

IN ESSENCE

REVIEWS OF ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS AND SPECIALIZED JOURNALS HERE AND ABROAD

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FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

If North Korea Falls

THE SOURCE: “The Long Goodbye: The Future North Korea” by Robert D. Kaplan and Abraham M. Denmark, in *World Affairs*, May–June 2011.

OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS, Northeast Asia has been transformed from a remote backwater devastated by war into the crossroads of the 21st century, economically, politically, and militarily. One vestige of the old days remains: North Korea. Impoverished and isolated, it is nevertheless the keystone on which the fragile architecture of the region’s power relations rests. A North Korean collapse—a possibility but not a certainty—could drag China, South Korea, Japan, and possibly the United States into conflict. Robert D. Kaplan and Abraham M. Denmark, both fellows at the Center for a New American Security, warn that these powers are not prepared for the challenge.

It’s a fool’s errand to predict whether or when the regime of

Kim Jong Il or his son will fall apart. The country faces severe challenges at the same time that North Koreans have gained more access to the wider world. Mobile phones have become popular, Korean-language broadcasts of Voice of America and Radio Free Asia are available 24/7, and there is a black market in pornography and South Korean soap opera DVDs. Yet despite increased media availability, many people are so poor that some are said to be surviving on little more than grass. But the regime has withstood decades of extreme poverty. Could the Arab Spring affect North Korea? “It would be more likely . . . to spread to the next galaxy,” says one unnamed expert.

More than one crumbling country has been saved from chaos by its military, as Romania was after the collapse of communism in 1989. North Korea’s army might not be up to the job. It is organized around regional commands. Civil war could

erupt if they weren’t united under an international occupying force. And if the military fractured, “who would control nuclear facilities, biological weapons sites, missile production facilities, dual-use chemical production sites, chemical storage facilities, and weapons research centers?” Kaplan and Denmark ask.

If the regime did fall apart, the population of 22 million would become the responsibility of the international community—in practical terms South Korea, the United States, and China. It’s not clear their three armies could work together. South Korea officially seeks reunification but China benefits from division, preferring a buffer between it and democratic South Korea. Beijing might oppose reunification even after a collapse. Above all, it fears instability, which could send millions of North Korean refugees streaming into Manchuria. South Korea has its own worries about refugees.

Given all these conflicting interests in the region, one thing is clear, the authors write: If North Korea ruptures, “someone is going to lose.” The three powers plus Japan and Russia should be talking now about

what they would do in the event of a collapse that's well within the realm of possibility. Alas, say the authors, there's no sign they're doing that.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Latin America Rising

THE SOURCE: "The Post-American Hemisphere" by Russell Crandall, in *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2011.

WHY HAS THERE NEVER BEEN A military coup in Washington?

Because there's no U.S. embassy there.

So goes an old Latin American joke. But according to Russell Crandall, a professor of international politics at Davidson College, it's a joke whose time has passed. U.S. influence in Latin America has been ebbing for the last decade, as Washington's attention has turned toward the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and

homegrown powers such as Brazil, Colombia, and Chile have become ascendant.

Latin America is flourishing. In recent years it has enjoyed unprecedented economic, political, and diplomatic success. Brazil stands out, with an economy that grew 7.5 percent last year, but the average for the region was an impressive 5.6 percent. More than 40 million Latin Americans escaped poverty between 2002 and 2008. Free elections and active civil societies are the new normal, and "armed revolution is now dead in the region that was once its cradle." The recent global economic calamities were not enough to knock Latin America off its promising trajectory. Even most leftist governments, disposed to "fiscal profligacy," reacted with prudent, market-friendly policies.

But present successes could breed fresh challenges, Crandall warns. New alliances and enmities may emerge that could threaten the balance of power.

Brazil is now the leader of the

region, as demonstrated by its key role in creating the Union of South American Nations in 2008. But Colombian, Mexican, and Peruvian officials complain privately about Brazil's "arrogant" diplomacy. One official said, "The new imperialists have arrived, and they speak Portuguese."

Without the United States aggressively policing them, the region's authoritarians—Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Cuba's Fidel and Raul Castro, and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega—have sought to play a larger role in regional affairs. But they have been "the biggest losers" in Latin America's realignment, Crandall says. "Nothing hurts [them] more than when other Latin American governments, especially leftist democratic ones, opt for and succeed with capitalist, democratic, or U.S.-friendly policies."

The United States, long used to being Latin America's "master," must adapt to the new realities. So far, Crandall thinks President

EXCERPT

The Accidental Revolutionaries

Like it or not, the United States is a revolutionary power. Whether our government is trying to overthrow foreign dictators is almost irrelevant; American society is the most revolutionary force on the planet. The Internet is more subversive than the CIA in its prime. The dynamism of American society is constantly creating new businesses, new technologies, new ideas, and new social models. These

innovations travel, and they make trouble when they do. Saudi conservatives know that whatever geopolitical arrangements the Saudi princes make with the American government, the American people are busily undermining the core principles of Saudi society. It's not just our NGOs educating Saudi women and civil society activists; it's not just the impact of American college life on the rising generation of the Saudi elite. We change the world even when we aren't thinking anything about global revolution—when Hollywood and rap musicians are just trying to make a buck, they are stoking the fires of change around the world.

—WALTER RUSSELL MEAD, professor of foreign affairs at Bard College, on his blog, *Via Meadia* (June 12, 2011)