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# Mission Failure: America And The World In The Post-Cold War Era



## Synopsis

The end of the Cold War led to a dramatic and fundamental change in the foreign policy of the United States. In *Mission Failure*, Michael Mandelbaum, one of America's leading foreign-policy thinkers, provides an original, provocative, and definitive account of the ambitious but deeply flawed post-Cold War efforts to promote American values and American institutions throughout the world. In the decades before the Cold War ended the United States, like virtually every other country throughout history, used its military power to defend against threats to important American international interests or to the American homeland itself. When the Cold War concluded, however, it embarked on military interventions in places where American interests were not at stake. Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo had no strategic or economic importance for the United States, which intervened in all of them for purely humanitarian reasons. Each such intervention led to efforts to transform the local political and economic systems. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, launched in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, turned into similar missions of transformation. None of them achieved its aims. *Mission Failure* describes and explains how such missions came to be central to America's post-Cold War foreign policy, even in relations with China and Russia in the early 1990s and in American diplomacy in the Middle East, and how they all failed. Mandelbaum shows how American efforts to bring peace, national unity, democracy, and free-market economies to poor, disorderly countries ran afoul of ethnic and sectarian loyalties and hatreds and foundered as well on the absence of the historical experiences and political habits, skills, and values that Western institutions require. The history of American foreign policy in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall is, he writes, "the story of good, sometimes noble, and thoroughly American intentions coming up against the deeply embedded, often harsh, and profoundly un-American realities of places far from the United States. In this encounter the realities prevailed."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[Mission Failure is] going to be one of the most talked about foreign policy books of the year...a must-read." -- Thomas Friedman, The New York Times "Specialists and general readers alike will appreciate his sure historical grasp, evenhanded assignment of fault, careful assessment of shifting domestic political considerations, and understanding of the foreign cultural barriers that so frustrated American intentions. A skilled, persuasive appraisal of a unique moment in our foreign policy history." -- Kirkus Reviews (starred) "Mission Failure is a commanding, synoptic review of US foreign policy choices and their outcomes (often unintended and unhappy) from 1993 to 2014. It is beautifully written and has that rarity in modern, policy-relevant books: deep knowledge of history, combined with the granular understanding of US policymaking-qualities that longtime readers of Mandelbaum's work have come to expect and appreciate." -- Charles Lipson, University of Chicago, and author of Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace "Mission Failure is a startlingly original, creative new book-essentially an epitaph for America's foreign policy in the quarter-century since the end of the Cold War. This is a trenchant critique of the faltering efforts by both Republican and Democratic presidents to refashion governments and societies around the world, from Somalia and Bosnia to China, Iraq and Libya." -- James Mann, author of Rise of the Vulcans and The Obamians "This book, from one of the major analysts of American foreign policy, is well-written, wide in scope, and insightful and penetrating in its vivid dissection of what might call the Twenty Years Disaster. It is a provocative must-read that will be of interest not only to specialists, but to the general public in whose name the cascading foreign policy failure has been carried out." - John Mueller, author of Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism "A superbly written, masterful, and deeply provocative work by Michael Mandelbaum. He makes a compelling argument in opposition to what he terms a values-based rather than interest and security-based foreign policy and to the waste of America's foreign policy capital, resources and credibility in fruitless efforts to transform foreign societies." - Robert J. Lieber, Georgetown University, author of Retreat and Its Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order "Mission Failure explains how

nation-building came to be the chief focus of US foreign policy in the past generation, and unblinkingly underlines how large a failure that has been. Michael Mandelbaum is one of the country's most acute analysts of US foreign policy, and his book should be required reading for policymakers today." - Francis Fukuyama, Stanford University, and author of *The End of History and the Last Man*

Michael Mandelbaum is the Christian A. Herter Professor of American Foreign Policy at The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and the author or co-author of sixteen books, including *The Ideas That Conquered the World*, *The Meaning of Sports*, *The Frugal Superpower*, and, with Thomas L. Friedman, the New York Times Best Seller *That Used To Be Us*.

Michael Mandelbaum has written a well thought out book on the failure of American interventions during the presidencies of Bush I, Clinton, Bush II and Obama which commenced after the end of the Cold War. In summary, Mandelbaum states that all of the failed interventions in the Balkans, Somalia, the Middle East and Afghanistan has been the result of people who NEVER had a understanding of democratic government and that they adhered to clannish leadership and cultures that are not conducive to governmental systems that worked well in the West. Mandelbaum did well to be non-partisan in his criticism of administrations of both parties. He called out Bill Clinton for his interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo which were constitutional questionable and the positive results of his actions were minimal at best. Those parts of the world still have high unemployment and corrupt governments. Bush II of course made his invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan go beyond what was warranted in their initial intentions. Instead of merely ousting the governments of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, Bush engaged in nation-building which resulted in utter failure and a lost to our country of trillions of dollars. Obama also fell into the trap of humanitarian intervention by ousting Ghadaffi in Libya on the grounds that civilians were going to be slaughtered which turned out not to be true. In fact, the fiasco has led to terror being spread into Mali and weapons being shipped to ISIS forces in Syria. Mandelbaum also brought up the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia as a rejuvenated power player. Clinton's unwise expansion of NATO alarmed the Russians to the point that their people grew suspicious of the West with their eastward push. China with their economic power is now gaining influence in the South China Sea which has put nations like the Philippines and Indonesia on alert. With the economic crisis of 2008, the United States' hegemony in dictating world affairs came to an end in Mandelbaum's opinion. The author also discusses the Israel-Arab conflict and it seemed that he took the Israelis side a bit too much. Nonetheless, this is a

very important book that tells the stone cold fact that America cannot save the world any longer and in fact should not do so. Four Stars..

I'm not an historian, actually little more than an average reader, and I've never before submitted a review through , but I simply must say something about the importance of this book. I've found so much vital background information in this cogent presentation. I'm pleased to have read it at this time because of the nonpartisan clarification it offers on critical issues before us in this election year. I'm hoping many more people will read this before making final assessments of 2016 candidates and their wide-ranging statements on future foreign policy. Voter opinions must be based on facts and the facts are here for the taking. I consider this book one of the most valuable books I've read in a long time. It deserves wide readership.

"Mission Failure" pretends to be a book organized around a central argument: that American foreign policy was set loose by the collapse of the Soviet Union and became a grand global drive to transform the domestic institutions and politics of foreign countries. In truth, the book is a set of loosely-connected essays about post-Cold War American foreign policy. The discussion of U.S./Russia relations is excellent; other sections, such as those on Afghanistan or China, are good but superficial; the discussion of Iran seems quite one-sided (Evil Mullahs!). Entire countries and regions of the world -- such as Latin America, Japan, India, or the EU -- are barely mentioned at all. Incredibly, the WTO and NAFTA also barely appear. The book correctly notes that U.S. foreign policy was driven by new factors after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the disappearance of America's only great power rival opened up vast new choices and opportunities for Washington. However, the book also makes the silly argument that "nation building" became the center of U.S. policy and that the interventions in Haiti or Somalia were emblematic of the new order. In reality, nation-building -- on the scale practiced in Iraq or Afghanistan -- was never more than a tactic to stabilize countries of interest to the U.S. for other reasons. After 1991, Washington's goals were quite clear: it strove to globalize markets in order to benefit U.S. business; it sought military dominance of Eurasia in order to discourage other countries from ever competing with it militarily (truly a gift that would have kept on giving); and finally, after 2001, the U.S. embarked on regime change in the Middle East and the hunting down of Islamic terror groups all over the world. U.S. self-interest was at the center of these policies, not flaky exercises in democracy promotion. Bottom line: "Mission Failure" is savvy and well-informed. It understands the bureaucracies, politics, and sheer quirks of foreign policy-making in DC. It even acknowledges in passing that building global

economic ties was the central theme of Bill Clinton's foreign policy. But like so many international relations books, it stays focused on politics and neglects trade and finance and the central role of U.S. corporate interests in policy-making. Maybe that's a comment on contemporary IR scholarship, I don't really know. But anyone who wants to study post-Cold War foreign policy needs to study USTR and Treasury in addition to State, Defense, and USAID.

Way too biased when it comes to Israel who according to the author never done anything wrong at all-and everyone who thinks otherwise are just misinformed.Overall 4 stars but the whole Israel-Palestine episode is way to unbalanced

This is required reading for anyone interested in US foreign policy or international relations. MM makes a strong case ideological crusades into regime change, which invariably fail regardless of how virtuous the intent is. The only questionable chapter is on Israel. Although he makes some fair points about the failure of Palestinians to authentically seek peace, one detects an overwhelming bias in favor of Israel the taints the credibility of the case he presents.

Excellent analysis of our foreign policy failures, both Republican and Democratic presidencies. From the looks of this year's campaign for president, it appears no lessons have been learned. We need a national discussion.

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