

Book Guide

Power, Terror, Peace, and War

In this book, CFR Senior Fellow Walter Russell Mead—one of the most original writers on U.S. foreign policy—provides a fascinating and timely account of the Bush administration's foreign policy and its current grand strategy for the world. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

Power, Terror, Peace and War examines and assesses the Bush administration's grand strategy at a critical juncture in American history. This book is equally suited for general courses on American foreign policy, advanced courses on the war on terror and America's involvement in Iraq, and advanced courses on the theory and practice of international relations.

Power, Terror, Peace and War will help students in introductory courses better grasp the broader strategic context of the Bush administration's strategy. In addition, it will underscore what did change, and no less importantly, what did not change in America's approach to the world in the wake of September 11th.

Students in upper-division courses can draw on Mead's incisive analysis to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush administration's prosecution of the war on terror. This work will also help advanced students to identify the way forward for American policymakers.

Essay and Discussion Questions

General Courses on American Foreign Policy

Discussion Questions

1. According to Mead, what distinguishes the varieties of power that the United States wields in its encounter with the world? Provide your own examples of sweet, sticky, sharp and hegemonic power.
2. What are the ideological underpinnings of George Bush's foreign policy? What are its historical roots and what does the future hold for this movement?
3. How has neoconservatism shaped the president's foreign policy?
4. Does the Bush administration's foreign policy mark a radical break in American diplomacy or is its approach to the world in keeping with enduring traditions of American foreign policy?
5. Mead dubs the emerging global economic order "millennial capitalism." What are its defining characteristics? How does the widespread perception of America as the engine of millennial capitalism impact American foreign policy.
6. How does America's distinctive social and economic model inform its foreign policy?
7. What are the salient parallels between America's effort to contain the spread of communism and the war on terrorism? How do the dynamics of this current conflict differ from the Cold War?
8. Describe the particular worldviews of the "Party of Heaven" and the "Party of Hell." By what means do they attempt to curb American power?
9. Trace the evolution of George Bush's strategic thinking from his candidacy to the present.
10. Evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the Bush administration's tendency toward unilateralism.

Advanced Courses on American Foreign Policy

Discussion Questions

1. Has the Bush administration effectively struck a balance between the types of American power detailed by Mead? What variety has the administration overly emphasized? What dimension of power has been insufficiently brought to bear?
2. Mead observes that "Ironically, turning away from Europe may be the best way to build a better relationship with it. Europeans have overestimated the political price the United States will pay for their help." Has the Bush administration's sometimes brusque approach to trans-Atlantic ties weakened the alliance, or will the administration's frankness ultimately bolster the relationship?
3. Draft a report card for the Bush administration's foreign policy thus far. Assign letter grades and a rationale for the President's policies vis-à-vis Iraq, the broader Middle East, Asia, South America, Europe, Russia, and Africa.
4. Explain the paradox behind America's role as a "revolutionary conservative" in the world. How has the current administration tried to reconcile the tension between these conflicting impulses? Have they been successful? Why or why not?
5. What are the dangers inherent to America's role as guarantor of the global order? What can the Bush administration do to avoid these perils?
6. Mead describes two different animating ideas (the "Party of Heaven" and the "Party of Hell") that impel nations to oppose American power. Can these two worldviews collaborate to form a durable counterweight to the United States? Is there already evidence of a coalition geared toward balancing against Washington?
7. Contrast the underlying philosophy, decision-making process and implementation of the Bush administration's foreign policy with his post-Cold War predecessors. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the respective administrations?
8. Why has the Bush administration only selectively worked with multilateral institutions? Has the administrations a la carte multilateralism been effective? Why or why not?

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