

# Daydream believers: a report

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Written on the themes of the post-Cold War phase and the role of allied nations in the global socio-political scenario, Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power by Fred Kaplan masterfully outlines the loopholes of administrative arrogance. Primarily a work of non-fiction, this book captivates the thinking minds, and engages them in thoughtful consideration of the backlashes of an imposing and tyrannical political mindset.

The facts that the attack on September 11 led the Bush government to believe the world had changed forever and that they can excogitate new foreign policies that would serve as a set of Americanized doctrines for other countries to follow had inherent flaws in them. This is what the author brings to light through his expert journalistic vision. This book report includes a brief overview of the plot of Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power, followed by a summary of the book, including the key literary aspects and how the author succeeds in establishing his viewpoints, and finally my own interpretations.

Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power, in a nutshell, exposes the truth about the US government's obtruding foreign affairs during the post-Cold War times. After the fall of Soviet Russia in 1991, the Cold War phase ensued, marking a peace-seeking era when most nations were looking for a secured national order. It required a highly methodical approach to rectify the failing systems of democracy and humanity. Most nations grouped themselves under one of two camps - the West led by America or the East governed by Soviet Union.

However, forming allies, which was such a necessity prior to the downfall of Soviet Russia, was no longer relevant from a political point of view. With the precipitation of the Soviet Union in 1991 as the major adversary of the West, the Western allies were left with no common enemies. What happened as a result of this was not in the vision of the 'superpower' America. Managing the allies became difficult because they no longer needed to pay attention to anything and everything America would say to them.

Since there were no particular threats hovering over the world, they could go about their own business, devise their own foreign policies, make their own systems of arms and weaponries and so on. In a way, the fall of Soviet Union made sure that there was no de facto modes of allies-making in world politics. It was true that the 9/11 incident did change certain things. From a socio-cultural perspective, the Americans realized that they too were vulnerable. And also it revealed certain factors relating to the world politics.

But the very idea that 9/11 changed everything was a grossly faulty perception the Bush administration had. No doubt security was a major cause for concern behind the allegiance of the allied parties. It was clear that internal security of a specific country was sometimes compromised with for the sake of external security. It was never going to be worthy of too much speculation since an allied nation just had to adjust its policies and appear loyal even if there was a clash of policies and ideologies. That is how international politics work.

But the Bush government and its topnotch advisors misread this premise of loyalty. They overlooked the compulsive elements involved with it, and had the impression that the entire world, following the downfall of Soviet Russia,

was under their command. But to achieve such an unrealistic ordeal, the US administration had to forge plans of sustained warfare by building up global bases of army. Moreover, the common Americans had to be brainwashed into believing the omnipotent abilities of their own country as a political powerhouse.

But this was way off the mass conscience since none wishes to support a brutal cause such as raging perpetual battle with far off lands. The second option President George W. Bush had was to restore faith in the former US allies. He could have done that in more than one ways. Firstly, his administration being at the helm of UN affairs most of the time could have addressed contemporary global issues that would attract both the attention and the concern of other nations.

This was a relatively easier way to go about as far as reconciling was concerned. Secondly, the process of peacemaking has some well-structured and universal methods such as lending economic assistance to the less-privileged countries and earning their respect and trust. In fact the benefits of developing allies are worth considering, especially for a big and complicated democratic setup like America's. The United States had to act diplomatic for ensuring their own benefits in the long run, and to get the job done with hardheaded principles.

Coming back to the question of bolstering a huge army, it was clear for the United States that the conventional outlooks on warfare were beginning to dissolve fast post 9/11. Strategic warfare and focusing on the most vulnerable areas of security gained prominence after the debacle of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Just outnumbering the force was not a

prudent idea as it would require consumption of hefty resources, that too without very little returns in terms of fortifying safety and security issues.

As was clear from the 9/11 attacks, deploying forces outside the country could only weaken the nation's internal security, and jeopardize the basic focus of defense. To look at the matter from international perspectives, it was all the more irrelevant to nurture massive military outposts. What President Bush had in mind as the 'new world' was definitely a distortion of the idea. It was a new world not in terms of changed political ideologies, but in terms of technological revolutions. Lighter and more lethal armaments began to replace the old, heavy ones, therefore lessening the number of troops in the battlefields.

So the idea of having more allies sounded like having needlessly extra burdens than is required for the smooth functioning of the country. The sophisticated weaponries acted as a lure for other countries to either come along or to back off. In either case, however, it was the American interests which would have been served. The spearheads of Nixon and Bush administration worked relentlessly to figure out the most balanced foreign policies that would keep a hold on America's existing allies and at the same time, would be credible and convincing enough to pull in new ones.

Following the tenure of President Clinton in the interim period, those plans seemed like showing a prospective path towards implementation, which, needless to mention, was the sole priority of the men in power. However, the unprecedented events of September 11 turned many equations upside down. For the first time in the near spotless history of the country, an ugly blemish was incurred upon the competence of national defense systems.

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Subsequently, the previous war strategies adopted in the 1990s were justified as the Cold War phase emerged out of a prolonged hibernation.

The face of terrorism and political oppositions assumed a new dimension even without the flaunting of power by the Soviets. Right at this crucial juncture, the US government made another utopian conjecture - almost a daydream - that Afghanistan and Iraq could be mollified by the advanced nuclear weapons specifically designed to decimate large enemy targets. This stance backfired horribly as the Middle-East strongly denounced America's aggression and developed an intense anti-American attitude.

Had President Bush paid attention to Kaplan's suggestions of interactive peacemaking by means of developing a congenial atmosphere for agreement, this conflicting situation could have been easily averted. As the US military went about their belligerent ways of seeking out and destroying 'enemies' in Iraq and Afghanistan, more tension built in North Korea and Iran. In an attempt to elucidate the so-called 'Grand Ideas', Kaplan cites several political and administrative figures including Donald Rumsfeld, Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward, Fareed Zakaria and Max Boot.

The author appears a straight shooter while reporting with an objective precision how the framework for a succession of US policy making fiascos was made: "Near the start of his presidential campaign, Bush had given a speech at The Citadel - the historic military college in Charleston, South Carolina - spelling out his top priorities for a new defense policy. He would deploy antiballistic missiles "at the earliest possible date," even if doing so meant withdrawing from the ABM Treaty, the long-standing centerpiece of Russian-American arms control accords." (Kaplan, 2008, p. 7)

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This very much highlights the US defense policies that were promoted in the 1990s. In fact Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was directed to review the existing defense mechanisms and war strategies (Kaplan, 2008, p. 8). The author closely scrutinizes the history of American war ammunitions by dating back to the 1950s when RVPs were inducted in the US air force (Kaplan, 2008, p. 14). It was thought to be a wise act of posing defense and if necessary, offense mechanisms should the Soviet allies crossed the level of tolerance in Europe.

But the Bush administration clearly flouted the gentleman's agreement of ceasefire, e. g. the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which was in effect from 1972, by declaring extreme military strategies to " shoot down enemy missiles in the event of a nuclear attack. " (Kaplan, 2008, p. 77) I feel this is way off the civilized and sensible agenda a president needs to adopt. The time when President Bush made the announcement witnessed the rise of the Republican in the American Congress after forty years of Democratic dominance.

Hence, it was mandatory for the new administration to settle down and formulate productive plans that would help building a solid groundwork for international relations. It can be argued from a critic's perspective that Kaplan's book provides a unique point of view regarding the very nature of bureaucracy. With a subtle degree of sarcastic banter, he penetrates deep into the core state of affairs at the White House, especially those handled by the administrative advisors. What is there at the center of the US military strategies need to be remodeled drastically for the sake of a more lenient approach in peacemaking and foreign policies.

In the fourth chapter of *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power*, Kaplan introduces a set of deductive reasoning bias that, in an ironic manner, cancels each other. President Bush's emphatic warning to the terrorists that acts of organized attack won't be withstood no matter wherever in the world they might occur is reflective of the changing worldview of oppression and terrorism. On one hand, America's claim to interfere into such situations denies a nation of its right to freedom. On the other hand, organized mass killings cannot be encouraged on the pretext of safeguarding one's own national security details.

So it is almost a catch 22 situation from a geopolitical context. The dichotomy of such a premise leaves only idealistic grounds and theoretical solutions. Practically speaking, no matter how much idealism can be read into this topic, unless and until it is deemed executable in reality, the void continues to exist. As the world is wrongly apprehended to be changing after the 9/11 attacks, Kaplan gathers enough honest courage to point out directly at the Bush administration and its elaborate think tank rather than holding the evangelical Christianity entirely accountable.

He blends his own experience and sense of realism with the actual events that happened inside the administration. In my view, the book single-handedly serves as a political school of thought that warns us against the integral shortcomings of 'far-sighted' politic propagandas. Kaplan's introduction of a smoky character named Mr. Sadr..., and his rather suspicious interaction with Kevin Whitelaw stirs our attention and bring us to the deals that keep going on under cover.



This is particularly highlighted in the case for jotting down “ a Provocative Plan to Face Down North Korea,” (Kaplan, 2008, p. 209). His richly introspective analysis of the conflicting case calls for a special attention in this regard. The book leaves me pondering on a few key points, including the hollowness of grandiose and hubris. I am sure this book is going to provide learning lessons to the upcoming breed of politicians and policy makers not just from the United States of America, but also from other parts of the globe.

As a classic case of diplomatic conundrum, this book offers an insightful analysis of the differences among race, culture and habitual factors. America’s foreign policies for the East lacked attention into these elements and were bound to falter at some point of time. Hence, the war in Iraq and other places fell miserably short of its intended objective, thus giving rise to further complications. The question of individual choice and freedom is ostensibly more important than the unwelcoming encumbrances levied upon by external pressures disguised under lofty ideologies.