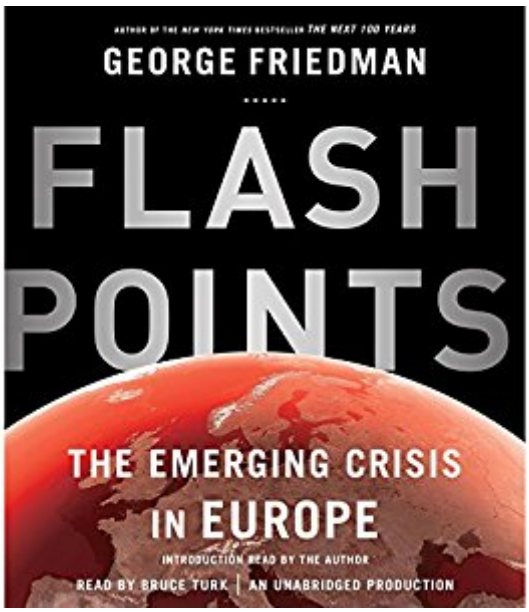
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# Flashpoints: The Emerging Crisis In Europe




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## Synopsis

A major new book by New York Times best-selling author and geopolitical forecaster George Friedman (The Next 100 Years, The Next Decade) with a bold thesis about coming conflict in the world, this provocative work examines the geopolitical flashpoints - particularly in Europe - in which imminent future conflicts are brewing. George Friedman has forecasted the coming trends (politics, technology, population, and culture) of the next century in The Next 100 Years, and focused his predictions on the coming ten years in The Next Decade. Now, in Flashpoints, Friedman zooms in on the region that has, for 500 years, been the cultural hotbed of the world - Europe - and examines the most basic and fascinating building block of the region: culture. Analyzing the fault lines that have existed for centuries - and which have led to two world wars and dozens more conflicts - Friedman walks us through the "flashpoints" that are still smoldering beneath the surface and are on course to erupt again. In Flashpoints, George Friedman begins with a fascinating history of the events leading up to the horrific wars that nearly tore apart Western civilization - killing over 100 million people on the "civilized" European continent. Modern-day Europe, and the formation of the European Union, were designed to minimize the built-in geopolitical tensions that led to catastrophic war, but as Friedman shows with a mix of history and cultural analysis, those plans have failed. "Flashpoints" are now simmering as dangerously as in the early twentieth century. Zeroing in on half a dozen locations, borderlands, and cultural dynamics, George Friedman does what few historians can - he explains precisely how certain trends are unstoppable, and what the future holds... both in terms of conflict and also opportunity. Flashpoints also explains in riveting detail how events in Europe will affect the rest of the world.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
Listening Length: 11 hoursÃ  Â andÃ  Â 40 minutes
Program Type: Audiobook
Version: Unabridged
Publisher: Random House Audio
Audible.com Release Date: January 27, 2015
Whispersync for Voice: Ready
Language: English
ASIN: B00RC678UU
Best Sellers Rank:  #75 inÃ  Â Books > Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events > Political

History & Theory  #157 inÃ  Â Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe  #245 inÃ  Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > European

## Customer Reviews

Friedman is great at summarizing important points. I have read historical books two or three times as long which provide less information, filled with countless details which are forgotten as soon as read. Friedman comes from a Hungarian Jewish family and he first explains the history of his family in Europe. As he states, being Jewish was the family's main identity and being in Hungary was just a geographical accident.He then begins the history of modern (post-medieval) Europe which started in the 1400s. At that time Islamic civilization abutted Europe, controlling much of Africa, western and central Asia, and parts of the Pacific. Europe's main demand then was for black pepper from India, and Prince Henry of Portugal (aka the Navigator) began the process of oceanic voyages around Africa to bypass the Islamic center and get spices directly from India. In 1498 Vasco da Gama made it around Africa to India. Meanwhile Spain had entered the race and in 1492 had Columbus sail west and discover what he thought were the outskirts of India. This led to Spain becoming the first world power, followed by other European world powers, with the last European world power the Soviet Union ceasing to exist on the first day of 1992, exactly 500 years after Columbus's discovery.Three men jolted Europe out of its medieval self-centered isolation and began the modern world. These are the previously mentioned Columbus in 1492 (Europe is not the center of the world), Martin Luther in 1517 (Rome is not the center of Europe), and Copernicus in 1543 (Earth is not the center of the universe). Especially important was Luther's belief that individual Christians can interpret the Bible for themselves, thereby launching modern individualism.This led to the scientific revolution as formulated by Francis Bacon (born 1561) where knowledge is based on observation and experimentation (not ancient authority). But back then it was necessary to say that science would be used to understand the world God had created. All this led to the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries where reason would overcome superstition, merit would overcome aristocratic privilege, and the meritorious would govern through a republic. Meanwhile Europe had fragmented into different nations, originally influenced by Luther's system of printing the Bible in local European languages (not Latin). Modern Europe became governed by science and nationalism.In 1914 life was good in Europe. There was peace and prosperity as well as technological and artistic innovation. European empires controlled most of the world. The last major war was a century ago in 1815 with the final defeat of Napoleon. Europeans were optimistic. Then World War I suddenly broke out and much of the old order collapsed. Europe was devastated, especially Germany and

Russia. Two new ideologies then developed in these countries led by two ruthless men. Stalin wanted to create a new society based on communist theory, kill or arrest any opponents, and end up with a worker's paradise. Hitler wanted to strengthen Germany by colonizing parts of Europe, ridding it of subversive elements like Jews, and end up with a thousand-year German Reich (empire). World War II ensued which further devastated Europe. In the 31 years between 1914 and 1945 about 100 million were killed. Europe ended up being occupied by American and Russian forces.Friedman states that Americans "pitied" Europeans and were generous with help. Russians "envied" Europeans and stole from them, shipping whole factories back to the Soviet Union. They came from a place where watches and indoor plumbing were luxuries. (When I visited the Soviet Union in 1984 toilet paper was a luxury - they used newspaper which showed Pravda had some use after all). Europeans were suffering from what is today called post-traumatic stress disorder. But back then people were expected to recover by themselves.While occupied eastern Europe became part of a new Russian Empire, western Europe pursued unification to prevent another war. The main idea was to unify Germany and France (enemies since 1871) plus the other countries. This resulted in Franco-German economic unification with the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the Treaty of Rome and the European Community (1957) which also contained Italy and Spain as well as smaller countries. Meanwhile Britain tried to maintain its independence by creating the European Free Trade Association which included countries like Sweden and Switzerland. Britain eventually joined the European Community in 1973 and the EFTA faded away. Further unification came in 1991 with the Maastricht Treaty and the European Union (now 28 countries). The main theme in Europe today is that it is a place of peace and prosperity that has made war obsolete.But cracks began appearing in this scenario. At first wars erupted in the 1990s in tense areas such as the Balkans and the Caucasus. Meanwhile Russia had recovered from the collapse of the Soviet Union and began attempts to re-establish its empire in 2008. This happened in Georgia where two northern provinces broke away from the country with the help of Russian troops. Contrast this with four years earlier when the Orange Revolution in Ukraine ousted a pro-Russian government which had won with a rigged election. By 2014 Russia felt powerful enough to invade and incorporate the Ukrainian province of Crimea. It is true that Crimea had historically been a part of Russia until Khrushchev gave it to Ukraine in 1954 (since it was attached to Ukraine but across the sea from Russia), but in 1994 Russia signed an international agreement to guarantee the borders of Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine abandoning its nuclear weapons (the biggest mistake it ever made).There were also economic problems caused by the worldwide Great Recession of 2008. Prosperous countries like Germany weathered the storm but poorer countries like Greece sank further into

bankruptcy. Germany is a country which produces more than it consumes and is a major exporter. Greece is a country which consumes more than it produces and is a major importer. The tension there is that Germany does not want to be the welfare department for southern Europe while countries like Greece want more welfare (foreign aid or "loans" expected to be forgiven).Friedman cites various flashpoints which are too numerous to mention here. There is always Germany which is generating resistance by trying to impose economic discipline on resistant poor southern European countries and mafia-style eastern European countries. Russia has had its borders pushed back to before Peter the Great, with the Baltic states, Belarus, and Ukraine now independent. Putin wants them back.Towards the end of the book Friedman finally addresses the biggest problem facing western Europe, which is the Muslim invasion (Russia is eastern Europe's biggest problem and the current battleground is Ukraine). Western Europe has been operating under the myth that due to its official policy of tolerance it has made war archaic and can accommodate millions of Muslims. The reality is that Muslims are there to benefit economically and despise tolerance as well as its proponents. They are more interested in imposing their culture on a culturally weak western Europe.European elites sponsored this invasion to gain cheap labor to benefit themselves as the main investors. They then imposed this policy on the rest as a manifestation of morally superior tolerance and understanding. As usual the European middle and lower classes had little influence over this matter and resented the imposition of this invasion. This conflict has led to Muslim terrorism, a return to warfare in Europe which the new policies were supposed to have banished.Once again we can see that history repeats itself. A dying Roman Empire imported Germanic barbarians to solve its economic and military problems. When additional waves of these barbarians invaded the empire, there was no one left able or willing to defend it. It took Europe a thousand years to recover from the fall of Rome. The current situation may be the beginning of a similar outcome.

Friedman shows Europe's tribes are still alive and still ready to kick each other. He says recent prosperity keeps a lid on Europe's simmering pot, but he thinks Europeans won't defend their prosperity from thieves and invaders. He is right ... left to themselves, they would let a war start, then once again drag most of the world into the mess their prosperity invited. He concludes it will happen, because he doesn't see intervention.Intervention is required. It may come as a result of the border flashpoints he describes so well. Friedman sees those border problems in history, expecting them to repeat. He is right that Europeans are still hopelessly utopian, wishfully thinking diplomacy will win, but Europe is organized politically, economically, and militarily as never before in history.

Europe is surely capable of projecting its organization across its borders. Friedman doesn't expect it to do so. If he is right and Europeans don't do so, we will suffer Europe's weakness yet again. If a leader is inspired, and Europe does the unexpected against thieves and invaders, Friedman will be happily wrong.It takes a lot of thought for a reader to connect Friedman's flashpoints into inspiration, but it is worth our effort. Yet intervention is a faster path to better inspiration. It is time for flashpoints surrounding Europe to get inspired responses. Thieves and invaders are actively inviting them. Pressure is building. Intervention and inspiration seem more likely now than when Friedman wrote only a few years ago.

Do you want to better understand the European Union and its fate?Can you explain in short words why Germany wants to have Greece remaining in the EU and the EUR, whatever it costs?If you want comprehensive answers to all these questions and more, then this is a book for you: "Flashpoints: The Emerging Crisis in Europe" by George Friedman.Friedman's objectivesFriedman sets out the following questions that he wanted to answer with his book:How did Europe achieve global domination, politically, militarily, economically, and intellectually?What was the flaw in Europe that caused it to throw away this domination between 1914 and 1945? andIs the period of peace that followed 1945 what the future of Europe will look like?The last question is the most important one for Friedman.His answer - in short - is: "No, it is not very likely that there will be continued peace throughout Europe".What is so special with this book?Friedman covered the big picture by providing detailed support, country by country. At the same time he lays open his working techniques which made him one of the very few internationally recognized geopoliticians.George Friedman also reveals a lot of himself. He is letting the reader into his life, he tells the exciting story of his family's escape from persecution in WW II Hungary. And his starting point is impressive. He was born in Hungary, escaped with his family to the USA, and then travelled almost all European and close-European countries that he is writing about in his book.This obviously shaped him to become someone who comes close to a world citizen, although he is usually putting the USA in the first place. I would not call this "arrogant" but one can throughout the entire book see that Friedman sees the USA to be the successor of Europe's domination of the world. And this is what this book has in common with most other books in the area of geopolitics, the USA are take as the center of the geopolitical universe and everything else follows from there.Anything missing in the book?If Friedman completely left out one significant point in his book then it is the future of manufacturing and its implication on geopolitics. Friedman emphasizes several times on international sea trade and the importance of protecting an empire's sea trade (namely the one of the USA) with a navy,

but he does not recognize that the future of 3D printing and rapid machining will bring more decentralized manufacture and less international logistics. It is yet to be seen if the USA will be able to continue in the future maintaining a navy that can invade any place of the world within 24 hours.And, of course, the Brexit is not captured in Friedman's book because this event is too young. I got the second edition of November 2015, which has updates about the ongoing refugee invasion, and Friedman already has somewhat anticipated the Brexit in chapter 15 of his book. But he qualifies this view with the following statement:"The Europeans see the British as being different from them. The Americans see the British as different from themselves as well. The British see themselves as both unique and needing to have a foot in each camp."George Friedman's professional backgroundGeorge Friedman is the founder and chairman of a commercial company that specializes in geopolitical forecasting. Before that he was the chairman of the global intelligence company Stratfor, which he founded back in 1996. This explains the style of the present book, George Friedman is surely a seasoned expert in geopolitics.Important ideas to rememberAccording to Friedman, Germany - and not France - plays a central role in Europe. One of his main points is that the EU created an only temporary abatement of Europe's core problems, which are nationalism and power - in particular German power. According to him, we are now in a period where that abatement is in the process of failing.Friedman summarizes the role of the USA as follows, which is probably true but certainly diffiult to swallow for some:"After the war, the United States became the first power to control all the world's oceans. It had expelled the Japanese from the Pacific - and the British and the French as well. It now dominated the North Atlantic, and through NATO, what was left of the Royal Navy was, in part at least, under American command. It was a maritime empire, and the British no longer controlled the sea lanes."This is only one example for Friedman's mercilessly straight approach in his book. He presents facts in order to back up his theories and ideas, regardless of whether these facts hurt or not.Here is one more merciless slap, right in the face of one-world order supporters:"... the European Union ... is crumbling. There are four European Unions. There are the German states (Germany and Austria), the rest of northern Europe, the Mediterranean states, and the states in the borderland. The latter face the retaking of their old borderlands by Russia. The Mediterranean Europeans face massive unemployment experienced by Americans in the Great Depression. The northern European states are doing better but none are doing as well as the Germans."Being of German origin myself, I can say that this book is not a bad read at all, but I may be biased ...Key facts of this bookThis book is so much filled with a large variety of facts that it is difficult to select which facts are the most important ones.What was certainly new for me was the fact that the British - under tremendous war pressure from Germany after the

fall of France - agreed to take 50 old destroyers from the USA, in return of a 99-year lease of land and bases, including the eastern Bahamas, the southern coast of Jamaica, St. Lucia, western Trinidad, Antigua, parts of British Guiana and basing rights in Bermuda and Newfoundland.Letting the Greeks off the EU hook would not hurt Germany or the EU at all, as Greece is only 2 percent of Europe's total economy. But it would set a precedent that would endanger the entire European project. And this cannot be as - this is an important fact - half of Germany's exports goes to other EU countries, and exports make half of Germany's total GDP. And this with Germany being the world's third largest single exporting nation. This is unique within the EU. So what is good for Germany may not be good for the rest of the EU and vice versa.ConclusionIn very short words, what I took from Friedman's book is this: if one has to decide on expanding his business into Europe, then Germany, Austria and Switzerland are surely top tier candidates, followed by the nordic countries. The UK - and with it the Netherlands - are playing in a different but still very attractive league. The remainder of Europe should be taken with a pinch of salt, to put it diplomatically. And don't bet the farm on that there will not be a war in Europe again, especially along the Russian border.Whether you like these ideas or agree with them or not, this book is a must read if you are interested in Europe's future.

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