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BOOK REVIEW

ANDREW J. BACEVICH. 2013. THE NEW AMERICAN MILITARISM: HOW AMERICANS ARE SEDUCED BY WAR. UPDATED ED. OXFORD, NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 304 PP. PAPER \$15.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-993176-7

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The United States retreated from the policy of isolationism that the country was strongly adherent to prior to the end of the nineteenth century when it got involved in the war with Spain in 1898 that later resulted in the Philippine-American War. The war, therefore, became the crucial point in the military history of the United States as the policy of isolationism became obsolete for good and all. To name just the major American military intrusions throughout the world that the country carried out in the twentieth century, one must mention WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the First Gulf War. The twenty-first century did not demonstrate much of a change as the U.S. became involved in the Afghanistan War and, later, the Second Gulf War that resulted from the War on Terror declared by George W. Bush and later supported by Barack Obama. Finding persuasive (for, example, the fight against the Nazism during WWII) or ambiguous (the case of the First Gulf War is still widely discussed in terms of American primary goals: to free the country from Saddam Hussein's oppression or to keep access to cheap oil?) explanations to get involved in the problems of various countries, whether it is to free them from Soviet communism (Korea, Vietnam) or bring such Western values as democracy and freedom to the war-torn nations (Kuwait, Iraq) and eradicate terrorism (Afghanistan, Iraq), the U.S. has gained a reputation of a world superpower that resorts to arms whatever a conflict situation emerges, thus, spreading its military power worldwide. Andrew J. Bacevich's *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* argues that the U.S. became obsessed with its military potency in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and provides lucid speculation on how militarism has shaped American beliefs of freedom and democracy.

At the heart of his study, Bacevich places the Vietnam War that, as he argues, was "a defining event" that made Americans themselves see cruelty in the U.S. ways of conducting war and provoked so-called "anti-militarism" (2013, 34). Yet, American militarism "has grown out of the Vietnam War" (2013, 34): out of the policy that the country followed, the means that were applied in Asia to fight the enemy, and the savagery that was born there. And although a majority of soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War were not really warmongers, namely they did not flare the conflict up but rather considered fighting only as being their job, the government, sorely influenced by the military, did advocate the Vietnam War and, arguably, all the other wars the United States has been involved in after

Vietnam. Bacevich's unique approach consists in looking over the issue of U.S. militarism from different perspectives, thus providing his readers with an utmost full picture in the course of all the eight economically headlined chapters.

First, throughout the book the author carefully examines the presidencies of Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, considering their roles in America's growing desire to have a great army as well as in the country's strengthening belief that military involvement is always the best choice to deal with a problem. Bacevich, therefore, considers the president as being one of the weightiest figures in the government as a powerful construct. Power, however, is not allocated only to the president but also to Congress as well as to the military. Perhaps most vividly the role of the military was underscored by Dwight D. Eisenhower who, having introduced the notion of the "military-industrial complex" ("Military-Industrial Complex Speech" 1961 [2008]), openly underscored a co-existence and co-dependence of lawmakers, the army, and the arms industry as a guarantee of country's military success.

Therefore, next, Bacevich analyzes the roles of military men, such as General Colin Powell and General Wesley K. Clark who helped militarism to become the core of U.S. foreign policy. Powell promoted the idea that militarism was the key to victory and after the successful accomplishment of Operation Desert Storm during the First Gulf War, according to Powell, "military might promised to be [...] more useful, even essential" (Bacevich 2013, 52). The Powell Doctrine that, although "aimed [...] to impede intervention," stressed the necessity of "approaching the task with preponderant rather than merely sufficient combat power at hand" (2013, 52). Clark, in turn, became most famous for his strategy of threatening Slobodan Milosevic with "superior air power" (2013, 59) during the Kosovo conflict in 1999.

Thirdly, the author shows the political positions of such intellectuals as Norman Podhoretz, Charles Krauthammer, Frederick W. Kagan, and some other so-called "neoconservatives" who, according to Bacevich, "were no longer inclined to employ force only after having exhausted all other alternatives" (2013, 85), hence, helped promote U.S. militarization. They, for example, criticized Clinton's uncertainty towards using a greater military force in Haiti, Somalia, and other countries, complaining that "military conquest has often proved to be an effective means of implanting democracy" (Muravchik qtd. in Bacevich 2013, 85). Bacevich provides an explanation to this viewpoint, claiming that although in the last decade of the twentieth century neoconservatives did not really represent "warmongers," "once having gotten a whiff of gunpowder during the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91, they developed a hankering to repeat the experience" (2013, 85).

Inevitably, Bacevich touches upon the issue of U.S. Exceptionalism and how "Christian thinking" (that has such fundamental issues as family, relations between human beings, and "national purpose and collective identity" at its core) influenced the position of Americans towards war, stating that "conservative evangelicals [...] developed a considerable appetite for wielding armed might on behalf of righteousness, more often than not indistinguishable from America's own interests" (2013, 123–24). Therefore, Bacevich does not only demonstrate how the ideology of American Exceptionalism affected the new American militarism that emerged after the Vietnam War but he also claims that it became its essential component.

Additionally, Bacevich characterizes the period from 1947 to 1989 as WWIII and the time of the War on Terror that followed the terrorist attacks as WWIV, thus, contending

that ever since WWI, the United States has always been in a state of war (the scholar calls the 1990s “a brief interval of relative peace” [2013, 175], which is, indeed, justified as the period stands out for numerous civil wars rather than any world conflicts).

An afterword that the author has added to the new addition of his book considers Barack Obama’s presidency and the policies the president has been adherent to and concludes unambiguously that “American militarism persists” (2013, 228) that, indeed, can be perceived from Obama’s claim: “The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. And in no small measure, that’s because we’ve built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history – and as Commander-in-Chief, I’m going to keep it that way” (qtd. in Bacevich 2013, 229).

Being a Professor of International Relations and History, a graduate of West Point, and a Vietnam veteran, Bacevich is more than just competent to give a profound overview of the wars the United States has been involved in over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and to investigate the development of U.S. militarism, focusing his main attention on the period from the Vietnam War onwards. These experiences enabled Bacevich, first and foremost, intellectually and helped him understand the structure of the military from the inside as a state institution and as a national force system, thus, familiarizing him with its organization and functioning in times of direct combat. His position as a professor, at the same time, provided him with an opportunity to explore the problem of the military in a broader way, comparing conflicts and, thus, investigating how the problem of militarism has been changing over time. Bacevich’s experiences, especially those of being a military man and a Vietnam War veteran, have undoubtedly influenced his political and military standpoints, which, in turn, found their reflection in the book. The author, apparently, does not advocate extensive U.S. interventionist policy, but rather claims that better for the country, it should focus on its domestic policy instead of imposing its views abroad. Yet, the book is not a diary of a desperate veteran. On the contrary, its narration is built upon a balanced chain of argumentation, concerning why the U.S. should reduce its policy of militarization. Bacevich sees soldiers’ vocation not in random deployments throughout the world but rather, he calls the government and the army to honor the role of soldiers, first and foremost, as defenders. The book, therefore, attempts to reveal what has led Americans to Afghanistan and Iraq, how these biggest military tragedies have happened, investigating the wrong turns in U.S. policy through the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Having provided this thorough and sufficient examination, the book can and must be considered as being a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship on U.S. foreign policy. The author’s arguments are highly persuasive; his brilliant observations and reasoning make *The New American Militarism* a truly engaging reading for anyone interested in politics in general and U.S. foreign policy in particular.

Reference

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