

YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

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

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Last accessed on Thursday July 15, 2021

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> on which it rests. Every president since Harry Truman has faithfully subscribed to these four assertions and Obama is no exception. First, the world must be organized (or shaped). In the absence of organization, chaos will surely reign. Second, only the United States possesses the capacity to prescribe and enforce such a global order. No other nation has the vision, will, and wisdom required to lead. Apart from the United States, no other nation or group of nations (and certainly no supra-national institution) can be entrusted with that role. Leadership in this sense implies that Washington demonstrate a voracious appetite for taking on new obligations, never acknowledging that limits exist on how much Americans can afford. Once shouldered, obligations become permanent—the consequences of pulling out of Afghanistan after 1989 demonstrating the penalty that results from violating this dictum. Third, America's writ includes the charge of articulating the principles that should define the international order. Those principles are necessarily American principles, which possess universal validity. That specific American principles may themselves evolve in no way compromises their universality. However much American attitudes regarding nuclear weapons or noncombatant casualties or women's rights may change, the most recent articulation of principle is the one that counts and to which others must conform. Finally, a few rogues and recalcitrants aside, everyone understands and accepts this reality. Despite pro forma grumbling, the world wants the United States to lead. Indeed, what keeps world leaders

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> up at night is the possibility that Americans may someday tire of the

> responsibilities that history plainly intends them to bear and which they are so admirably equipped to fulfill.

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> The imaginary Chinese program described above pales in comparison to the existing military posture of the United States. Some highlights of that posture include the following: With current Pentagon outlays running at something like $700 billion annually, the United States spends as much or more money on its military than the entire rest of the world combined.4 The United States currently has approximately 300,000 troops stationed abroad, again more than the rest of the world combined (a total that does not even include another 90,000 sailors and marines who are at sea);5 as of 2008, according to the Department of Defense, these troops occupied or used some 761 “sites” in 39 foreign countries, although this tally neglected to include many dozens of U.S. bases in Iraq or Afghanistan;6 no other country comes even remotely close to replicating this “empire of bases”—or to matching the access that the Pentagon has negotiated to airfields and seaports around the world.7 The Pentagon has divvied up the planet (and universe) into “unified commands,” each headed by a four-star general or admiral. Pacific Command, “committed to preserving the security, stability, and freedom” of the Asia-Pacific region, polices a region comprising 50 percent of the earth’s surface, and more than half of its population;8 Central Command, spanning the Greater Middle East, currently presides over wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as it seeks “to promote security, stability, and prosperity”;9 European Command, established in Germany at the end of World War II, remains committed to the proposition that a need exists “for continuing and expanded U.S. engagement throughout the command’s area of focus”;10 Africa Command, created in 2007, conducts “military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations” in fifty-three nations in order “to promote a stable and secure African environment”;11 Southern Command, encompassing Central and South America and the Caribbean, strives to “ensure stability,” “enhance security,” and “enable partnerships”;12 Northern Command, established in the wake of 9/11, tends to North America; and, by no means least of all, Space Command, responsible for the biggest region of all, conducts “joint space operations,” including “Space Force Support, Space Force Enhancement, Space Force Application,

> and Space Force Control."13

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> Finally, not to be forgotten, is Strategic Command—formerly known as Strategic Air Command—with its sea- and land-based ballistic missiles and its fleet of long-range bombers standing ready "to deliver integrated kinetic and non-kinetic effects to include nuclear and information operations" anywhere in the world at any time;15 information operations is a euphemism for cyberwarfare, that mission soon to be assumed by yet another new headquarters to be called CYBERCOM.

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> were now on board. Kennedy had renewed and enriched the U.S. global military presence, its power projection capabilities, and—as events quickly demonstrated—its penchant for intervention as well.

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> The younger Kennedy became chair of a newly created anti-Castro steering group known as the Special Group (Augmented), charged with coordinating the actions of all government agencies conspiring to topple Castro. Bringing to this task the energy for which he was well known, Robert Kennedy declared his intention to "stir things up on [the] island with espionage, sabotage, [and] general disorder," working through Cuban exiles. Direct military intervention was to be a last resort.

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> The likelihood of such actions inducing unintended consequences left the attorney general undaunted: "[W]e have nothing to lose in my estimate."24 The younger Kennedy wasted no time declaring that solving the Cuba problem ranked as "the top priority in the United States Government—all else is secondary—no time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared."25

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> Likewise not to be spared were the legal and moral norms to which U.S. officials professed allegiance. With legendary spook Maj. Gen. Edward Lansdale acting as Kennedy's chief of operations, all sorts of bizarre chicanery soon followed, including collusion with the Mafia in plots to assassinate Castro, fantastical schemes aimed at inciting popular insurrection, and a program of sabotage directed at Cuba's food supply, power plants, oil refineries, and other economic assets—all of this together constituting one of the most infamous and profitless episodes in the history of American statecraft.

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> The resulting plan distributed among various executive departments and agencies thirty-two specific tasks, running the gamut from "inducing failures in food crops" and mounting sabotage attacks to recruiting defectors and devising "songs, symbols, [and] propaganda themes" to boost the morale of an all but nonexistent indigenous resistance. According to Lansdale, accomplishing this menu of tasks would culminate with Castro's overthrow. The target date for completion: October 1962.27

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> From our present vantage point, with the passing of several decades during which nine of Kennedy's successors managed to coexist with Castro even as the Kennedy brothers achieved the status of secular saints, Operation Mongoose appears inexplicable. Suffice it to say that by the end of 1961, the Kennedy administration was fixating on Fidel Castro with the same feverish intensity as the Bush administration exactly forty years later was to fixate on Saddam Hussein—and with as little strategic logic. In its determination to destroy the Cuban Revolution, the Kennedy administration heedlessly embarked upon what was, in effect, a program of state-sponsored terrorism. In substance if not in scope, the actions of the United States toward Cuba during the early 1960s bear comparison with Iranian and Syrian support for proxies engaging in terrorist activities against Israel since the 1980s. The principal difference is that,

> whereas Hamas and Hezbollah have achieved considerable success, at least in enhancing their political standing, the U.S. attempt to unseat Castro achieved none whatsoever. Apart from expending the lives of several dozen guileless exiles who, at the CIA's behest, attempted to infiltrate their home island, those efforts were stillborn. From a moral and legal point of view, Operation Mongoose was indefensible. From a practical point of view, it turned out to be arguably even more stupid than Operation Zapata.

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> Theodore Sorensen, special counsel to the president and a loyal chronicler of Camelot, found it heartening that Kennedy had taken from the Bay of Pigs episode "so many major lessons," gained "at so relatively small and temporary a cost."33 Soon thereafter, those lessons "helped save the world."34 Arthur Schlesinger, the Democratic court historian then serving as one of the president's special assistants, concurred. "[N]o one can doubt," he wrote, "that failure in Cuba in 1961 contributed to success in Cuba in 1962."35 To arrive at such exceedingly generous judgments, Sorensen and Schlesinger excluded from their accounts the post–Bay of Pigs vendetta against Castro that consumed the Kennedy brothers. In fact, Kennedy and his advisers learned astonishingly little from the Bay of Pigs. In that action-oriented era, the tempo of CIA activity actually quickened. "Ike had undertaken 170 major covert CIA operations in eight years," writes Tim Weiner in his history of the CIA. "The Kennedys launched 163 major covert operations in less than three."36 In short, the only thing that mattered to the president and his brother was how to get Operation Zapata right the next time.

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> The peaceful resolution of the missile crisis in no way dampened the Kennedy administration's enthusiasm for flexible response or enriching the options available to the president for employing force. In this regard, the course of events in Vietnam testifies to the realities of U.S. policy far more accurately than does Kennedy's oft-cited speech at American University.

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> In fact, Kennedy saw South Vietnam as the crucial test case of flexible response, an opportunity to demonstrate that counterinsurgency and nation-building techniques could defeat communist-inspired “wars of national liberation”—that when it came to projecting power, the United States had at hand tools other than those offered by the CIA and SAC.48 With this in mind, the president increased the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam from nine hundred to nearly seventeen thousand “advisers.” eased restrictions on U.S. military personnel, authorizing those advisers to engage in combat operations or in combat support operations like Operation Ranch Hand, in which U.S. Air Force aircraft dumped large quantities of defoliants such as Agent Orange on the Vietnamese countryside.49 more than doubled the level of material support provided to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), including heavy equipment such as armored combat vehicles and field artillery along with more than three hundred military aircraft.50 did nothing in his public representations to refute claims made by others in his administration—Taylor and McNamara in the forefront—that South Vietnam represented a vital U.S. national security interest.51 permitted members of his inner circle to conspire with ARVN generals intent on toppling President Ngo Dinh Diem, installed by the United States as president of South Vietnam in 1955.52

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> Yet there was also this: In an obscure corner of Southeast Asia about which most Americans knew little and cared less, the survival of the Washington rules was seemingly at stake. By 1965, America’s inability to impose its will on Vietnam threatened the underpinnings of U.S. global leadership. As viewed from Washington, American credibility was on the line. If Viet Cong insurgents and their North Vietnamese backers got away with defying the United States, then others might be similarly tempted. Enemies would be emboldened while nations in the habit of taking their marching orders from Washington might become less inclined to do so. With a strategy of global presence, power projection, and interventionism no longer guaranteeing success, alternative approaches to national security strategy might even gain a hearing at home, with basic strategy no longer taken as given. To those whose interests were served by preserving that strategy, this was an intolerable prospect. So among the explanations for the Vietnam War we can add this one: It was a war fought to

> sustain the Washington consensus.

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> That the transformation of a people's army into a professional force had the potential to produce just the opposite effect—decision makers gaining a free hand to use a military over which the American people had forfeited any ownership—was a prospect few anticipated.

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> that tragedy. When it came to national security policy, Democrats —intent on refuting the charge that theirs had become the cut-and-run party—wanted it known that their views did not differ appreciably from their rivals'. America's purpose was "to be a beacon of liberty," employing American power and American ideals "as a means of shaping not only a more secure, but also a more decent world."

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> The drafters of the Democratic platform made it clear that power meant military power. "America's military strength is and must be unsurpassed," they asserted. Yet unsurpassed was not good enough and Democrats vowed to "strengthen the military security of the United States" even further by increasing the level of Pentagon spending—a promise on which Carter and members of his party had, in fact, already begun to make good.

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> as interpreted by the political class. By 1980, both major parties had concluded that Vietnam was best forgotten while the energetic reassertion of American global leadership, backed by plentiful supplies of firepower, had once more become the order of the day.

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> The campaign to choose a successor to President Bush in 2008 told the tale. As is usually the case in U.S. elections, the contestants portrayed their differences as fundamental, notably so with regard to national security. Yet what actually ensued was a contest between different species of hawks. In one camp were those like Republicans John McCain and Sarah Palin who insisted that the Iraq War, having always been necessary and justified, was now—thanks to the surge—successful as well. In the other camp were those like Barack Obama and Joseph Biden who derided the Iraq War as disastrous, but pointed to Afghanistan as a war that needed to be won. No prominent figure in either party came within ten feet of questioning the logic of configuring U.S. forces for global power projection or the wisdom of maintaining a global military presence. When it came to the use of force, the various candidates vied with one another to demonstrate their bellicosity. Inevitably in such a contest, the hawks won.

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> “War is the health of the State.” So wrote Randolph Bourne nearly a century ago, as he contemplated the U.S. entry into World War I. Bourne’s famous aphorism contains an essential truth, yet is too narrowly framed for present-day purposes. Not only war itself, but the preparation for, preoccupation with, and casual acceptance of war all serve today to enhance state power. In addition to the state itself, a constellation of individuals and institutions drawing sustenance from the state also prosper.

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> During the first year of the Obama presidency, with defense spending and overall federal spending increasing even as tax receipts fell, the annual budget deficit hit an all-time high of $1.4 trillion or 10 percent of the total gross domestic product (GDP). The annual cost of servicing that debt reached a staggering $383 billion, equivalent to the GDP of Belgium, and continued to climb. So, too, did the resources funneled to the Pentagon: The Obama administration announced plans to increase military spending by 5 percent above what it had averaged during the Bush years.

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