

Travel Tips

by David J. Smith

THOMAS P.M. BARNETT, *The Pentagon's New Map*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004), 435 pp., \$26.95.

Boiled down to its essence, Thomas Barnett's *The Pentagon's New Map* is a set of recommendations about where (and where not) to travel. Nevertheless, it is well worth reading, because some of these tips will no doubt prove essential to America's 21st Century journey.

Unfortunately, the message of *The Pentagon's New Map* is burdened by two problems that render it downright tedious in parts. The first is that Barnett's arrogance virtually drips off the page. In the 1980s, he writes, he played a role akin to that of Tom Clancy's superstar character Jack Ryan. Then he "spent the 1990s trying in vain to reconnect the military to the world outside the Pentagon." He failed "despite [his] considerable briefing skills." Sure, he left his wife alone one Thanksgiving, but he "was part of history!" Barnett, in short, tries to impress Clancy fans with the ways of Washington, all the while ignoring one essential tenet of life along the Potomac: if you have to tell people how important you are, you probably are not very important.

The second is that Barnett tries to weave what are unquestionably important observations—maybe even a nascent post Cold War strategy—into a grand theory. I read *The Pentagon's New Map* in Tbilisi, Georgia. From my

vantage point on Rustaveli Avenue, Barnett's theory was not firing on all cylinders. My first clue came from the map adorning the book's inside cover. Georgia, if that graphic is to be believed, has been the site of a major U.S. military peacekeeping mission. The problem is that, although a detachment of U.S. Marines is currently training the Georgian army down the road in Krtsanisi, there has in fact been no U.S. peacekeeping mission in Georgia.

Instead, there is a so-called CIS—Russian, actually—peacekeeping force that helps sustain the breakaway regime in the enclave of Abkhazia. This may seem a pesky detail to all but those of us embroiled in Caucasus politics, but it illustrates the problem: while many of his fellow Pentagon briefers may miss the forest for the trees, Barnett misses the trees for the forest.

Globalization, Barnett argues, has bypassed large swaths of humanity. Consequently, people in what he calls the "non-integrating gap" have little vested interest in the rules that we in the "functioning core" would like to uphold. Until we shrink the "gap" and forge near-consensus on a new set of rules, conflicts—catalyzed by disputes over religion, ethnicity, wealth or what have you—will continue to spew from the "gap" into the "core." Meanwhile, of course, we must insulate ourselves from these conflicts. And the U.S., as leader of the "core" and the world's only superpower, must take the lead in doing so.



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Barnett concludes that we will need military power, but of a sort far different from what the Pentagon has been buying. Moreover, military power alone will be insufficient; there must also be major efforts at economic and democratic development aimed at shrinking the “gap” and enlarging the “core.” Without them, we will be unable to keep pace with wars across the globe.

One could argue at the margins, but this is unquestionably a powerful thesis—and one with which Washington must grapple. It could even form the beginnings of the coherent post Cold War strategy for which we have been searching for almost fifteen years. And *The Pentagon’s New Map* is replete with brilliant observations and important sub-theses.

The problem, then, is one of overreach. Barnett’s thesis does not explain everything. For one thing, what exactly is the “core,” and what is the “gap”? Barnett assigns Brazil, South Africa and Mexico to the functioning “core.” Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, on the other hand, fall into the “gap.” But by what criteria? More problematic still is Barnett’s inclusion in the “core” of India and China. One can certainly hope that these countries will join the functioning “core,” but that is very different from asserting that they already have. Perhaps Barnett has never seen how people in central China’s Gansu Province live in mud huts, eking out a living with a pig and a few geese.

I doubt he has been to Tbilisi either. Sitting there, I found Barnett’s assignment of Russia to the “core,” and of democratic Georgia to the “gap,” most vexing. A young woman had just told me of her hope for her newborn son to grow up in their family home in Abkhazia. Today, however, he cannot, because Russia props up a regime there that chased out her family and most other Georgians. Indeed, Russia has

done everything it can to destabilize Georgia. If Russia today is part of the functioning “core,” then the concept is meaningless. More likely, then, Barnett is engaging in a bit of wishful thinking, or in a Cartesian calculation of how Russia ought to behave. Real world Russia remains leader of the “gap”—bits of Moscow and St. Petersburg may look like the “core,” but Chechnya and Bashkortostan certainly do not.

That means our task will be greater and messier than Barnett believes. Furthermore, though he is surely correct that the U.S. military needs a post-Cold War course correction, Pentagon planners must not exclude the emergence of a near-peer competitor to the U.S., and they must buy accordingly. Finally, perhaps cultural factors like religion and ethnicity are just a bit more powerful than Barnett’s thesis allows.

The point is that *The Pentagon’s New Map* is no map. But with a touch of humility and his “considerable briefing skills,” Barnett might be able to work with others to contribute to a post-Cold War strategy. He would be doing the nation a service. 