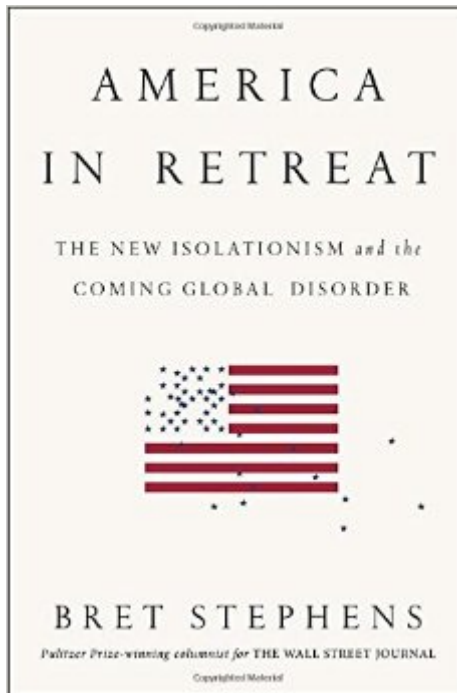


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# America In Retreat: The New Isolationism And The Coming Global Disorder



## Synopsis

“A world in which the leading liberal-democratic nation does not assume its role as world policeman will become a world in which dictatorships contend, or unite, to fill the breach. Americans seeking a return to an isolationist garden of Eden—alone and undisturbed in the world, knowing neither good nor evil—will soon find themselves living within shooting range of global pandemonium.”

From the Introduction

In a brilliant book that will elevate foreign policy in the national conversation, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Bret Stephens makes a powerful case for American intervention abroad. In December 2011 the last American soldier left Iraq. “We’re leaving behind a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq,” boasted President Obama. He was proved devastatingly wrong less than three years later as jihadists seized the Iraqi city of Mosul. The event cast another dark shadow over the future of global order—a shadow, which, Bret Stephens argues, we ignore at our peril.

America in Retreat identifies a profound crisis on the global horizon. As Americans seek to withdraw from the world to tend to domestic problems, America’s adversaries spy opportunity. Vladimir Putin’s ambitions to restore the glory of the czarist empire go effectively unchecked, as do China’s attempts to expand its maritime claims in the South China Sea, as do Iran’s efforts to develop nuclear capabilities. Civil war in Syria displaces millions throughout the Middle East while turbocharging the forces of radical Islam. Long-time allies such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, doubting the credibility of American security guarantees, are tempted to freelance their foreign policy, irrespective of U.S. interests.

Deploying his characteristic stylistic flair and intellectual prowess, Stephens argues for American reengagement abroad. He explains how military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan was the right course of action, foolishly executed. He traces the intellectual continuity between anti-interventionist statesmen such as Henry Wallace and Robert Taft in the late 1940s and Barack Obama and Rand Paul today. And he makes an unapologetic case for Pax Americana, a world in which English is the default language of business, diplomacy, tourism, and technology; in which markets are global, capital is mobile, and trade is increasingly free; in which values of openness and tolerance are, when not the norm, often the aspiration.

In a terrifying chapter imagining the world of 2019, Stephens shows what could lie in store if Americans continue on their current course. Yet we are not doomed to this future. Stephens makes a passionate rejoinder to those who argue that America is in decline, a process that is often beyond the reach of political cures. Instead, we are in retreat—the result of faulty, but reversible, policy choices. By embracing its historic responsibility as the world’s policeman, America can safeguard not only greater peace in the world but also greater prosperity at home. At once lively and sobering, *America in Retreat* offers trenchant analysis of the gravest threat

to global order, from a rising star of political commentary.Â

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bret Stephens is the Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign affairs columnist for the Wall Street Journal, arguably the nationâ™s most liberal newspaper. I read his column regularly so I was gratified that he published a book on Americaâ™s role (or lack of one) in world affairs. Mr. Stephens is a gifted writer and his book is both informative and thought provoking. I donâ™t agree completely with his premise that the United States cannot afford to shirk its âœresponsibilityâ• to remain the worldâ™s moral, political and military champion. And I reject outright his proposed solution, that America must assume the role of âœworld copâ• in order to keep tyrants and despots at bay lest their local mischief grow into a threatening international crisis. Stephens presents a cogent history of Americaâ™s isolationist tendencies and how such behavior often leads to negative consequences. He goes into considerable detail laying out a compelling case that we are now revisiting scenarios that played out in the 1930sâ”and most Americans over the age of 35 know that didnâ™t end well. I agree. We differ strongly on how the United States should use its power and influence to manage an increasingly fractious world. Stephens proposes that the United States become something like a world cop using the âœbroken windowsâ• theory of law enforcement. Here, in my opinion, Mr. Stephensâ™ liberal upbringing, education, and lack of military experience lead him astray. Soldiers are not, and should never be, policemen. There is a vast gulf between cops working within a framework of laws and soldiers who, until recent times, operate in a much looser environment that

includes state-sanctioned killing. Stephens offers the Syrian civil war as an example of where the United States should have stepped in to stop the misery and slaughter.

Should America walk the beat as the world's policeman? Many Americans on both sides of the political aisle think not. For example, President Barack Obama, a Democrat, flatly states, "We should not be the world's policeman." Similarly, Senator Rand Paul, a Republican, avers: "America's mission should always be to keep the peace, not police the world." After more than a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the sentiment is understandable. Understandable, Bret Stephens argues in his new book, *America in Retreat* "but still dangerous." "No great power can treat foreign policy as a spectator sport and hope to remain a great power," he writes. "A world in which the leading liberal-democratic nation does not assume its role as world policeman will become a world in which dictatorships contend, or unite, to fill the breach. Americans seeking a return to an isolationist garden of Eden "alone and undisturbed in the world, knowing neither good nor evil" will soon find themselves living within shooting range of global pandemonium." To be the world's policeman, Stephens quickly qualifies, "is not to say we need to be its priest; preaching the gospel of the American way." Nor does America need to be "the world's martyr." "Police work isn't altruism," he explains. "It is done from necessity and self-interest. It is done because it has been done and there's no one else to do it, and because the benefits of doing it accrue not only to those we protect but also, indeed mainly, to ourselves." Stephens draws on a famous 1982 essay in *The Atlantic Monthly* to explain what it would mean for America to police the world. That essay, "Broken Windows," attempted to understand "the nature of communal order, the way it is maintained, and the ways in which order turns into disorder."

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