Western militaries? What has America forgotten? What is Col. Robert Wheeler’s definition of **decadence**?

Review

Sun-tzu
Rudyard Kipling
Powell Doctrine

Carl von Clausewitz
Paul Bracken on nationalism in Asia
radical changes in Eurasia

Joseph Conrad
decadence