

WASHINGTON RULES: AMERICA'S PATH TO PERMANENT WAR

Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations at Boston University and retired career officer educated at West Point, contributed in past decade to American historical literature with several significant books.¹ As a former professional soldier, highly academically educated in US diplomacy history, he found his field of expertise in the area of contemporary foreign relations, from the end of Second World War up to Obama's administration. The curiosity of his perspective is analytical and sharp approach to dialectical, rather controversial link between proclaimed American principles in the area of foreign affairs and the reality of situation on the ground — overstretched military engagement because of growing threats to national security recognized by Washington.

In his recent work, named “Washington Rules,” Bacevich analyzes in-depth the contradiction between US basic ideological principles in the sphere of international relations (belief that America is called and destined to “to lead, save, liberate and ultimately transform the world”²) and problematic, contradictory and irritating way in which the implementation of those principles has been carried out since 1945 (global military presence, global power projection and global interventionism). Set of ideas and principles author named as *American credo*, while the global US engagement in terms of power and force he framed with a lucid expression shaded with cynicism — *sacred trinity*, which represents a general war doctrine carried out from Harry Truman to Barack Obama. Belief that good intentions and basic principles ensure US from any quilt in foreign affairs in this book has been ruthlessly put into question. Assumption that US policy makers have the very deed to the truth is one of the ideological stereotypes sold to American public as a mainstream narrative about freedom and democracy, which US is entitled to spread worldwide.

Author's intensions with this book were to trace the origins of Washington rules, to subject the resulting consensus to critical inspection, to explain how those rules are perpetuated, to emphasize that those rules have lost whatever utility they may have and to rethink them in attempt to offer new approaches to US foreign affairs.³ The very core of his analysis is a phenomenological

¹ “The Limits of Power (The End of American Exceptionalism)”; “The Long War (A New History of U.S. National Security Policy Since World War II)”; “The New American Militarism (How Americans Are Seduced by War)”; “American Empire (The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy)”; “The Imperial Tense (Prospect and Problems of American Power)”.

² Bacevich, *Washington Rules*, p. 12.

³ Bacevich, p. 16.

paradox in which American society has fallen, caused especially by US military engagement abroad, fact that the gap between reality and official narrative of foreign policy has been increasing with passage of time. Nothing is as it seems and contemporary history should be re-evaluated for the benefit of the nation and the country, emphasizes the writer.

Breaking point in this shift between reality and its presentation was the end of Second World War. In the paranoid atmosphere of Cold War and global nuclear threats symbolized in USSR, United States found itself in a condition of permanent danger. New world order dictated change in national security policy: US must defend its own borders in Europe at the first place, but also in all other areas where it was possible to expect collision of interests of two superpowers. This mindset, as Bacevich explains, created the situation of semiwar⁴ which has been established as permanent framework of the US military engagement ever since. In the name of keeping America safe and global peace preserved, semiwarriors in US military and intelligence insisted, “nothing should impede U.S. preparations for war”.⁵ Hence, the origin of the belief that everyone is arming in order to preserve peace, but this assumption was reserved exclusively for the United States investment in military power. Every other country was carefully observed in such actions. In order to preserve peace, United States has launched series of interventions on small and large scale. With the passage of time and administrations, America’s aspiration for peace was guarded with constant annual growth of military budget.

According to Bacevich, everything started with Allen Dulles, director of CIA (1953–1961) and Curtis Le May, founder of Strategic Air Command (SAC). With first covert operations in early 1950’s, with operation Tpjax and overthrow of Mohhammad Mosaddegh in Tehran, new structures of power and influence, uncontrolled by civil authorities, emerged in Washington. The problem was not, Bacevich argues, existence of CIA or military structures, but lack of public observation upon this organizations. Simultaneously with the Agency growth, Le May developed SAC in such extent that by the end of 1950’s he commanded over 200 000 people, operating in 55 bases worldwide, establishing of Strategic Air Command a kind of state for its self. In the early days of Cold War, Dulles and Le May made a framework of US foreign military engagement as a “national first principle and so laid the foundation for what became the Washington consensus”.⁶

⁴ “Semiwar defines a condition in which great dangers always threaten the United States and will continue doing so into the indefinite future”, Bacevich, p. 28.

⁵ Bacevich, p. 28.

⁶ Ibid, p. 56.

Thanks to aspiration of secrecy, privilege and prestige among high offices in CIA and SAC, and power promptly created and accumulated back in the 50's, this framework have never been actually changed or significantly reshaped. From Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson all the way to Clinton, Bush and Obama, sacred trinity have prevailed all presidential changes and new programs, regardless of personal aspirations, intensions and wishes of president elected. It turns out that Washington is much stronger than any chief executive is. Author emphasizes that Washington is less geographic term but much more a peculiar and dense net of number of institutions, which create a specific power structure, the structure that lies behind all top decision making processes in the area of foreign affairs. It emerges as a hydra with hundred heads, threatening legitimacy of American values abroad. However, one and only institution lay behind what Washington represents, author claims, United States Army.

First official warning of this threat can be found in Dwight Eisenhower's Farewell Address in which departing president warns his fellow Americans regarding industrial — military complex.⁷ Time has shown that this warning was based on reality. Thanks to high profit and various interests of vast number of people involved in the machinery called Washington, the primary principle set since the time of Dulles and Le May was avoiding control of any kind as much as possible — civil, political or any other supervision. Administration by administration, with some cosmetic changes, status quo continued to exist based on the set up made in early 1950's. Searching through period of sixty years, author explores a number of interventions, decisions and their consequences, pointing out on two things: a well-established conduct in matters of military presence and a complex interdependence of those acts on wider time scale.

Bacevich has found no exception in acceptance of *Washington Rules* for any of the Eisenhower's successors in the Oval Office. Quite contrary, all of them he found insufficiently bold and determined to make a change and to face with the failure of taken approach when the damage already has been done, with Vietnam as the most disastrous example. Pushing painful issues and requests at the margins of political life is a part of politics itself. Problem arises, however, with permanent pushing aside all negative experience blindly, refusing even to reconsider whether something wrong with declared principles (American credo) or with the means and the ways they are used (sacred trinity). Avoidance to see, to admit mistake and to draw lessons from experience, leaves only one option in the process of conclusion — something about the world is seriously wrong.

⁷ "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist, Dwight Eisenhower", *"Farewell Address to the Nation"*, January 17, 1961, cited from <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>, accessed March 15, 2012.

Approach of this kind implemented on the individual leads to paranoia. If the same pattern we apply to a state, positive conclusion about it would be highly questionable. Repealing the outcome of the Vietnam was exit strategy for *Washington rules*. Representing Vietnam case as an anomaly was refusing to consider in what extent this war had been “but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit”.⁸ All Washington players had been engaged in order to preserve consensus about sacred trinity and the outcome of the Vietnam disaster was actually vanishing this episode from the official mainstream political discourse from the top.

In his diachronic and complex analysis Bacevich takes to face with the greatest mainstream narrative of American political culture — the presidential narrative. Regardless their broad executive prerogatives, U.S. presidents in last sixty years seem to be not in position of crucial decider in Washington. Idea that “occupant of the White House defines the age”⁹ seems far from reality. According to Bacevich, presidents are no more than the mediums for manifestation of the power and decisions made somewhere else. For each president since JFK, thanks to his failure in Bay of Pigs, image of tough guy has become a part of job description, but the position of Decider has been only a role to play in contemporary presidency, without real meaning and significance, and “the greatest irony of all” is the fact of unchanged priorities within sacred trinity in current office.

Inability of learning from history and experience is one of the main Washington characteristics and of those at the top of the government. Long list of controversial action, from adventures with Cuba up to complete misunderstanding of Afghan culture and necessities of local people, represent one of the obstacles of US military engagement as a whole. American approach to modern political crisis and military presence in crisis areas suffers from narrow sight to strategic problems of the other side, thus ensuring always a losing position for US one way or another.

Having in mind the assumption that US not only misjudged *them*, but also even worse misjudged *itself*, willingness to approach others in radically different way is the first step toward real learning and education. On behalf of this author offers to American public and political elite proposal of possible new trinity, which can be read as a message that follows — America and Americans should mind their own business. It would be radical change in deployment of military force from dissemination of American credo around the globe to defense of the US as a top priority; primary duty station of US soldiers is at the

⁸ Martin Luther King, “Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam”, April 1967, cited in Bacevich, p. 133.

⁹ Bacevic, p. 30.

American soil; finally yet importantly, using military force only as a final and exclusively self-defend option. Bacevich suggest fundamental revision of American soldier identity and its return to the image created during the struggle for American independence in late XVIII century — from contemporary professional warrior to the citizen-protector, legendary Minuteman who had won a war against England as the most powerful country of the age.

However, those fundamental changes require one and only thing missing in Washington — alert and knowledgeable citizenry, because only that power “can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together”.¹⁰ The main threat to American credo in reality of American society lies in the following — Founding Fathers dream of minimal government reversed during past sixty years in its diabolical opposite, reality of minimal citizenship. Washington suffers from a lack of citizen engagement and control, which allows it wide latitude of employing military power. While Founding Fathers views to foreign affairs and international position of United States have prevailed as mainstream approach for majority of American citizens even in 21st century, *Washington rules* would be impossible to exist if those views have been preserved as political and ideological imperative, which dictates the direction of foreign policy.

Andrew Bacevich challenges Washington rules exactly in the Founding Fathers ideological framework, having in mind that those fundament pillars of the Republic has to be pulled out and refreshed “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”¹¹ Advocating with such passion and in-depth understanding of foreign affairs behind the curtain, Andrew Bachevich wrote remarkable book, which breaks mainstream narrative about US contemporary foreign affairs. Writing in simple and readable style, able to connect events easily with clear explanation of presented views, author succeeds to deal with heavy and painful issues in a lightweight manner, which allows possible social impact of his study to be much broader than would otherwise be expected from the literature of this kind. Because of all that has been said, this book is a kind of a challenge to Washington and its rules, a glove thrown in to the face of steady habits, assumptions, traditional and crusty US statecraft discourse.

Gordana BEKČIĆ PJEŠČIĆ

¹⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, “*Farewell Address to the Nation*”, January 17, 1961, cited from <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>, accessed March 15, 2012.

¹¹ Abraham Lincoln, “*The Gettysburg Address*”, November 19, 1863, cited from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/gettyb.asp, accessed March 15, 2012.

CONFERENCE REVIEW

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY – LEADERS FOR TOMORROW

Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD)¹ is an international and non-governmental organization founded in United States in 1999. Based in Berlin, with headquarters in Washington, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Ecuador, ICD represents a global network of organization involved in public and private sector, individuals and distinguished persons from all areas with the same goal and idea — promoting interconnections between people and culture in order to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas. The ultimate ICD goal is to promote global peace by strengthening social and cultural interactions between people interested with and involved in the field of cultural diplomacy.

A starting definition of cultural diplomacy is offered by the American political scientist and author, Milton C. Cummings, in his description of cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding”. As such, cultural diplomacy existed through centuries, in every peaceful touch of different cultures, through individual travelers and explorers, like Marco Polo, or within overlapping of different civilizations in their mutual influence.

Even though it seems that contemporary world, having been already interconnected, is easy-going area for mutual understanding and intercultural respect, necessity for active cultural diplomacy is bigger than ever. Technological development does not imply elimination of cultural barriers between people and societies. Unfortunately, it seems that this process is inversely proportional to the technical and technological progress of humankind. If we look at the world map and try to count all local conflict and crises, it would be more than depressing conclusion that most are in some extent caused by cultural conflict.

Globalization processes which have been reshaping the world for last few decades placed in front a request for new approach to the people as human beings and to culture as a framework in which each individual exist. In globalized and interdependent world with such huge and complex set of problems and challenges, from military interventions, social movements, religious and ethnic

¹ For more information see: <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org>.

hostilities up to climate and environmental issues, culture seems to be condemned to periphery. Nevertheless, *proliferation* (sic!) of cultural opening, understanding and overcoming of cultural stereotypes and assumptions emerges as a very first step towards more possible success in searching solutions for those difficult issues numbered above.

In promoting the field of cultural diplomacy, ICD organizes programs that target the development of awareness and understanding of the practice of cultural diplomacy. The aim of the ICD programs is to gather young scholars from all parts of the world, to encourage and support them to explore the field of cultural diplomacy according to their interests and field of expertise and, if it is possible, to subsequently initiate independent projects of their own. Senior lecturers who participate in ICD events are members of long list of distinguished names from academic, political, military, public diplomacy and civil society areas. Among many various means and methods in promoting cultural diplomacy, ICD uses institution of international conference. During one calendar year, number of conferences, lectures and panel discussions is impressive. All of them are divided in specific section, regarding the main topic argued at the event. Some of them are *Annual Conference of Cultural Diplomacy, A World Without Walls, The Language of Art of Music, Young Leaders Forums, Europe Meets Russia etc...*

Having in mind a lack of serious research in the field of cultural diplomacy, the ICD actively encourages and supports cultural diplomacy as an academic discipline and as a more widely accepted tool in the practice of foreign policy. That is the main reason of heavy schedule organized by ICD. Development of research field is necessary and important because of better optimization of cultural diplomacy initiatives currently in existence and opening of new possibilities in the prediction processes in the future.

One of the forums among Young Leaders Forums is *US Meets Europe* (USAME), a network of young, influential people from both sides of the Atlantic who have an interest in supporting the relationship between the United States and Europe. Held twice a year, this forum is sometimes organized in Washington DC within some broader conference, as was the case last year in the mid of May. In the building of German Marshall Fund in Washington *The International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy in the USA 2011* was held for five days. The main topic discussed and evaluated during the event was the roles and the responsibilities in a changing world order (evaluating the political, economic and cultural dimensions).

Conference brought together over sixty participants from US, Russia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Sudan, Serbia and nearly forty speakers — professors from US universities, former and current ambassadors from various countries, military experts, UN representatives, prominent journalist, former high governmental

officers and public diplomacy representatives. In a hard working atmosphere from early morning until 8pm speakers took turns and panel discussions were opened. From various angles and perspectives, according to their background and field of expertise, ICD participants together with lecturers talked and evaluated contemporary issues and responsibilities of US and EU as the most developed parts of the world and therefore most responsible political structures in contemporary political and social changes that hit the world — changes in Arab World, proliferation of nuclear weapons, global terrorism threats, climate change. In order to understand and evaluate significance of all changes humankind faces with, cultural diplomacy as an interpersonal and intergovernmental communication has been perceived as significant tool of implementing soft power in more than complex international relations as a whole. Panel discussions after lectures gave opportunity to participants (students and young scholars) who are just entering the public arena of cultural diplomacy to discuss the topics offered, giving their observations and exchanging views with colleagues from other cultures. Additional encouragement, which is official ICD policy in nurturing future scholars and public diplomacy activists, was the presentation of participant's papers regarding cultural diplomacy in their research field. After five intensive days offered participants to exchange experience and personal impressions in a closing session, with the suggestion for further activity in cultural diplomacy in each person country, as a part of individual and professional growth.

Conference review by
Gordana BEKČIĆ PJEŠČIĆ