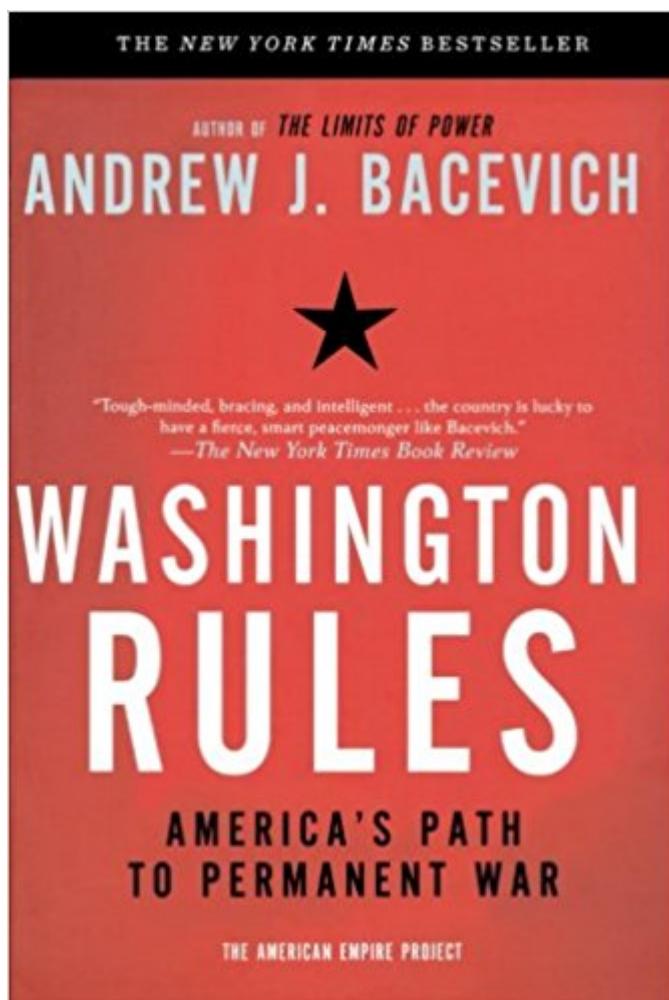


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Washington Rules: America's Path To Permanent War (American Empire Project)



Synopsis

"Tough-minded, bracing, and intelligent . . . the country is lucky to have a fierce, smart peacemonger like Bacevich."The New York Times Book Review Hailed as "brilliant" (The Washington Post), Washington Rules is Andrew J. Bacevich's bestselling challenge to the conventional wisdom that American security requires the United States (and us alone) to maintain a permanent armed presence around the globe, to prepare our forces for military operations in far-flung regions, and to be ready to intervene anywhere at any time. Adopted by administrations on both sides of the political spectrum during the past half century, this Washington consensus on national security has become foreign policy gospel when, according to Bacevich, it has outlasted its usefulness. With vivid, incisive analysis, Bacevich assails and exposes the preconceptions, biases, and habits that underlie this pervasive faith in military might, especially the notion that overwhelming superiority will oblige others to accommodate America's needs and desireswhether for cheap oil, cheap credit, or cheap consumer goods. Instead, Bacevich argues that we must reconsider the principles which shape American policy in the world and acknowledge that fixing Afghanistan should not take precedence over fixing Detroit. As we enter a period when our militarism has become both unaffordable and increasingly dangerous, replacing this Washington consensus is crucial to America's future and may yet offer the key to the country's salvation.

Book Information

Series: American Empire Project

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Metropolitan Books; Reprint edition (March 29, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805094229

ISBN-13: 978-0805094220

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 136 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #283,765 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Military Policy #622 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Security #640 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > General

Customer Reviews

Bacevich, a retired colonel, critiques the unstated, unexamined premises, the "Washington Rules" that govern American foreign policy--even to the detriment of national security and domestic harmony. Bacevich is frustrated by the hamstrung debate, but Sean Runnette is not. He reads with a polite NPR softness at odds with the crusading, rabble-rousing tone of Bacevich's writing, but the contrast works better than might be expected. Runnette treads softly over Bacevich's reportage, picking out the most crushing indictments of the text and highlighting them by dropping his voice to an intimate whisper. The contrast between the ideas proffered and their accompanying emotions are distinct, and well-rendered. A Metropolitan hardcover (Reviews, May 24). (Aug.) (c) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review The U.S. spends more on the military than the entire rest of the world combined and maintains 300,000 troops abroad in an "empire of bases," all part of a credo of global leadership and a consensus that the U.S. must maintain a state of semiwar. The Washington consensus, across administrations dating back to the cold war, is that the world must be organized in alignment with American principles, even if it means using force. Bacevich, with background in the military at the rank of retired army colonel and the perspective afforded by academia, offers a vivid and critical analysis of the assumptions behind the credo of global leadership and eternal military vigilance that has become increasingly expensive and unsustainable. He details American misadventures from the Bay of Pigs to the invasion in Iraq, and the most prominent figures ("semiwarriors par excellence") behind the credo, notably Allen Dulles, director of the CIA in the 1950s, and Curtis LeMay, director of the Strategic Air Command during the same period. The credo of global leadership and hyper-militarism is so ingrained and resilient in the U.S. psyche that it survived even the doubts that surfaced after the miserable failure of U.S. military might in Vietnam. Whatever their party or philosophy, all presidents want to project an image of toughness that has made them vulnerable to the credo, at great cost in American dollars and lives. Bacevich challenges Washington (the president, Congress, and the military industrial complex) as well as citizens to rethink the credo that has directed national security for generations. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Washington Rules illuminates one of America's waking nightmares
in this case, the penchant of America's foreign policy elite for

picking fights on turf where America cannot really win. Bacevich diagnoses this as the inevitable outcome of a deeply entrenched perpetual motion machine — because we possess a powerful military, we create doctrines that give our military a sacred purpose. Because our military has a sacred purpose, we therefore have an obligation to intervene whenever our trigger finger gets too itchy. And because we have intervened in the past, and expect to intervene again in the future, we must continually reinforce America's military capabilities. Capabilities drive our doctrine; our doctrine drives our interventions; our interventions drive the expansion of capabilities. We have forgotten the value of peace; we have become addicted to war. Each chapter in Bacevich's story unfolds in its own way, but leads to the same ending. For all the wreckage America's missteps may have caused, the hubris of our foreign policy elite always springs back to life. Implicit in Bacevich's book is an acknowledgment that America has absorbed all too well the imperial outlook of the British Empire and its clubby spirit of limitless entitlement. But his focus on the twists and turns of military doctrine in a wholly American setting misses something important. Yes, we have lived for five centuries in a world of imperial European invasions, but we also live for a very long time in a world of anti-imperial resistance movements. What has been missing from the thinking of our foreign policy elites is an awareness of the dynamic between empire and resistance. It is also missing from Washington Rules. While Bacevich recounts the Washington perspective in great detail; he never examines the world's resistance leaders to see if there is something to be learned from those who dislike empire and prefer resistance. And there is a second blind spot in the Bacevich analysis — a lack of attention to soft power. The film "Charlie Wilson's War" ends with a lament about America's failure to use soft power in Afghanistan when it might still have made a difference. It's a chronic problem. America's policy elites have little interest in whether soft power might be the smarter choice; alas, Bacevich neglects this theme as well.

Mr. Bacevich gives a clear insight into the complex world of American foreign policy, and the military-industrial complex which helps shape the foreign policy of the most powerful nation in the world. The United States has given the world so many discoveries in the fields of science and medicine. One can only imagine what more could be done if a portion of the budget devoted to the military was diverted to education and healthcare.

Andrew Bacevich offers an explanation of what is putting our way of life at risk. If he is correct, the

Afghan War has no end in sight as did the Iraq War (see Charles Ferguson's book: "No End in Sight: Iraq's Descent into Chaos"). In fact, the Afghan War is now the longest war in U.S. history. Retired U.S. military and intelligence personnel have written prolifically about the current wars and what they mean for the U.S. They educate the public about connecting foreign policy to war strategy to what our young enlisted men and women do in the wars. Examples include books by Wesley Clark (A Time to Lead: For Duty, Honor and Country), Michael Scheuer (Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam After Iraq) and David Bellavia (HOUSE TO HOUSE: A TALE OF MODERN WAR). In the history of warfare, there has probably never been a population with as much access to information about their wars. Washington Rules provides analysis of the considerations that President Obama faced when he made the decision to expand the military effort in Afghanistan. Whereas the consensus holds that this president grasps issues and is not primarily informed by ideology, there may have been a dominant domestic political calculation to this war decision. Bacevich identifies pressures imposed on our president by the "military industrial complex" and the "national security apparatus." These loaded terms summarize privileged powers within the U.S. that seek global military engagement in part to maintain the status quo within. This is the Status Quo argument that has been used to explain some U.S. motives in the wars. Andrew Bacevich has patriotic credentials to state the Status Quo argument. He has been doing this for some time. (See his previous book: "The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism" (American Empire Project)). His son was killed in Iraq while serving as a 1st Lt. in the Army. Andrew Bacevich is a veteran of the Vietnam War, a graduate of West Point and he taught at both West Point and Johns Hopkins. He earned his Ph.D. in history from Princeton University. He is a retired Army Colonel. Bacevich is critical of George W. Bush and Barack Obama but for completely different reasons. Bacevich addresses the question debated from California to the New York Island, from the redwood forest to the gulf stream waters: which is worse, the president who sends young people into harm's way due to misguided notions or the president who sends young people into harm's way because of political calculation? Of course, this question is framed in a simple way in order to introduce debate. Bacevich is more appalled by the latter, however. Washington Rules traces America's overreliance on military power from the administration of Woodrow Wilson right up to that of Barack Obama. Over time the U.S. presidency morphed into an imperial presidency with a self-imposed mission to intervene in problems throughout the world irrespective of long-term U.S. interests. An exaggerated sense of what the military can accomplish went unquestioned until recently. Bacevich makes history come alive with applications of the lessons of the Vietnam War along with several other wars. Washington Rules addresses the following questions. What did we

get out of Desert Storm? What should our role be with regard to the Islamic World? What happens if we back down in Afghanistan? Bacevich asks tough questions and that's healthy. It's taking me time to digest his solutions to these issues although I'm excited about changes to the status quo. With regard to the Middle East, Bacevich says our role should be to demonstrate that liberalism can coexist with religion. Finally, Washington Rules is entertaining because it's almost a horror story in real time. These issues affect our way of life right now. Teachers across the country are being laid off as the States struggle with their budgets, and I wonder how that might be related to federal debt accumulated to finance the wars. Bacevich is a Declinist in that he flatly states that the American Century is over and we have reached certain limits.

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