



Photograph by Matthew Septimus

Terrae Incognitae: Survival Guides for Curious Globalists

From Iran to Indonesia, opportunity awaits. But you've got to know the territory.

Knowledge Review
by Stephan Götz-Richter

You've been a senior executive of a major multinational for quite some time. Of course, you know that globalization is here to stay. And no doubt you are keenly aware that your company's growth prospects lie beyond your nation's shores, especially in unpredictable emerging-market countries.

In line with the steady expansion of your management responsibilities, you've led a regional business unit from London, Sydney, or Toronto and visited a total of 15 different countries, on four continents. By some yardsticks, you are as global-minded a manager as they come.

Yet you harbor a real sense of frustration inside your chest.

No, it's not the job stress, or all the hectic travel. Your frustration is deeper than that. How much do you really know about the world? How well prepared are you to judge strategic opportunities outside the mature economies of North America, Europe, and Asia? There are many places in the world you have never seen, and given what's on your plate already, you may never see them.

Without actually going to far-away lands — such as racially torn

Stephan Götz-Richter

(srichter@theglobalist.com) is publisher and editor-in-chief of *The Globalist.com* (www.theglobalist.com), a leading Web-based daily magazine covering the global economy. A weekly columnist for the *Financial Times Deutschland*, Mr. Götz-Richter has written for the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, *South China Morning Post*, *Le Monde*, and other publications covering world affairs.

Zimbabwe, oil-rich Azerbaijan, religiously zealous Afghanistan and Iran, bustling Brazil, struggling Serbia, or explosive Indonesia — is it possible to go on pretending you are one of your company's most senior and savvy global managers?

In short, do you have to live forever with global blind spots? Not if you settle into a comfortable armchair (or, if need be, an airplane seat) with one of a rich array of books that will take you on fascinating and vivid explorations of specific countries and global problems, including climate change and epidemic diseases. These are books that will push you to think deeply about global societal challenges, the business environment, and life in general in countries off the industrialized beaten track.

The best place to start eliminating your personal terrae incognitae is Robert D. Kaplan's *Eastward to Tartary: Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus*. This should be read right along with Mr. Kaplan's earlier book *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. The author, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, leads readers on a country-by-country tour, mostly by bus and train,

through Eastern Europe, Africa, the Near and Middle East, and South-west Asia.

Unlike travelogue writers, however, Mr. Kaplan is a geopolitical thinker who is keenly interested in exploring the commercial and political context in each country. You would have to look hard to find someone who can better pinpoint the relevance of cell phones for "hustler economies with weak hard-wired infrastructures," such as in Romania. Mr. Kaplan explains how tough it is for Bulgaria's fledgling democratic institutions to fight against Russian efforts to "re-satellize" the country, and the implications in the Middle East of the budding Turkish-Israeli relationship. His reporting includes interviews with the intelligentsia as well as the downtrodden. At his best, Mr. Kaplan is as deft as George Orwell in his ruthless analysis of social dysfunctions — and as brilliantly strategic as Henry Kissinger at his most concise.

After Robert Kaplan's tour, you may feel a distinct yearning to spend more time on one country. If so, sit down with Elaine Sciolino and her *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran*. This is a riveting account of Iran's struggle to challenge the pres-

ent master of the universe, the United States.

As Ms. Sciolino, a *New York Times* reporter, explains, Iran may feel it won crucial battles against America. But Iranian society — and even the country's clerics — are increasingly concerned about the crippling effects of their much heralded "moral victory" over the forces of modernization and the West, in general. After all, the strict turn toward religious dogmatism has meant that a once-vibrant society has underperformed its economic potential for decades. Many well-educated young people are without work or are underemployed, and keen to emigrate to Western nations. That is hardly a welcome development for corporations (mostly non-American ones) considering expanding their business with Iran.

In this regard, Ms. Sciolino's portrayals of the economic marginalization of women in Iranian society are particularly penetrating. She makes clear that both lower-class, highly religious women and middle- and upper-class Westernized women were a critical part of the revolution that swept the Shah from power. Yet, after the revolution, neither group felt a sense of liberation, because societal constraints imposed by the religious

leadership limited most women's ability to develop the professional skills that Iran badly needs. Ms. Sciolino explores how the national power aspirations of the Iranian clergy conflict with their systematic undermining of the growth of professional women, which has exacerbated Iran's economic troubles.

Chrystia Freeland's *Sale of the Century: Russia's Wild Ride From Communism to Capitalism* is another fresh and in-depth country portrait, one that allows readers to observe the behind-the-scenes events that are shaping Russia's future. Ms. Freeland became Moscow bureau chief of the *Financial Times* at 27 years of age and now, at 32, is the deputy editor of Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper. That alone tells you something about her skills in the reporting craft.

Although a lot of attention is given to political infighting in Russia, much less is known about the mysteries of Russian culture and the even more mysterious inner workings of Russian business — how deals are done and business coalitions built.

Ms. Freeland took it upon herself to crack through these walls. Through sheer persistence, she managed to get

interviews with Russian tycoons who previously had eluded most reporters, certainly Western ones. She describes detailed one-on-one conversations with leading Russian business figures, often conducted at very short notice and in their private clubs. It only adds to the power of her insights that these highly patriarchal men were unaccustomed to dealing with professional women in any role other than administrative assistant.

Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia is the best choice to expand your knowledge of East Asia. The book was written by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, a Pulitzer Prize-winning husband-and-wife team of *New York Times* correspondents who previously published an intriguing book titled *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power*, based on their experiences in China.

The authors' work is most appealing in those sections where they explore such countries as China, India, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, and what they will be like 40 years from now. According to the authors, China will be among the industrial leaders of the global economy, and a Chinese man, Jia Mingzi of the Sichuan Space Industry Corporation,

will replace Bill Gates as the richest man on earth in 2040.

Although California's Silicon Valley has lost its luster, such countries as India are coming up fast. Among India's advantages are a general improvement in the management of its economy, and the fact that most of the Indian-born software engineers who fueled the boom south of San Francisco have firmly established their own country as the world's leading software producer.

The authors also show the fascinating parallels in migration in 19th-century America and 21st-century Asia.

If you'd like to go beyond readings on contemporary affairs, history can be an excellent guide for understanding the future. At their best, historians invite you on a spellbinding exercise in time travel, where you are not sure whether you are reading about past decades, or the challenges of those to come. Olivier Bernier, a cultural historian based in New York City and the author of *The World in 1800*, can tell you about China's problems with its unwieldy administrative structures, as well as migration and population-related challenges. It all sounds very contemporary, but the material he presents is pulled from 200 years in the past.

In some ways, Mr. Bernier relieves some of our fears and feeling of resignation about present-day social problems by showing that previous generations dealt with them, too. Anybody worrying about China's population size now is swiftly reminded by him that the country's rulers in 1800 had some 300 million mouths to feed. Even Europe's then-most populous country, France, had a population of a mere 20 million people — one-fifteenth the population of China at that time.

Without going to faraway lands, you can pursue fascinating and vivid explorations of countries off the industrialized beaten track.

Moving beyond countries and regions to global issues, we examine many a global manager's biggest blind spot — the environment. Today, it isn't just the raw material extractors and the manufacturers of the world, but every industry, from insurance and banking to software and biotechnology, that is being held responsible for protecting the fate of the earth. The more global the company, the more environmental knowledge executives need.

These days, one has to be prepared for sweeping attacks by well-organized, media-savvy critics. Worse still, it is almost pointless to argue with people who viscerally believe that globalization equals pollution. And although newspaper editorialists tell you the Kyoto Protocol on global warming is a mess, you honestly aren't sure. What you do know is that none of the partisans have it all right.

Under those circumstances, wouldn't it be great to have a book at your fingertips that explored environmental challenges in clear language and on a global canvas? This is the book J.R. McNeill, a professor at Georgetown University who specializes in environmental history, set out to produce. Professor McNeill's *Something New Under the Sun:*

An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World deals swiftly and succinctly with matters of economics, science, politics, and culture.

Where else can you find, in a single volume, an overview of “Energy History Since 10,000 B.C.” in seven pages? You will learn such things as humans are 18 percent efficient, when one measures their conversion of food to mechanical energy. And you are reminded that slavery was the answer to fundamental energy shortages prior to the advent of the steam engine and oil.

Professor McNeill provides fresh comparative analyses of regional challenges. For example, he looks at the cleanliness of the Rhine River versus that of the Ganges to illuminate challenges facing Central Europe and India. He also shows the difficulties in procuring adequate drinking water for an urban population by comparing Istanbul's efforts throughout history with those of Chicago. His book is full of great narrative and analytical techniques that will help readers expand not just their environmental knowledge, but also their global perspective — all in a historic context spanning millennia.

Hilary French's *Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization* is a solid, non-ideological primer on the “ecology of globalization.” Ms. French, a vice president of the Washington, D.C.-based Worldwatch Institute, has a reputation as a balanced thought leader. In her book she covers everything from the slow “greening” of Wall Street to how global shipping lanes are once again a major transporter of disease. The latter issue will eventually be sorted out in international agreements and monitoring regimes, but if you want to assess the prospects and hurdles on the road to global governance, this book is your best guide.

Its garish title notwithstanding, Laurie Garrett's *Betrayal of Public Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health* is a magisterial book about global strategy in the 21st century. If you've ever spent a waking moment thinking about such abstractions as arms control, this book is a must-read because it talks so lucidly about humankind's new, primarily non-military extinction threats.

Painstakingly researched and clearly written, this work by the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Newsday* reporter covers AIDS, the Ebola

virus, the threat of biological terrorism, and many more existential health threats. Ms. Garrett goes all the way back to the Black Death episodes of the mid-14th century. Going deep into Africa and Russia, her work spans the globe. But she does not shy away from handling such political hot potatoes as class-based provision of health care in the United States.

Reading her thick, but never verbose, tome, I was reminded of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, which created a lasting literary splash in the 1970s. Ostensibly covering "global public health," as she calls it, *Betrayal of Public Trust* provides a similarly honest account of the depressing realities of contemporary humanity. Although the topics covered in this book are urgently relevant for executives in health care-related industries, it covers issues that are overlooked by most business leaders in their job-related intellectual haste.

Finally, for fun, grab G. Pascal Zachary's *The Global Me: Picking Globalism's Winners and Losers*. The author is one of the *Wall Street Journal*'s best reporters and has a mandate to roam globally. Mr. Zachary invites you into the living

Global Resources

Works mentioned in this review.

Olivier Bernier, *The World in 1800* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 452 pages, \$30.

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J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), 416 pages, \$29.95.

Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (Free Press, 2000), 402 pages, \$26.

G. Pascal Zachary, *The Global Me: Picking Globalism's Winners and Losers* (Public Affairs, 2000), 320 pages, \$26.

room of second-generation Chinese immigrants to Canada and lets you converse with the son of a Japanese executive who grew up mostly over-seas. His portraits of individuals who are succeeding in the age of cross-cultural life are fascinating. +

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