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**Peter Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower: The Next Generation of American Preeminence and the Coming Global Disorder*.  
Twelve, Hachette Book Group, 2014.**

Reviewed by Laina Farhat-Holzman

Peter Zeihan launched his own firm: Zeihan on Geopolitics, in 2012, after working for 12 years with the geopolitical analysis firm, Stratfor (Strategic Forecasts), where he was Vice President of Analysis.

Zeihan's definition of geopolitics explains how important this discipline is to understanding the world we live in. "Geopolitics is the study of how place impacts...everything: the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the size and serviceability of your mortgage, how long you live, how many children you have, the stability of your job, the shape and feel of your country's political system, what sorts of war your country wages or defends itself against, and ultimately whether your culture will withstand the test of time. The balance of rivers, mountains, oceans, plains, deserts, and jungles massively influences everything about both the human condition and national success."

He warns, however, that geopolitics is not the **ONLY** determinant. Human agency can provide surprises. But geography cannot be ignored. It just cannot be used to say that some human beings are better than others; they are just luckier; and sometimes the less lucky can use what they have with more intelligence.

"At its core," he says, "The Accidental Superpower is about the advantages and disadvantages that geography imposes. How such characteristics interact to create the world we now know. How fluctuations in those interactions are about to turn that world on its ear. How the most powerful state of the ending era will evolve into something far greater in the new."

The book begins with the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 (during WWII), which set up an agenda that established a global system of rule of law. Out of it came the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These were all institutions for putting back together devastated Europe and the foundations of the free-trade-dominated global economic systems that endure to this day. The US called the shots; they were the war effort in manpower, money, and materiel.

And this was what they were fighting for: the closed systems of the past (European colonial networks) would no longer be permitted. What was new was that America would open up all the world with our Navy to free trade. No more closed systems. No more excuses for war. None of these empires (British, Dutch, French) would have rival navies after this war. They would have to give up their empires. Including Japan, of course.

The book details the rebuilding of Europe and Asia, and the enormous prosperity it engendered, despite the USSR's attempt to undo it.

Now, says Zeihan, it is time to retire the Bretton Woods deal. It is winding down. This will not mean the end of US American power, but it is the end of this particular phase and the beginning of a period of chaos and the rise of a new one in its place. The US will be the only stable one in a world of collapse.

The second section of the book covers how geopolitics works: Place matters. Zeihan analyzes the benefits of nature and culture of the US and then every other possible major power of our time. There is little contest, he believes. The US has the balance of transport, deepwater navigation, and industrialization. In all three cases, the US enjoys the physical geography most favorable to their application. (More than any place else in the world.)

The next chapters look at our military defenses, a hard-eyed estimate of which seems to render us invulnerable. This invulnerability is not a matter of our cleverness but rests on the extraordinary geopolitics we command. He asks: Who could duke it out with our population of 300 million of us? China? India, The combined EU and Russia? Even combined, it appears that we are secure.

The book provides a keen analysis of World War II, its deadly costs and its aftermath in which the United States was the only intact superpower.

We could have been a nasty victor, but we were not. The US could have occupied by force, but we did not. The Russians did. We made alliances and did everything through voluntary cooperation. We waged peace, using trade as a weapon.

But our largesse was expensive. Free trade isn't cheap from a military point of view. The Cold War ended in 1989. Now what? Do we still patrol the world? He addresses next the energy revolution and demographics.

In a final chapter on migration and terrorism, he notes that Militant Islam will continue to roil the world, but much less so for us. We will be the beneficiaries of a flood of immigrants who are already educated and are looking for a safe place for their families and their money. This is all to the good for the United States.

This book might seem to some triumphalist about the United States. I don't see it that way. Zeihan is a geopolitical analyst and he has provided a hard-eyed look at our recent past, present, and future. Most of what he has written makes sense to me.