



## Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era

By Michael Mandelbaum  
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Reviewed by Bruno Carvalho

**R**eactionary, expansive, naive: these are the themes that Michael Mandelbaum alludes to most often in his extensive look at U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Mandelbaum examines foreign policy from the end of the George H.W. Bush Presidency through the Barack Obama administration, highlighting the mix of wishful thinking and lack of focus that prevailed as the United States found itself unchecked on the global stage following the decline and eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Mandelbaum assesses several notable foreign policy failures: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization expansion and the bungled rapprochement with Russia; the failure to instill democracy in China; Bill Clinton's interventions in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia; and the mixed record on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and U.S. attempts at nation-

building in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mandelbaum paints a picture of a foreign policy apparatus beset by lack of interest and political cohesion, demotion in importance to domestic policy, and a repeated failure to understand key aspects of the societies in which the United States chose to intervene.

Mandelbaum's early chapters highlight key points that set the stage for the later portions of the book: the U.S. insistence on imposing its ideals on other nations, a lack of a clear post-Cold War goal in regard to foreign policy, and the absence of a counterweight to oppose U.S. ambitions overseas. The United States was caught unaware by the relative freedom to act in which it found itself; Mandelbaum refers to this when he mentions that "historically, where their foreign policies are concerned sovereign states inhabit the realm of necessity; they do what they must to survive. The United States after the Cold War, by contrast, dwelled in the difficult-to-reach kingdom of choice." With a policy apparatus built mainly to deter and dissuade the Soviet Union, the United States emerged from the Cold War determined to spread its core ideals of democracy and the free-market system. At the same time, Mandelbaum notes how the United States, having "won" the Cold War, switched its priorities to a domestic focus, with its domestic political class also losing the cohesion that the need to counter the Soviet Union had fortified.

Mandelbaum's strength lies in demonstrating the results of a less focused foreign policy, with goals driven by niche wants and domestic popularity rather than actual strategic needs or interests. A case in point is his description of the Clinton administration's Somalia intervention in 1993, which details how a humanitarian mission descended into mission creep that resulted in U.S. casualties. The resulting fallout would then set the stage for future American interventions to be casualty averse and beholden to politicians focused on domestic needs and approval ratings.

This pattern of shallow interventions would be repeated in both Haiti and the Balkans, as the United States attempted

to export its political and democratic ideals into societies with little capacity for change. Mandelbaum draws excellent comparisons with the U.S. occupations in both Germany and Japan, describing how their prewar national identities and civil structures were instrumental in their postwar success. In contrast, when American policymakers intervened in Haiti and Bosnia, they encountered kinship-based societies with little record of accountable, impersonal institutions or rule of law, facts that were repeatedly ignored.

Mandelbaum adequately addresses actions prior to 9/11, but the book takes an interesting shift when he pivots to discussing post-9/11 foreign policy. These chapters are truly the highlight of the book, as the author delves into the minutiae of the American response. Pointing out how 9/11 reprioritized foreign policy for U.S. policymakers, Mandelbaum describes the shifting perception of terrorism from being a crime to being an act of combat as al Qaeda focused its methods on mass slaughter. This change set the stage for other U.S. actions of the time, such as the increasing use of targeted drone strikes, the extralegal rendition of suspected terrorists, the use of torture, and the National Security Agency's domestic collection programs—all done in the name of fighting terrorism. Pointing out that in hindsight, the lack of attacks after 9/11 means that the terrorist threat may have been overblown, Mandelbaum frames this change as the United States returning to acting on its interests instead of its ideals. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 is described the same way; in acting on its interests to root out al Qaeda and capture Osama Bin Laden, the United States failed to give Afghanistan's government the tools it would need to succeed later, setting the stage for the corruption of the Hamid Karzai regime.

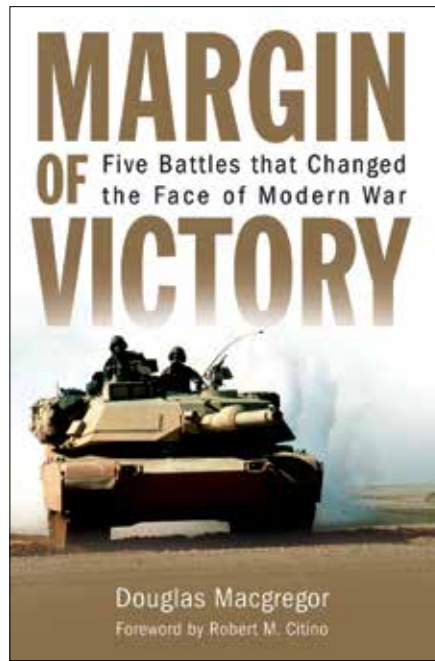
Mandelbaum's description of the Iraq War and the continuous failure of U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process further highlights his overall theme of U.S. foreign policy shortcomings. Briefly describing Iraq's history as a nation with kinship- and

tribal-based societies, he lambasts the U.S. expectation that such a fractious country would embrace American-style democracy and freedom. The author details how the United States, in its attempts at post-invasion order, simply replaced Iraq's Sunnis with its Shia population in the ruling structure, setting the stage for a sectarian government, reprisals, and the eventual start of Iraq's brutal insurgency and civil war. Mandelbaum describes the Iraqi mission as one doomed to fail from the start—a "struggle between American will and the laws of gravity of the region." The U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is similarly described as an attempt to force dissimilar cultures to accept American concepts of negotiation, acceptance, and rule of law.

The thread that ties together *Mission Failure* is the repeating theme of disinterested, unfocused, and mismanaged foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. Describing an American public and government apparatus eager to return to domestic needs, Mandelbaum paints a picture of conflicts defined by ideology and not interests; of interventions run according to fickle domestic popularity; and, perhaps most damaging, of under-resourced and mismanaged missions, from Haiti, Somalia, and Bosnia to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In his closing chapter, Mandelbaum describes a "restoration" of historic power politics and declares the end of the post-Cold War period of U.S. preeminence in world affairs. Ironically, Mandelbaum describes this return to form as an opening for the United States to revert to its interest-based roots—a conclusion that may assure students of history but leaves us wondering, who will fill that vacuum? JFQ

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Bruno Carvalho is a graduate student in the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. He previously served 6 years with the U.S. Army.



### Margin of Victory: Five Battles that Changed the Face of Modern War

by Douglas Macgregor  
 Naval Institute Press, 2016  
 288 pp. \$34.95  
 ISBN: 978-1612519968

Reviewed by John Dethlefs

Douglas Macgregor's newest book offers a tutorial and blueprint for the strategically guided development of the U.S. military. This is timely, as the Department of Defense finds itself preparing for our future national defense strategy, which in the Barack Obama administration was often referred to as the Third Offset. Planning for it should be nested within the current and anticipated strategic environment, emerging technologies, and how we intend to fight our next war. Macgregor analyzes the preparation for, execution of, and consequences of belligerence in five significant battles. He also includes a chapter with recommendations (some of which are quite controversial) for the U.S. military's development.

In the opening chapter, the author recounts how Sir Richard Haldane, who

was appointed the British Secretary of War in December 1905, reformed the British army despite its well-established naval supremacy and significant spending restraints. After analyzing the strategic environment, Haldane concluded he did not know precisely which power or alliance Britain would face in the next war. He asked first-order questions: Whom do we fight? Where do we fight? And how do we fight? The reforms were nested under the answers to these questions. The subsequent battle of Mons in 1914 would reveal that Haldane's reforms served the British army well. The British Expeditionary Force proved to be strategically decisive in protecting France until the Allied powers, which eventually included U.S. forces, could defeat Germany.

Next, Macgregor details the Japanese rise to power and embrace of many Western ideas in the early 1900s. General Ugaki Kazushige "embodied the fight for change inside the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA)," as the Japanese struggled with reform and balancing resources between the navy and army. Much like Haldane, many of his reforms were resisted, blocked, or ignored by some military leadership. The subsequent battle of Shanghai in 1937 put these reforms to the test: "The disparity in Chinese and Japanese losses highlights the impact of Ugaki's modest modernization efforts and the high quality of Japanese troops and leadership, but the struggle for control of Shanghai was harder and bloodier than it should have been. The IJA had failed to change enough to achieve a true margin of victory." Herein lies a subtle warning to U.S. planners that they must be ruthless with our reform as we adjust to the new strategic environment and growing capabilities of possible adversaries.

The author next analyzes the modernization of the post-World War I Soviet and German forces and subsequent destruction of the German Army Group Center in June 1944 by Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. Macgregor argues the German defeat was decided well before any German forces entered the Soviet Union. The difference was