



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Deterring Democracy

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The themes are familiar. Reviewing President Eisenhower's strategic thinking, diplomatic historian Richard Immerman observes that he "took it as an article of faith that America's strength and security depended on its maintaining access to—indeed control of—global markets and resources, particularly in the Third World." Like other rational planners, he assumed that the West was safe from any Soviet attack, and that such fears were "the product of paranoid imagination." But the periphery "was vulnerable to subversion," and the Russians, Eisenhower wrote, "are getting far closer to the [Third World] masses than we are" and are skilled at propaganda and other methods "to appeal directly to the masses."³⁵ These are common features of the planning record, even more clearly visible than before now that the image of the expansionist and aggressive Soviet Union has lost its credibility.

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Budget changes must be geared to a capital-intensive military if it is to serve its function for advanced industry. Alternatives to military spending are theoretically possible, but—as has been understood by business from the origins of the Cold War—they tend to have undesirable effects: to interfere with managerial prerogatives, mobilize popular constituencies and thus extend the "crisis of democracy," redistribute income, and so on. The problem is not one of pure economic theory but of power and privilege, and their specific institutional structures. Advocates of conversion will be tilting at windmills unless they confront these fundamental problems. The same is true of opponents of intervention

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US labor leaders viewed these developments with a generally favorable eye. The American Federationist, edited by AFL president Samuel Gompers, welcomed Fascism as a bulwark against Communism and a movement "capable of decisive action on a national scale," which was "rapidly reconstructing a nation of collaborating units of usefulness," Mussolini's Fascist corporations, which subordinated labor to capital and the state. The AFL journal found these corporations "a welcome replacement for the

old, Bolshevik-infected industrial unions," Ronald Filippelli comments. Mussolini's activism was also attractive. "However repugnant ... the idea of dictatorship and the man on horseback," the journal continued, "American trade unionists will at least find it possible to have some sympathy with the policies of a man whose dominating purpose is to get something done; to do rather than theorize; to build a working, producing civilization instead of a disorganized, theorizing aggregation of conflicting groups" in a society riven by class conflict.⁵¹ Mussolini got the trains to run on time, as the standard cliché had it. The suppression of labor and democratic institutions was not too great a price to pay for this achievement, from the AFL perspective. Mussolini was portrayed as a "moderate" with enormous popular appeal who had brought efficient administration and prosperity, slaying the beast and opening the doors to profitable investment and trade. Reflecting common attitudes in the business community, J.P. Morgan partner Thomas Lamont described himself as "something like a missionary" for Italian Fascism, expressing his admiration for Il Duce, "a very upstanding chap" who had "done a great job in Italy," and for the "sound ideas" that guided him in governing the country. Otto Kahn of Kuhn, Loeb, and Co. praised the Fascists further for ending "parliamentary wrangling and wasteful impotent bureaucracy" and bringing "a spirit of order, discipline, hard work, patriotic devotion and faith" under "the clear sighted and masterful guidance of that remarkable man, Benito Mussolini." Judge Elbert Gary of United Steel asked whether "we, too, need a man like Mussolini." The US Embassy was particularly impressed that "there has not been a single strike in the whole of Italy" since the Fascist takeover.⁵²

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the effects of the Great Depression hit Europe, leading to social and political unrest, Fascist Italy received mounting praise as a bastion of order and stability, free of class struggle and challenges from labor and the left. "The wops are unwopping themselves," Fortune magazine wrote with awe in a special issue devoted to Fascist Italy in 1934. Others agreed. State Department roving Ambassador Norman Davis praised Italy's successes in remarks before the Council on Foreign Relations in 1933, speaking after the Italian Ambassador had drawn applause from his distinguished audience for his description of how Italy had put its "own house in order A class war was put down"—by means that were apparently regarded as appropriate. Roosevelt's Ambassador to Italy, Breckenridge Long, was also full of enthusiasm for the "new experiment in government" under Fascism, which "works most successfully in Italy." After World War II, Henry Stimson (Secretary of State under Hoover, Secretary of War under Roosevelt) recalled that he and Hoover had found Mussolini to be "a sound and useful leader." When Marine General Smedley Butler made some critical comments about Mussolini in 1931, Stimson had brought court-martial proceedings against him, making no effort to ascertain the facts. When Fascists won 99 percent of the vote in the March 1934 election, the State Department concluded that the results

"demonstrate incontestably the popularity of the Fascist regime." Roosevelt shared many of these positive views of "that admirable Italian gentleman," as he termed Mussolini in 1933.⁵⁵ Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia was condemned, but did not seriously harm US relations with Fascist Italy. The essential reason was given by Ambassador Long: if Mussolini fell and the country was left "without guidance, ... the violent manifestations of Bolshevism would be apparent in the industrial centers and in the agricultural regions where private ownership still pertains." A 1937 State Department report concluded that "Fascism is becoming the soul of Italy," having "brought order out of chaos, discipline out of license, and solvency out of bankruptcy." To "accomplish so much in a short time severe measures have been necessary," the report continued. Furthermore, like Germany under Hitler, Italy was standing in the way of Russian influence in Spain during the Civil War. Washington had adopted a form of "neutrality" that amounted to a tilt towards Spanish Fascism against the liberal democratic republic, while joining in the uniform hostility of the West and Stalin to the popular libertarian revolution.⁵⁶

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The basis for US policy in the Cold War era is outlined with considerable clarity in the internal record of planning.⁶⁵ With unprecedented economic and military preeminence, the US prepared to become the first truly global power. Not surprisingly, corporate and state managers hoped to use this power to design a world order that would serve the interests they represented. During the war, US planners developed the concept of a "Grand Area," a region understood to be "strategically necessary for world control," subordinated to the needs of the American economy. In its early stages, the Grand Area was conceived as a US-led non-German bloc. It was to incorporate the Western hemisphere, the Far East, and the former British empire, which was to be dismantled along with other regional systems and incorporated under US control. Meanwhile the US extended its own regional systems in Latin America and the Pacific on the principle, expressed by Abe Fortas in internal discussion, that these steps were justified "as part of our obligation to the security of the world ... what was good for us was good for the world." British officials were unimpressed, denouncing "the economic imperialism of American business interests, which is quite active under the cloak of a benevolent and avuncular internationalism," and is "attempting to elbow us out." As it became clear that Germany would be defeated, the Grand Area concept was extended to include the Eurasian landmass as well, as far as possible. These general plans were applied to particular regions with much consistency. With regard to the Soviet Union, the doves were reconciled to a form of "containment" in which it would control most of the areas occupied by the Red Army in the war against Hitler. The hawks had broader aspirations, as expressed in the rollback strategy of NSC 68. US policy towards the Soviet Union has fluctuated between these positions over the years, reflecting in part the problem of controlling the far-flung domains "defended" by US power, in part the

need for a credible enemy to ensure that the public remains willing to support intervention and provide a subsidy to advanced industry through the military system. The Grand Area was to have a definite structure. The industrial societies were to be reconstituted with much of the traditional order restored, but within the overarching framework of US power. They were to be organized under their “natural leaders,” Germany and Japan. Early moves towards democratization under the military occupation caused deep concern in Washington and the business community. They were reversed by the late 1940s, with firm steps to weaken the labor movement and ensure the dominance of the traditional business sectors, linked to US capital. Britain was later to undergo a similar process, as did the United States itself.⁶⁶

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The major policy imperative is to block indigenous nationalist forces that might try to use their own resources in conflict with US interests. A large-scale counterinsurgency operation in Greece from 1947 was partially motivated by the concern that the “rot” of independent nationalism there might “infect” the Middle East, Acheson warned. Greece was regarded as an outpost of US power, protecting Middle East oil for the United States and its allies. A CIA study held that if the rebels were victorious, the US would face “the possible loss of the petroleum resources of the Middle East.” A Soviet threat was concocted in the usual manner. The real threat was indigenous nationalism, with its feared demonstration effects elsewhere.

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Similar factors led to the CIA coup restoring the Shah in Iran in 1953. Nasser became an enemy for similar reasons. Later, Khomeini was perceived as posing another such threat, leading the US to support Iraq in the Gulf War. The Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein then took over the mantle, shifting status overnight from favored friend to new Hitler when he invaded Kuwait in an effort to displace US—British clients. The primary fear throughout has been that nationalist forces not under US influence and control might come to have substantial influence over the oil-producing regions of the Arabian peninsula. Saudi Arabian elites, in contrast, are considered appropriate partners, managing their resources in conformity to basic US interests, and assisting US terror and subversion throughout the Third World.

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In brief, the world’s major energy reserves must be in the proper hands—ours—which can be counted on to use them for the benefit of the right people, Churchill’s “satisfied

nations, who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had." Rhetoric aside, the perceived danger

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The right-wing military Keynesians were also highly protectionist, quite apart from the expansion of the protected state market for high-tech production under the euphemism of "defense." The Reaganites initiated a Pentagon-based consortium for semiconductor research and development, and increasingly gave the Pentagon the task of functioning in the manner of Japan's state—corporate planners, organizing R&D in chip and computer design, superconductivity, high-definition television, and other areas of advanced technology. Star Wars fantasies constituted only one of the methods concocted to induce the public to provide a subsidy to high-technology industry, which will reap the profits if there are commercial applications in accord with the doctrines of "free enterprise." Reagan also introduced more import restrictions than the past six presidents combined; the percentage of total imports subjected to quota and restraint agreements doubled from 12 to 24 percent under Reaganite "conservatism."¹⁷ The results of these policies were apparent by the mid 1980s, and became increasingly so as the presidential transition approached. Expressing a fairly general consensus among economists and business elites, David Hale, chief economist of Kemper Financial Services, observed: "seldom has a new American administration taken office against such a pervasive backdrop of economic gloom as that which now confronts President George Bush," with "the country seemingly awash in a sea of red ink as the Reagan era ends."¹⁸ There was a rapid increase in the federal deficit, and a seventy-year climb to the status of the world's leading creditor nation was quickly reversed as the US became the world's leading debtor. Hale estimates that "by 1991 the United States will probably have a \$1 trillion external debt," a transfer of well over a trillion dollars in a decade—no mean feat on the part of those who regularly deride "Sandinista mismanagement." The investment balance also swung radically in favor of foreign investors. Private and corporate savings deteriorated to a historic low, relative to GNP. Private wealth rose more slowly than in the late 1970s, and real wages stagnated. Income was sharply redistributed upwards; the rich gained, the poor suffered, as intended. Government economic management led to consumption by the rich, speculation and financial manipulation, but little in the way of productive investment. "Investment is a smaller fraction of the GNP today than it was in the late 1970s, when we were not borrowing abroad," Lester Thurow observes, adding: "our current international borrowing is going into either public or private consumption and will therefore eventually extract a reduction in the future American standard of living." US net investment, relative to GNP, is now the lowest of the big seven industrial countries. Even that low level of investment was maintained only by the large increase in capital imports, Modigliani and Solow note. Military R&D rose from...

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The state managers were selective in the forms of state intervention in the economy that they adopted. Where deregulation could yield short-term profits, it was considered a worthy goal. The Savings and Loan fiasco is one dramatic consequence. The wild

abandon of these years has had its effects more broadly in the deterioration of infrastructure, health and education standards, the conditions of the environment, and the general state of the economy. Regulatory programs to encourage energy conservation went the way of plans to develop renewable energy resources, on the pretext that the price of oil would be lowered by the miracle of the free market (the price in practice has generally been administered by the US client regime of Saudi Arabia and the major oil corporations, who maintain production at a level that will ensure prices high enough for rich profits but low enough not to encourage a search for alternatives, with US government pressures in the 1980s to lower the price so as to sustain the recovery from the deep recession of 1982). This form of foolishness has ample precedent and, as in the past, is bound to have grave repercussions.²¹

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A closer look at the drug crisis is instructive. There can be no doubt that the problem is serious. "Substance abuse," to use the technical term, takes a terrible toll. The grim facts are reviewed by Ethan Nadelmann in *Science* magazine.²⁸ Deaths attributable to consumption of tobacco are estimated at over 300,000 a year, while alcohol use adds an additional 50,000 to 200,000 annual deaths. Among fifteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds, alcohol is the leading cause of death, also serving as a "gateway" drug that leads to use of others, according to the National Council on Alcoholism.²⁹ In addition, a few thousand deaths from illegal drugs are recorded: 3562 deaths were reported in 1985, from all illegal drugs combined. According to these estimates, over 99 percent of deaths from substance abuse are attributable to tobacco and alcohol. There are also enormous health costs, again primarily from alcohol and tobacco use: "the health costs of marijuana, cocaine, and heroin combined amount to only a small fraction of those caused by either of the two licit substances," Nadelmann continues. Also to be considered is the distribution of victims. Illicit drugs primarily affect the user, but their legal cousins seriously affect others, including passive smokers and victims of drunken driving and alcohol-induced violence; "no illicit drug ... is as strongly associated with violent behavior as is alcohol," Nadelmann observes, and alcohol abuse is a factor in some 40 percent of roughly 50,000 annual traffic deaths.

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It is therefore not at all surprising that hostility to the Sandinistas was virtually uniform in media commentary and other elite circles.³ The official reasons (human rights, democracy, the Soviet threat, and so on) are too far-fetched to take seriously, and were, in any event, thoroughly refuted so many times, with no effect, as to reveal the pointlessness of the exercise. The real issue is the one Figueres identified. Throughout, the only debatable question has been tactical: how to restore Nicaragua to "the Central

American mode” and impose “regional standards”—those of the US client states. Such matters as freedom of the press and human rights aroused profound libertarian and moral passions in Nicaragua, as distinct from the death squad democracies next door, or other states with vastly worse records but with the compensating merit that they too were properly respectful of US priorities. 4 Similarly, elections in the terror states revealed heartening progress towards democracy, but not in Nicaragua, where radically different standards were applied. The 1984 elections were intolerable to the United States because they could not be controlled. Therefore Washington did what it could to disrupt them, and they were dismissed and eliminated from history by the media, as required. In the case of the long-scheduled 1990 elections, the US interfered massively from the outset to gain victory for its candidates, not only by the enormous financial aid that received some publicity, but—far more significant and considered quite uncontroversial—by White House announcements that only a victory by the US candidate would bring an end to the illegal US economic sanctions and restoration of aid. In brief, Nicaraguan voters were informed that they had a free choice: Vote for our candidate, or watch your children starve.⁵

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In those years, according to a 1984 report of the Italian Parliament, P2 and other neo-fascist groups, working closely with elements of the Italian military and secret services, were preparing a virtual coup to impose an ultra-right regime and to block the rising forces of the left. One aspect of these plans was a “strategy of tension” involving major terrorist actions in Europe. The new charges were made by Richard Brenneke, who claims to have served as a CIA contract officer and alleged that the CIA—P2 connections extended over more than twenty years and involved a \$10 million payoff. Close links between Washington and the Italian ultra-right can be traced to the strong support for Mussolini’s Fascist takeover in 1922.³

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