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Flash Points: The Emerging Crisis in Europe, by George Friedman

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to Ruth Benedict's much-maligned yet still-influential 1946 work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, a general primer on the seemingly contradictory forces driving this global power. For those with a professional interest in the country and its region, this book is a must-read, an enlightening facilitator in the current debate over Japan's place in Asia and the world.

J. OVERTON



Flash Points: The Emerging Crisis in Europe, by George Friedman. New York: Doubleday, 2015. 288 pages. \$28.95.

Flash Points is both an elegant and a disturbing book. Not simply elegant in its writing style, which is direct and clear, but also in its initial discussion of the age of discovery and enlightenment that propelled the European nations into becoming world powers—you rarely find a more cogent and concise explanation of the roots of European social, cultural, political, and economic development. Yet the book is also very disturbing because it details how the factors that allowed Europe to transform the world—faith, individualism, scientific inquiry, ideas of self-determination and legal rights, and nationalism—also contributed to the almost unfathomable destruction of the two world wars that tore it apart. George Friedman details the region's history, current events, and potential future in a way that makes an admonishment from his father, a Hungarian Jewish survivor of both the Nazis and the Soviets, seem very true: "Europe will never change. It will just act as if nothing happened" (p. 23).

Friedman, the well-known founder of Stratfor.com, one of the first private intelligence firms to be a major presence on the web, and an author of prescient books on the future security environment, begins with the personal history of how and why his family escaped Hungary in 1949. Having survived the horrors of World War II and the Communist takeover in a weak, dependent, and occupied nation, Friedman's father wanted his family to go to America and "live in a strong country with weak neighbors and, if possible, no Nazis, communists, or anyone else who believed in anything deeply enough to want to kill him and his family over it" (p. 17). His view—that a humane peace in Europe always would be a mere interlude—sets the scenario for the rest of the book.

This fear is, of course, what spurred the creation of the European Union (EU). Friedman analyzes the weaknesses of the EU and the sources of conflict throughout Europe, particularly in a situation in which NATO's perceived importance has diminished, and concludes that the centripetal forces of geopolitics are just too strong. It is not just the potential collapse of the euro; it is the fact that national identities cannot be supplanted by a European identity without destroying a cultural diversity established over millennia. The fact that the EU appeared to achieve some small success in cultivating a cosmopolitan Europeanness is, in Friedman's view, merely a veneer that a U.S. commitment to defending a cold peace under unique historical circumstances made possible.

Those circumstances have devolved. With the controlling pressures removed, Yugoslavia—perhaps the

greatest attempt at fusing otherwise hostile nationalities—exploded into violence until all sides were exhausted by fighting or concluded that opposing NATO’s wishes was too costly. But that was before a resurgent Russia could intervene on behalf of the Serbs. Friedman’s book tours the other potential flash points of Europe within a background where Russia is back, and the geopolitical question of who will be the hegemonic leader of Europe—France, Germany, or Russia—has returned. It is not ambition that drives; it is fear of the power of the others (as Thucydides described so many centuries ago). By all measures, Germany would remain the dominant power in economics, as it is the economic engine of the EU today. But it also is the power most easily invaded from both east and west. And it is growing impatient with the seeming impossibility of creating an EU that conforms to its view of necessary order. The Germans, according to Friedman, view themselves as the victims of the EU/euro economic crisis. What would it mean to the EU, NATO, and specifically eastern Europe if Germany were to cut a deal with Russia to secure its own “permanent” peace—secure to be the export power it already is beyond Europe?

In Friedman’s view, the question of Germany, Russia, and European peace is one of national culture as well as geopolitics: “For the Germans, success and disaster are intimately linked, so they are simultaneously afraid of what they have achieved and tremendously proud of it. . . . They do not aspire to lead a new Europe. They fear that they cannot escape the role. The rest of Europe harbors suspicions that

Germany’s public fears and modesty are feigned, that in the end the old Germany has never died but has merely been asleep” (p. 153). Add in Russian pressure and the fact that post–Cold War Germany is united, and the European foundation seems a lot less stable.

Even if the European powers never are moved to conflict with each other, Friedman’s conclusion is that the situation can make the continent safe for ethnic breakups, with all the resulting potential for wars—or perhaps hybrid wars and gray-zone conflicts—to occur. Russia will be the first to take advantage of that, prompting others to do the same. He predicts that “Europe’s history of conflict is far from over. . . . [I]n many places Europe’s anger against other Europeans is still there” (p. 251).

Ultimately, Friedman sees the future still controlled by Europe’s “Faustian spirit” that “haunted its greatest moment, the Enlightenment,” defined as “the desire to possess everything even at the cost of their souls,” and today “everything at no cost” (p. 257). By “everything,” he means national sovereignty without the exercise of national sovereignty; wealth distribution without work distribution; a world in which they can feel like the hegemon but not have to be it; a world in which wars would stop without intervention; and, perhaps worst of all, ethnic nationalism without its implications.

What can be done to prevent growing conflicts? Friedman flirts with the fact that America today is still as powerful as it was when it put out “the European fire in 1918 and 1945” and contained it during the Cold War. But can it do so in the future? Should it do so in the future, or do the fires need to burn

themselves out? Friedman is not sure, but he does give us a disturbing prospect about which we need to think deeply.

SAM J. TANGREDI



The End of the Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region, by Michael R. Auslin. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2017. 304 pages. \$30.

The signature foreign policy move, and greatest strategic insight, of Barack Obama's presidency was "the pivot"—later renamed "the rebalance"—to the Asia-Pacific region. President Obama's initiative grew out of his conviction that Asia had become the most important region in terms of economic dynamism, explosive demographic growth, and growing military tensions. And if one broadens the geography and semantics to include India—yielding the "Indo-Pacific"—this makes utter sense, since the region claims 60 percent of the world's population, nearly 40 percent of total global economic output, some of the fastest-growing and most capable militaries, and three nuclear states. No surprise, then, that the Obama White House argued in a November 2015 fact sheet that this region "is increasingly the world's political and economic center of gravity." Or, as top Asia expert and diplomat Kurt M. Campbell astutely wrote in *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, "[T]he lion's share of the history of the twenty-first century will be written in Asia" (pp. 1, 344).

While the Obama administration made a compelling case for the logic of pivoting to Asia—that is, elevating the time, attention, and resources

given to the region relative to other parts of the world—the results were uneven. Washington reinvigorated its diplomacy in the region, strengthened commitments with U.S. treaty allies, forged relationships with new partners such as Burma, began shifting military assets to the region, and negotiated a far-reaching trade deal intended to deepen economic integration. But it also failed to ratify that trade deal, suffered significant political setbacks with treaty allies Thailand and the Philippines, was unable to counter Pyongyang's rush toward acquiring nuclear weapons capable of reaching the United States, and did little to restrain Chinese maritime assertiveness and economic and political coercion in the region.

How then should one understand and evaluate the myriad factors contributing to Asia's future? And are the risks to the continued growth and stability of the region now eclipsing the region's promise? These are the questions that Michael Auslin, scholar in residence at the American Enterprise Institute, asks in his judicious, sobering, and compelling new book *The End of the Asian Century*. Auslin argues that Asia's future is significantly less assured than is commonly held. As a longtime scholar of, frequent traveler to, and trenchant observer on the geopolitics of Asia, he is positioned well to make such a case. This book is far from a polemic; in fact, Auslin approaches these questions as a skeptic, describing how he in fact originally held the opposite belief—that the twenty-first century inevitably looked to be an Asian century. Yet through repeated trips to the region and multiple meetings with senior policy makers, businessmen, and military