



# Why Geography Matters: More Than Ever

By Harm de Blij

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In recent years our world has seen transformations of all kinds: intense climate change accompanied by significant weather extremes; deadly tsunamis caused by submarine earthquakes; unprecedented terrorist attacks; costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; a terrible and overlooked conflict in Equatorial Africa costing millions of lives; an economic crisis threatening the stability of the international system. Is there some way we can get our minds around these disparate global upheavals, to grasp these events and their interconnections, and place our turbulent world in a more understandable light? Acclaimed author Harm de Blij answers this question with one word: geography.

In this revised edition of the immensely popular and influential *Why Geography Matters*, de Blij tackles topics from the burgeoning presence of China to the troubling disarray of the European Union, from the dangerous nuclear ambitions of North Korea to the revolutionary Arab Spring. By improving our understanding of the world's geography, de Blij shows, we can better respond to the events around us, and better prepare ourselves to face the global challenges ahead. Peppering his writing with anecdotes from his own professional travels, de Blij expands upon his original argument, offering an updated work that is as engaging as it is eye-opening. Casual students of geography and professional policy-makers alike will benefit from this stimulating and crucial perspective on geography and the way it shapes our world's events.

America, de Blij warns, has become the world's most geographically illiterate society of consequence. Indeed, despite increasing global interconnectivity and rapid change, Americans seem to be less informed and less knowledgeable about the rest of the world than ever. In this compelling volume, de Blij shows why this dispiriting picture must change, and change now.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Remarkable.... A friendly and accessible reader for those who have a basic grasp of some of the concepts of geography and who want to understand where the world is headed. It is also an urgent call to educators across the United States to restore the study of geography to the nation's schools.... A powerful and deeply personal writer, de Blij discusses his own background in detail and fills the book with anecdotes from his experience. This makes for an entertaining and enlightening trek."--David J. Smith, *Christian Science Monitor*

"A provocative, fast-paced book that interprets the world through the dynamic discipline of geography. The remarkable chapter on Africa is at once compelling and tragic, but also cautiously hopeful. If you think that geography makes your eyes glaze over, try this book and you'll discover insights you've never encountered before."--David Miller, Senior Editor, *National Geographic Maps*

"Harm de Blij packs so much useful information and so many thoughtful insights into *Why Geography Matters* that the book is indispensable to those seeking to understand our complex, changing world. The United States State Department would be well served to make this book required reading for all newly recruited foreign service officers and diplomats--and it is strongly recommended for all citizens.... de Blij demonstrates persuasively how the tools and findings of geographers are indispensable in understanding the world today. In its scope, analytical balance, power, originality, and readability, *Why Geography Matters* is a matchless book; the riveting chapter on Africa is the best summation of the continent's past and prospects I have ever read."--Willard DePree, Former United States Ambassador to Mozambique and Bangladesh, On Special Assignment to the Department of State

"De Blij writes from a conviction that not only the American public but also government officials can be dangerously ignorant of basic geography, so to enlighten them he discusses three topics with national security implications. His tour of Islamic radicalism has the most immediate relevance and, buttressed by a profusion of maps, it covers Afghanistan, Iraq, the Islamic "front" in sub-Saharan Africa, and--Paraguay? Learning the significance of that outlier to the geography of Islamic terrorism (as well as its unappeasable aims) typifies many of de Blij's informational surprises, which are arranged clearly and spiced with the author's allusions to his career and travels."--*Booklist*

"If the author did nothing more than evince the extent to which geography is political destiny, he would have accomplished a worthwhile objective. But he succeeds in much more, raising thought-provoking issues on global warming, terrorism, China's ascendancy, Europe's future, Russia's role, and Africa's prospects, issues our legislative and executive branches of government as well as members of the media need to consider in geographic perspective. Every person responsible for making public policy, as well as those who interpret these complex issues for the public, should read this book."--Anthony H. Ewing, former Director of the

Committee on Research Coordination for the Science Advisor, Office of Science and Technology Policy,  
Executive Office of the President

"Illuminating perspective...splendid maps...useful methodology...extremely well-informed."--*Publishers Weekly*

"[Here], de Blij argues that geographic ignorance is a more serious problem than many people think. De Blij, an accomplished academic and regular television geography analyst, writes that by gaining a greater working knowledge of geography, Americans will be better suited to deal with the problems facing the country and the world. De Blij makes a good case for geography's importance. [His] treatment of this subject is particularly refreshing."--*San Francisco Chronicle*

"If we could mandate reading material for our leaders, [this] would be at or near the top of the list. It provides a plethora of insights."--*Cape Cod Chronicle*

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"Nobody knows how to explain the importance of geographic literacy to citizens and leaders of the United

States better than Harm de Blij. As the NBC News "geography analyst" explains in his 30th book, "Why Geography Matters," geography is much more than memorizing mountain ranges and estuaries."--*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*

"De Blij argues that most people in the United States, including the country's elected officials, are dangerously ignorant of basic geography. The consequence, he writes, is that leaders lack insights to connections in a world facing climate change, overpopulation, and the continuing threat of terrorism."--*Science News*

"eloquent and encyclopedic" --*The New Yorker*

#### About the Author

**Harm de Blij** is John A. Hannah Professor at Michigan State University. He was the popular Geography Editor on ABC's "Good Morning America" for seven years, worked at NBC News as Geography Analyst, and was the writer of and commentator for the original PBS Series "The Power of Place." The author of over 30 books, he is an honorary life member of the National Geographic Society.

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