

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

## *The Critique of Pure Kagan*

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Christopher A. Preble

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Americans must learn to embrace their relative security and face down their lingering fears. Until they do so, the fear of the unknown works in Kagan's favor. It is difficult to disentangle the many different factors that have contributed to relative peace and security over the past half century, and it is impossible to know what would have happened in a world without America. The future is even more inscrutable. In this latest book, Kagan surveys all the explanations for what may have contributed to global peace and prosperity—including the spread of democracy, liberal economics, nuclear weapons, and evolving global norms against violence and war—and returns to his refrain from sixteen years earlier. “American hegemony,” he and Kristol wrote in 1996, “is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order.” Fast-forward to 2012, and nothing, it seems, has changed:

*There can be no world order without power to preserve it, to shape its norms, uphold its institutions, defend the sinews of its economic system, and keep the peace. . . . If the United States begins to look like a less reliable defender of the present order, that order will begin to unravel.*

He didn't prove that case before, and he doesn't now.

*Christopher Preble is the vice president for defense and foreign-policy studies at the Cato Institute.*