



JE KINDLE-NOTITIES VOOR:

House Of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power

door James Carroll

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60 Highlights

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 206

Supervising all of this work was a Corps of Engineers colonel named Leslie R. Groves, who was forty-five years old when appointed to head up Pentagon construction. He was a burly, corpulent man whose belly protruded like lips over his brass-buckled belt.¹⁰ A man of the job, Groves was an important military manager. In charge of the Army's crash building program across the country (in 1940 the Corps's construction budget skyrocketed from \$20 million to \$10 billion), he had already purchased half the lumber in the United States.¹¹ Born into an Army family four years after the Battle of Wounded Knee, in 1890, which marked the end of the Indian wars, Groves had spent part of his childhood at Fort Apache, Arizona, living in the house of a man famous for killing Indians.¹² His lifelong hero was General William Tecumseh Sherman, whose "march to the sea" across Georgia legitimized the spirit of total war, which after the Civil War was unleashed on Native Americans.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 480

As of January 1943, the American military still defined itself in terms of martial honor that refused to target innocents. This starting point of U.S. strategic doctrine has particular poignancy in the context of the career path of the young AAF targeting officer whom I have cited twice. His name is Carl Kaysen. He reported for service with the Eighth Air Force in London in that same early winter of 1943, and after two years of picking targets for American bombers flying into Germany, he would pursue a career as an academic economist that would bring him prominence. Later in this story we will see how, as a senior adviser to President Kennedy, Kaysen revisited the mortal question of targeting civilians from the air, but on a far deadlier scale—an experience that made him one of the Cold War's most important arms control advocates.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 678

Technology was driving change—change in the way war was fought and change in the way war was thought about. The center of change was the Pentagon, and in that crucial week of January 1943, technology and the Building came together in one man, Leslie Groves. As we saw, he had supervised the construction of the new War Department headquarters, and now that that was completed he was ready for new duty. Groves was the son of an army chaplain and a man who loved Indian fighters and General Sherman. He had supervised the finish work on the new War Department headquarters—those Whites Only lavatories—but in that same period he had undertaken another, more momentous responsibility. Before the Building's January completion, Groves had already been dividing his time. In September 1942, he had just testified before a congressional committee on

Army construction programs when a general stopped him in the hallway outside the hearing room. “The Secretary of War has selected you for a very important assignment,” the general said, “and the President has approved the selection.” Groves asked where, was told Washington, and he immediately protested that he wanted a combat assignment. “If you do the job right,” the general said, “it will win the war.”⁸²

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 692

Two and a half years after Einstein’s letter, scientists led by Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago set in motion, on December 2, 1942, the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, finally proving that an atomic bomb was feasible. If there was any reluctance among the scientists to proceed with the development of a bomb, it was undercut, especially for those who were Jewish, by a State Department bulletin issued that same day: two million Jews had already been systematically murdered by the Nazis, and many others were vulnerable.⁸⁵ Soon thereafter the Army’s effort got serious, and the center of U.S. nuclear weapons research moved from Chicago to a new secret facility in the desert of New Mexico.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 697

By the beginning of 1943, Leslie Groves, now director of the innocuously named Manhattan Engineer District, 86 had discreetly pulled back from the last phase of Pentagon construction and begun to inform himself about the supersecret work of the scientists. When the scientific director of the project, Vannevar Bush,⁸⁷ learned of Groves’s appointment, he objected because the gruff Army colonel lacked, as Bush wrote, “sufficient tact for the job.” But War Secretary Henry Stimson knew Groves from his work on the Pentagon, which provided proof enough of his competence. The Pentagon was the largest building project in history up until that time, but the Manhattan Project, simply as a management task, would far surpass it.⁸⁸ In fact, Groves would oversee the construction of an even larger building, the largest in the world: a plant for the manufacture of enriched uranium in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.⁸⁹ Within days of his hallway encounter with that general, Groves was promoted to general himself, and he moved back to the Washington side of the river. His office was in the so-called New War Department Building in Foggy Bottom, the Roosevelt-favored building that Groves’s Pentagon had just trumped, in spades.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 722

That “Pentagon effect” on American governance and life is the subject of this book. It focuses on the question of how moral agency (for good and for ill) and impersonal forces beyond human control interact. It sounds like classical tragedy. But that ancient dilemma of agency and fate gained new power when mass bureaucracy and mechanization combined with group paranoia in the nuclear project presided over by Groves.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 878

September 11, as the date of the Pentagon’s groundbreaking in 1941, pulls the mind forward exactly sixty years to 2001, when the Building’s vulnerability fulfilled Groves’s nervous intuition at Trinity and the prophecy of those who had long seen the Pentagon as a bull’s-eye on the earth. Beginning then, under President George W. Bush, America entered a new era characterized by the rhetoric of “dead or alive,” by a new doctrine of “preventive war,” by a recasting of nuclear policy, and by a radical new empowering of the Pentagon. Convergence, as opposed to coincidence, prompts the question, Was all of this set in motion at the start?

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 883

September 11, 1944, the prince of Hesse, the principality in which Wiesbaden, site of my one-time boyhood home, is located, stood on a promontory of his property, his eyes fixed in the direction of the city of Darmstadt, fifteen kilometers distant: “The light grew and grew until the whole of the southern sky was glowing, shot through with red and yellow.” The prince was seeing Allied bombers at work. It is almost certain that many more died that night from the action of airplanes than would from airplanes arrowing into Wall Street and Hell’s Bottom fifty-seven years later.¹¹⁵ On September 11, 1973, twenty-eight years almost to the exact moment before American Airlines flight 77’s explosive crash into the Pentagon, terrorists launched the violent overthrow of a democratic government in Chile, although in that case the result was the murder of the head of state, Salvador Allende, and the terrorists were sponsored not by an ad hoc nihilist group but by the United States.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 891

On September 11, 1990, after Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush, in a speech before Congress, declared what he called “a new world order,” a phrase originating in Machiavelli¹¹⁶ (and which appears, in Latin, on the one-dollar bill), a purpose his son would attempt to fulfill, beginning exactly eleven years later.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 1916

Brigadier General Charles Pearre Cabell served as leader of Hughes’s unit. Years later, he would be our neighbor on Generals’ Row at Bolling, and his son Ben would be one of the golden older kids who hung around the Officers’ Club swimming pool. Since, like LeMay, Cabell was a figure for whom I developed a youthful, if distant, admiration, I am relieved to report that in the crucial 1944 debates over AAF bombing methods, Cabell came down on the side of those opposed to the shift.¹⁷⁸ Partly because of Cabell’s influence, Eisenhower himself weighed in on the argument, on July 21, 1944, ordering the Eighth Air Force commander to maintain the strictures of precision bombing. “Let’s for God’s sake keep our eyes on the ball and use some sense,” he said, rejecting terror tactics of all kinds.¹⁷⁹

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 1925

Kaysen would be one of the leading theorists of nuclear war, devoting decades of his life to preventing it. But he began as someone who told bombardiers where to push their buttons. For the Americans, this was a far more complex matter than studying maps and determining coordinates, and it says much about the seriousness with which the AAF took precision that it relied on people like Kaysen as target officers. He was a trained economist, and it was his expertise in what makes for productivity—military productivity—that qualified him for his role.
Kaysen

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2198

Official counts put the number of dead at between 80,000 and 100,000. A million people had been rendered homeless. No one could pretend the raid was anything but what it was. The bombing of Tokyo occupies a small back room in the house of the American memory, but it was widely known at the time. In fact, with few

exceptions, Americans greeted the news with a special glee. The New York Times led its first day of coverage with the headline “300 B-29s Fire 15 Square Miles of Tokyo,” and its second with “Center of Tokyo Devastated by Fire Bombs. City’s Heart Gone.” To define the civilian death toll, the Times used the word “holocaust,”²²³ a word that would not appear in the Times index with reference to the Shoah until 1980.²²⁴ Yet there was nothing of protest in the Times’s coverage, nothing even of questioning. It was taken for granted at every level of American society that the urban center of the Japanese capital was a proper target. So much housing disappeared from Tokyo that night that the postwar population of the city was less than half of what it was on March 9. The firestorm effects of both Hamburg and Dresden—the conflagrations generating heat hurricanes that melted cement and boiled rivers—had been flukes, had gone beyond what the bombardiers could control, but LeMay’s careful preparations for Tokyo meant he had near-total control over fire conditions. What he achieved went far beyond what had happened in either of the German cities. In Hamburg, as Sebald reports, after the fires subsided, “rats and flies ruled the city . . . flies such as had never been seen before.”²²⁵ But in Tokyo, “rats and mice, lice and fleas were destroyed along with other animals.”²²⁶ Not even what was necessary for disease had survived the fires LeMay started.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2212

The extraordinarily destructive effects of this bombing—Tokyo’s buildings spontaneously igniting not from flames but simply from heat, bomb shelters turned into ovens, the scorched atmosphere itself an exploder of human lungs—were not inevitable, but they were premeditated. The results were deliberate and, in the outcome, a source of not only satisfaction but inspiration. Tokyo would be a model for LeMay’s attacks on numerous other Japanese cities, and in ten days he would wreak half the carnage on Japan that had been inflicted on Germany through five years of bombing. In five months, the square footage of destroyed urban centers in Japan would be more than double what was destroyed in five years in Germany.²²⁷

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2218

Although LeMay would not duplicate his success elsewhere, in the weeks after Tokyo his bombers would raze nearly half of the area of sixty-six other cities, killing 900,000 civilians, which surpassed by more than 100,000 the total of Japanese combat deaths. LeMay’s campaign would make more than twenty million Japanese homeless.²²⁸ It would stop only when the AAF supply depots ran out of napalm. And how many, in actual terms, is 900,000? Robert Conquest, in writing about Stalin’s terror, compared the number of victims to the number of words in his book.²²⁹ For every word in the book you now hold, more than four Japanese women, children, and the elderly were killed by Curtis LeMay’s campaign. This paragraph represents five hundred dead. “The

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2277

Sherry’s litany suggests that these “reasons” coexist in some kind of equilibrium with one another, as if any one of them could have counted as the force that carried the United States and the world across the nuclear threshold. But the history we have been tracking puts “the precedents set by firebombing” on a level above all else. Indeed, this history confirms LeMay’s perception, suggesting that the primary shift in American consciousness, the true threshold, was defined by the firebombing of cities. The atomic bombs, instead of establishing a new context, must be seen within that already existing context.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2550

It was another of those events dated September 11, each one the center of a world in collision with other worlds. The impact of such collisions is our subject. On September 11, 1945, four years to the day after the groundbreaking of the Pentagon, fifty-six years to the day before the Al Qaeda attack on the Pentagon, less than a month after Japan's surrender, and just over a month after the detonation of the Nagasaki bomb, Stimson composed an urgent "Memorandum for the President," which began, "Subject: Proposed Action for Control of Atomic Bombs."

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2554

First Stimson told the president what the dawning of the nuclear age meant: If the atomic bomb were merely another though more devastating military weapon to be assimilated into our pattern of international relations, it would be one thing. We could then follow the old custom of secrecy and nationalistic military superiority relying on international caution to prescribe [sic] the future use of the weapon as we did with gas. But I think the bomb instead constitutes merely a first step in a new control by man over the forces of nature too revolutionary and dangerous to fit into the old concepts. I think it really caps the climax of the race between man's growing technical power for destructiveness and his psychological power of self-control and group-control—his moral power. If so, our method of approach to the Russians is a question of the most vital importance in the evolution of human progress . . . The crux of the problem is Russia. Stimson already understood that from then on, relations between Moscow and Washington would be "virtually dominated by the problem of the atomic bomb." He had said as much to Truman at their first meeting on the subject the previous April. It was inevitable, he wrote, that the Russians would get the bomb, whether sooner (in three or four years, as scientists argued) or later (in twenty years or more, as General Groves said). That time frame was not nearly as important as avoiding "a secret armament race of a rather desperate character. There is evidence to indicate," he wrote, "that such activity may have already commenced."

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2577

Stimson was seventy-seven years old, had first been appointed as secretary of war in 1911, and had been secretary of state when the world plunged into the armed chaos of the Depression. As war secretary throughout World War II, he had been anguished by the escalation of air war brutality over which he presided, but he had also done more than anyone to empower the anxiety-free Leslie Groves. Though he'd intervened for Kyoto, he had not flinched from approving the bombing of Hiroshima and its "workers' houses." He had himself set loose the "strapping young giant"¹⁷ of a strategic bomber force. He was at the furthest remove from naïve, but he was worried, as he put it, about "saving civilization not for five or for twenty years, but forever."

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2583

So now he warned that relations with Moscow "maybe perhaps irretrievably embittered by the way in which we approach the solution of the bomb with Russia. For if we fail to approach them now and merely continue to negotiate with them, having this weapon rather ostentatiously on our hip, their suspicion and their distrust of our purposes and motives will increase." This reference to the atomic bomb "ostentatiously on our hip" is a tipoff that this memo was essentially an argument against fiercely anti-Soviet positions then being taken by Secretary

of State Byrnes, who had already proven to be something of a nemesis. Stimson had, the week before, criticized the way Byrnes was preparing for an upcoming meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London: “Byrnes [is] very much against any attempt to cooperate with Stalin. His mind is full of the problems with the coming meeting of the foreign ministers and he looks to having the presence of the bomb in his pocket, so to speak, as a great weapon to get through the thing he has.”¹⁸

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2625

Truman, to his credit, made Stimson’s radical September 11 proposal the subject of full debate at a cabinet meeting ten days later, on September 21, which happened to be Stimson’s seventy-eighth birthday. Stimson, in his 1948 memoir, does not say what occurred, but there is reason to conceive of the meeting as a turning point in the American century. What would remain the basic question of the Cold War was put on that table: Is Soviet foreign policy motivated by an offensive strategy for the sake of ideologically driven global empire or by normal big-power defensiveness, aiming at security? If the former, Stimson’s “trust” would be naïve and self-defeating; if the latter, it would be routine statecraft, a search for common self-interest. All too quickly, those suspicious of Moscow’s motives would invoke the analogy of Munich, looking to head off a Soviet version of Hitler’s aggression. But others, like Stimson, saw less Munich than Mexico, and knew how Washington would react if America’s nearest neighbor fell under the control of a hostile power.²³ After

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2910

Kennan had arrived at this extreme assessment years before, but only now did he find a ready audience for it, and in no one more than James Forrestal. Kennan’s telegram, with its Manichaean analysis and air of messianic apocalypse, touched something deep in Forrestal. Admittedly, when one speaks of unconscious motivations, one is moving into the realm of conjecture, but readings of Forrestal’s diaries, of his biographers’ assessments, and of the public record point to the relevance of such motivation here. Acting on little more than a visceral anti-Communism, it was Forrestal who had instinctively urged (against Stimson) Truman’s early confrontation with Molotov; he who had dismissed out of hand the Roosevelt tradition of seeking to ameliorate Soviet behavior through diplomacy; and he who assumed, with Groves, the necessity of an American nuclear monopoly to keep Moscow in check. By early in the postwar period, Forrestal’s biographers say, he had “come to believe in the most abstract and theological explanation of Soviet motivation and behavior. The answer seemed to lie somewhere in his Catholic past, in his suspiciousness and insecurity, in his jesuitical fascination with intellectual complexity.”

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 2982

Kennan would later claim to have been misunderstood, insisting that he had intended the American response to Soviet messianism to be more political than military. Indeed, in the original telegram he had, after all the alarms, recorded his conviction that “the problem is within our power to solve—and that without recourse to any military conflict.”⁹¹ Embedded in Kennan’s distinction between the political and the military is the essential argument over the origins of the Cold War. The differences between the United States and the Soviet Union were real and serious, but they were political in nature. The differences derived, arguably on both sides but certainly on the Soviet side, from deep insecurity in the face of huge changes brought on by the war and its aftermath. But it was the United States, more than the Soviet Union, that militarized that political conflict, making it far more dangerous and costly than it needed to be.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 3408

Forrestal had cracked. He was taken from the Pentagon in a borrowed car. The next day, to avoid publicity and to get him some rest, he was flown to Florida, where Josephine was visiting Robert Lovett, who had recently resigned as undersecretary of state and who would himself be appointed as secretary of defense a couple of years later. Upon arrival, Forrestal told his host, “Bob, they’re after me.” It wasn’t clear who “they” were at first. Forrestal had sometimes spoken of Jews and “Zionist agents” stalking him,¹⁶³ but in the end he was undone by fears of his great enemy. Years before, when Josephine had become delusional, “they” were “the Reds,” and now Forrestal, too, vented his anxiety that the Communists were after him. On the beach he saw umbrella stands as microphones set to record his every word. He believed that Communists had infiltrated the White House, which accounted for his dismissal, and he was sure that Communists were going to kill him for all he had done to urge his countrymen to oppose them. When Truman was told what Forrestal was saying, he ordered the Secret Service to investigate. They reported back that the fear was without foundation. Forrestal, the Secret Service assessment said, had suffered “a slight nervous breakdown.”¹⁶⁴ Rumors flew around Washington. One radio report had it that Forrestal was found in his pajamas a few blocks from Lovett’s house, and he was calling out, “The Russians are coming!”

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 3502

The B-36, dubbed the Peacemaker,¹⁸¹ was the first true intercontinental bomber, and tensions over Berlin made its deployment an Air Force priority. By May 1949, the Strategic Air Command, of which, since March, Curtis LeMay had been chief, was commissioning the plane by the dozen as it rolled off the assembly line of the Consolidated-Vultee Corporation (soon to be renamed Convair). With the B-36, the United States finally had the capacity to launch a major attack against the Soviet Union, and SAC had a plan for doing so. The 1949 Operation Dropshot foresaw the destruction with three hundred atom bombs of one hundred Soviet cities—an equivalent, with the improved bombs, of more than eight hundred Hiroshimas.¹⁸²

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4010

If Nitze did not see the difference between conventional bombs and the atomic bomb, he was unlikely to see the difference between the atomic bomb and the Super. That became even more true when he fell under the influence of Edward Teller, who would be a kind of permanent instructor of Nitze, shaping his perceptions of weapons and their possibilities from the 1940s through the 1980s. Truman’s decision to go ahead with the H-bomb had empowered Teller, who oversaw its development, work that was concentrated at Los Alamos.⁵⁹ Teller owed a large debt to Nitze, who, as its executive director, had organized the considerations of the three-man committee that finally gave Truman the justification he needed to order the H-bomb, and who then articulated the rationale for a crash program to build an H-bomb arsenal. Teller and Nitze would, in effect, be a tag team for two generations, with the former insisting on the scientific possibility of ever more powerful weapons, and the latter providing the political justification for them.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4062

After the war, it had been Nitze who first brought to Forrestal’s attention the belligerent speech Stalin delivered in February 1946. Nitze called it “a delayed declaration of war against us.” Forrestal agreed and went to work on

a declaration of his own.⁷¹ Nitze and Forrestal, with George Kennan at first, formed an alliance to raise concern in Washington about the Soviet threat. One of those whom they had to convince was Dean Acheson, who, as we saw, was inclined to downplay dangers from Moscow, as indicated by his support of Stimson against Forrestal. The early divergence of Acheson and Nitze anticipated the permanent argument between those who emphasized the inherent aggressiveness of Soviet ideology and those who saw Moscow as a traditional nation intent on shoring up a security zone for itself. In 1946, Acheson dismissed Nitze's hawkish warnings: "Paul, you see hobgoblins under the bed. They aren't there. Forget it."⁷²

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4069

But by 1950, after Forrestal's suicide, after the Soviet A-bomb, after the Red Scare had begun, and after Kennan's marked turn away from the creatures under the bed, Acheson valued Nitze precisely for his faith that the hobgoblins were still there.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4071

All of this informed Nitze's first great work of statecraft: the "re-examination of our objectives in peace and war" that produced the Cold War's defining statement of American martial purpose. On April 7, 1950, little more than two months after Truman gave the go-ahead for the H-bomb, the president was presented with a document titled "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security." Referred to ever after as NSC-68, it was Nitze's ponderous reiteration of the alarmist view he had inherited from Forrestal.⁷³ Only now, the slightly hysterical themes of a man who, owing to his patent emotional distress, had remained on the national margin suddenly found expression in the ordained center of the establishment.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4076

What had been the much-debated implications of the Truman Doctrine—amplified by the ad hoc maneuverings, service rivalries, and war scares of the late 1940s—were now schematically spelled out as the coherent consensus on which policy decisions would depend in the future. In fact, Nitze's statement read like nothing so much as the ex post facto justification for the most important policy decision of the era, the one Truman had made in ordering the development of the hydrogen bomb. Given that a priori decision, the Nitze document had to be extreme, and it was.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4171

In September 1950, with the Korean War in its third month, Truman ordered NSC-68 "to be taken as a statement of policy."⁸⁸ In fact, the two taken together—Communist aggression in East Asia and a paranoid American mindset prepared to both misread it and overblow it—led to the transformation of American society called for in NSC-68. Beyond mere mobilization, what occurred was nothing less than culture-wide militarization, and it was reflected, first, in the collapse of Truman's budget restraints. The defense budget in 1951 was \$13.5 billion; in 1953 it was more than \$50 billion.⁸⁹

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4191

In nothing is this more true than in the matter of the hydrogen bomb, which had spawned NSC-68 in the first place. As Truman prepared and issued his order for the production of the Super, the men in the Pentagon, spurred by the vision being articulated by Nitze, pressed for a crash increase in the nuclear arsenal—A-bombs as well as, when ready, H-bombs. And President Truman gave it to them. The stockpile that he had already expanded went from those 300 bombs in 1950 to well over 1,300 by late 1953.⁹⁵ Truman approved such massive construction of nuclear reactors and production facilities—plutonium reactors increased from 5 to 13; U-235 gaseous diffusion plants from 2 to 1296—that “no president after Truman needed to order more.”⁹⁷ Within about three years, the megatonnage of America’s nuclear arsenal would increase 150-fold, with no limit in sight.⁹⁸ A new generation of smaller, more “usable” atomic bombs was quickly developed, making fighter aircraft, such as the F-84, atomic capable. At the same time, U.S. missile technology was progressing, preparing the transformation of nuclear delivery systems. In 1950, for example, the modified V-2 gave way to the Corporal, the first American rocket capable of carrying a nuclear weapon. By Truman’s order, the Air Force was given operational responsibility for surface-to-surface missiles, a major extension of LeMay’s Strategic Air Command.⁹⁹ Vastly more nukes married to a hugely expanded SAC: this was the single most fateful dynamic of this crucial period; it led to an increase in the nuclear stockpile from the 300 weapons early in 1950 to well over 18,000 by 1960.¹⁰⁰

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4361

The third pillar of U.S. policy put in place here stood until the administration of George W. Bush. In vetoing an expansion of the Korean conflict into a preemption of the Soviet Union, Truman rejected the then much-touted idea of preventive war—the idea that, as one of his advisers put it, America should become an “aggressor for peace.”¹²⁶ In particular, Truman rejected a recommendation from Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg, offered in December 1950, for an all-out atomic attack—Operation Shakedown after all—against the Soviet Union. “He did not say so specifically,” noted a State Department official of Vandenberg’s proposal, “but the implication was that it would be better for us to precipitate hostilities at an early date in order to prevent further USSR atomic build-up.”¹²⁷

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4368

Given that no such course was ever followed, it seems impossible after the fact to credit such proposals with anything like rationality, much less prudence. MacArthur is remembered as a kind of loose cannon, and so, for that matter, is LeMay. But Vandenberg, Symington, and others (including such intellectuals as Bertrand Russell, William L. Laurence, and John von Neumann¹²⁸) who promoted the idea of a preemptive nuclear attack were taken to be exemplars of moderation at the time. Even Oppenheimer, who had valiantly opposed the buildup of the arsenal he had created, embraced the logic of nuclear attack as a way of heading off a full-blown nuclear war.¹²⁹ Early in the atomic age, a preventive war was taken to be preferable to an arms race that would inevitably culminate in war. Better to have the war while the United States still had superiority of force.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4375

And the notion of preventive war is back in the center of American geopolitical orthodoxy. That the United States in the twenty-first century has embraced prevention as a defining strategy, based on the same rationale

offered by Vandenberg, only suggests how easily it could have done so in 1950, before it was vulnerable to Soviet retaliation. George W. Bush has not used nuclear weapons for prevention, but the principle is identical. What made Truman's threefold decision against total war, against atomic war, and against preventive war so historic is the fact that he made it just as the destructive power of nuclear arsenals was about to escalate toward infinity with the coming of the thermonuclear bomb. Truman's decision, that is, took actual use of the weapon off the table at the point when it became powerful enough to destroy the table and the house and the neighborhood and the world.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4564

Dulles and Eisenhower were satisfied that their willingness to, in Dulles's famous word, move to the "brink" had brought about the change in Communist attitudes. Brinkmanship would define the Eisenhower-Dulles mode from then on, and Dulles would flamboyantly claim that during his time in office, the United States had gone "to the brink of total war" three times to thwart Communist aggression (the other two were over Vietnam and Formosa).¹⁵¹ That does not count the Lebanon landing in 1958, when both the Soviet Union and the United States threatened nuclear war.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4574

The importance of Dulles as a shaper of America's Cold War nuclear bellicosity cannot be overemphasized. Ensnared in Foggy Bottom, he was happy to carry forward Dean Acheson's militarization of the State Department, and he recognized, incidentally, an ally in Paul Nitze, the nemesis of George Kennan, the father of containment. Instead of firing Nitze with the rest of Acheson's staffers, Dulles restored him to his role as an intermediary between State and Defense.¹⁵³

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4578

But where Acheson had merely militarized American foreign policy, Dulles nuclearized it. In 1952, as a way of criticizing President Truman's temerity in Korea, for example, Dulles had published an article in *Life*, "A Policy of Boldness." He wrote that the only way to deal with Communist challenges "is for the free world to develop the will and organize the means to retaliate instantly against open aggression led by Red armies, so that, if it occurred anywhere, we could and would strike back where it hurts, by means of our choosing."¹⁵⁴ In the Dulles view, the wily Russians had succeeded in making atomic weapons seem somehow more immoral than other weapons. He not only wanted "to break down this false distinction,"¹⁵⁵ but also to make clear American readiness to use the weapon. This stance, for which Korea would be claimed as a victory, would become known as "massive retaliation," and Dulles would formalize it as American policy in a much-noted speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in January 1954.¹⁵⁶

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4611

Despite John Foster Dulles's rhetoric, Ike was no more enthused about a policy of rollback than his predecessor had been,¹⁵⁹ but an extroverted brandishing of the atomic bomb could distract from that. Even after Korea, Eisenhower continued the lifting of Truman's restriction on atomic control, putting more and more nuclear bombs into military custody, allowing deployment on bases and ships. By the end of his administration, only one

tenth of the arsenal remained under the control of civilians.¹⁶⁰ The bomb was another weapon, period. And Ike wanted that known. It

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4748

What has been forgotten is that the American military establishment not only was prepared to launch a nuclear strike, but on occasion was eager to, with the collusion and active support of its civilian overseers and of the “theologians” on whom it depended for intellectual and, if only implicitly, moral guidance.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4750

As indicated by their active service in a succession of Pentagon regimes, and despite many claims to objectivity, the defense intellectuals’ primary function was to justify the endless upward spiral of the arms race and its interruption at any point by an act of nuclear war. They did this especially by reinforcing a mindset that expected the worst from enemies—and the rest of the world as well. The “paranoid style,” when adopted by the defense intellectuals, was not only justified but made to seem the height of rationality, able to be articulated even in the formulas of hard science. In the Eisenhower years, the strategists tended to view the massive-retaliation doctrine skeptically, as leaving, for example, the United States no options between all-out war and capitulation. Later they would develop arguments for the “selective” use of nuclear weapons, which in the real world would nevertheless be “massive.” But

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4916

As it happened, after he was comfortably reelected, Eisenhower responded to the pressures of his various critics by establishing a special commission in May 1957. It was called the Gaither Committee,²⁰⁰ after its chairman, H. Rowan Gaither of the RAND Corporation and the Ford Foundation, and its original mandate was to consider only the question of whether the United States should embark on a large-scale bomb shelter program. Gaither was soon taken ill and was replaced by Robert C. Sprague, the chairman of an electrical equipment company. The committee brought in numerous consultants, none with more experience—or stronger convictions—on national security questions than Paul Nitze.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 4973

The Gaither Report was titled “Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age.” America’s deterrence capability was weak, it said. America’s survival was at risk. Moving well beyond the starting point of bomb shelters, the report asserted that no defensive measures could offer adequate protection. The Soviets were more determined than ever to overrun the free world, and the bulwark designed to thwart that prospect, the Strategic Air Command, was fatally flawed. “The current vulnerability of SAC to surprise attack,” the report warned, “and the threat posed to SAC by the prospects of an early Russian ICBM capability, call for prompt remedial action.”²⁰⁷ The Gaither Report insisted on the urgent need for large increases in the strategic arsenal, a major escalation of the U.S. ballistic missile program, and a full restoration of conventional military strength, at levels envisioned in NSC-68. Tens of billions of dollars would have to be spent on defense, and fast.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 6512

Of those, none had been more powerfully summoned than we Catholics, called first by Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which defined the new longing for peace as a sign of the times, boldly rejecting the idea that nuclear weapons could ever be used as instruments of justice.⁸ The first Catholic to reject the escalating war in Vietnam as such, when it was only months old, was Pope John's successor, Paul VI, who went before the United Nations in 1965 and declared, "War no more! War never again!" In that unforgotten speech, the pope had defied Lyndon Johnson by citing President Kennedy, "a great man now departed": "Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind."⁹ Wasn't that the unassailable logic that had come out of not only 1945 but the crises of 1961 and 1962? And wasn't that why the loss of November 22, 1963, was still felt? Only days before this demonstration, I had learned that Father Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit poet, known to be one of the Kennedys' priests, was going to join it, marching all the way to the Pentagon.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 6912

Yet resignation in the face of that dark impulse was not universal. In the late forties and early fifties, Communists in Europe openly sponsored various peace conferences and organizations, obviously concerned that the United States would use the bomb against the Soviet Union. But soon calls for disarmament came from religious and scientific groups, as well as nonaligned nations. In 1953, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists's Doomsday Clock showed the time as two minutes before midnight. Indeed, scientists would be in the forefront of the movement to oppose the normalization of nuclear weapons. In 1955, Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein issued a manifesto alerting the world to the danger of thermonuclear weapons and called on scientists in particular to raise their voices. In 1957 the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs was founded by scientists opposed to nuclear weapons,⁵⁹ and in the same year a group of middle-class American professionals established the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE).⁶⁰ In many countries, ordinary citizens took to the streets to protest the legitimization of the bomb, although in the United States, a nation traumatized by the McCarthy-driven Red Scare, the disarmament movement continued to be associated by many with Communism, a Soviet plot to defang the West from within. Even Dr. Benjamin Spock, once he became associated with SANE, would be regarded with suspicion by many who had depended on his child-rearing advice.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7036

The trial of the Catonsville Nine took place in the fall of 1968, opening in the same week that George Wallace named Curtis LeMay as his running mate. The candidates would be dismissed as the "bombsy twins."⁸² Any ambivalence I might still have been feeling about the Berrigans' witness evaporated when my

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7094

Nitze, you will recall, was an author of the two main arms race manifestoes, NSC-68 and the Gaither Report. We last saw him when he was the secretary of the Navy designate, being pilloried as, of all things, an "accommodationist"⁹⁰ by, among others, Congressman Donald Rumsfeld. Nitze was confirmed for that position in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, and he served as Navy secretary from 1963 to 1967.⁹¹ Not long before McNamara's anti-ABM speech, his deputy secretary of defense, Cyrus Vance, resigned because of health

problems. Nitze had first expected to be named to the Pentagon's number-two position in 1961, and now, finally, in July 1967, he was. He would run the day-to-day operations of the Defense Department while McNamara dealt with Vietnam. Vance had agreed with McNamara about the ABM, but Nitze did not. In one of his first duties as McNamara's deputy, he participated in the drafting of the September speech, which may account for the reversal that put the speech's astounding last paragraphs in conflict with all that McNamara had just said.⁹²

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7911

Nixon might have thought he had the power to create such a catastrophe, but in his waning time as president it was not true. Meeting at the Pentagon with General George S. Brown of the Air Force, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in July, a few weeks before Nixon's resignation, Schlesinger issued the directive that "any emergency order coming from the president" be first shown to him, the secretary of defense, before any action was taken. Schlesinger did not make his directive more explicit. He could have been cautioning against a Nixon attempt to use the military to support him in defiance of the Supreme Court or the Congress—a military coup. But Nixon's ultimate authority over the nuclear chain of command was certainly at issue, too, especially once his mental stability had come into question. It seems reasonable to infer that Schlesinger was prepared to thwart Nixon's constitutional authority as commander in chief. And it seems reasonable to think that Schlesinger was also ready to insert himself between Henry Kissinger and the nation's military, if Kissinger tried again to exercise authority of the kind Schlesinger had seen him assume in October 1973. Immediately after his meeting with Schlesinger, General Brown summoned his fellow Chiefs. "I've just had the strangest conversation with the Secretary of Defense," he reported.³⁶ Schlesinger, in other words, moved smoothly into the power vacuum created by Watergate in the last days of Nixon's administration—and in the early days of Gerald Ford's, he sought to stay there. Even though he was, as secretary of defense, bound to support the president's policies, Schlesinger, in the summer of Nixon's demise, did not hesitate to openly oppose the SALT process in which Nixon and Kissinger were investing hopes for a rescue of Nixon's reputation. The Pentagon objected to SALT by then because it seemed to aim at nuclear parity with the Soviet Union instead of maintaining superiority. American Cold War orthodoxy had as its foundational doctrine Winston Churchill's rejection, in his 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech, of "balance" of power in favor of "preponderance,"³⁷ and the credentialed statesmen of Washington had sought to give at least lip service to this purpose ever since.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7939

It is another manifestation of the odd mystical energy attached to the date 9/11 to note that on September 11, 1974, just a month after Nixon was forced from office on August 9, James Schlesinger, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, put forward a major new rationale for limited nuclear war. In speeches prior to this appearance, he had outlined the "Schlesinger doctrine," arguing for first-strike capability, for a revised SIOP that aimed at fighting and prevailing in nuclear war, and for the reduction of "inhibitions on the use of nuclear weapons for the resolution of political conflicts." The senators had to be shocked to find themselves confronted with a secretary of defense, as Janne Nolan put it in describing Schlesinger's position, "discussing holocaust in cold-blooded terms."³⁹

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7982

Rumsfeld had a hard-liner's sympathy with Schlesinger, but the arrogant secretary of defense had impossibly alienated his insecure superior, and Ford wanted to escape his shadow even more than Kissinger's. In the fall of

1975—a “Halloween massacre”—Ford’s chief of staff made his move. Now thoroughly under Rumsfeld’s sway, the president fired Schlesinger outright,⁴² removed Kissinger from his position as national security adviser, banishing him to the relative harmlessness of Foggy Bottom, and replaced William Colby at the CIA with George H. W. Bush. (Rumsfeld saw Bush as his own main rival to become Ford’s vice president in 1976, and the intelligence post removed him from contention.) In the most dramatic move of all, Rumsfeld had Ford appoint as Schlesinger’s replacement at the Pentagon none other than himself.⁴³

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 7999

It is hard to believe that observers could have taken Rumsfeld’s maneuvers as anything but a triumph of traditional anti-Soviet ideology, given what they put in place. Rumsfeld immediately sought major increases in defense spending, reversing the dramatic downturn in the percentage of the gross national product that had been spent on the military under Nixon.⁴⁵ Rumsfeld’s move to the Pentagon marked the definitive end of détente, destroyed any chances for SALT under Ford, and laid the groundwork for a post-Vietnam generational shift that would aim at, and ultimately accomplish, the restoration of America’s overwhelming military dominance, a supremacy unapologetically based on nuclear weapons.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 8005

Among those empowered by Rumsfeld were his acolyte Cheney⁴⁶ and his factotum Carlucci, each of whom would follow him as secretary of defense, together with Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz, who would, from within the government and outside it, be permanent Pentagon tribunes of American hegemony. They would be joined by the likes of Colin Powell, Richard Armitage, and Condoleezza Rice. The group Rumsfeld put in place, shaping policy through the Reagan years and then coming fully into their own when Rumsfeld returned to the E-ring office over the River Entrance in the early twenty-first century, would eventually become known as the Vulcans, a name James Mann used as the title of his book on the group. What they all had in common was a hunger for martial dominance that was born of the failure of Vietnam.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 9671

But even Arabs unfriendly to Saddam Hussein had an opposite experience. They understood very well that the new world order was fueled by the oil under their sand. Indeed, while President Bush’s rhetoric was all about Kuwaiti freedom, Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction, and the integrity of international borders, on the same September 11 of Bush’s greatest speech, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney gave a less high-flown but more pointed statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee. “Once [Saddam] acquired Kuwait and deployed an army as large as the one he possesses,” Cheney said, he would be “in a position to be able to dictate the future of worldwide energy policy, and that [would give] him a stranglehold on our economy.”⁵⁹ The Carter Doctrine held: America would go to war to protect its oil, and Cheney, who with Donald Rumsfeld had anticipated Carter, was the man to say so.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 9682

What George H. W. Bush really inaugurated on his September 11 was a new world disorder that would show itself with staggering brutality exactly eleven years later.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 10022

upheaval. During the first Clinton term, in the chaotic aftermath of Cold War stasis, three dozen wars broke out around the world, some of them exceedingly violent and a few of them obviously preventable. Terrorism came into its own as a mode of political conflict, with a stunning attack on New York's World Trade Center occurring a little over a month after Clinton took office.⁹⁹ Of greater significance than the weight or lightness of Clinton's team was the nation's new situation, which had psychological as well as political aspects. The unifying and motivating enemy of the Cold War had disappeared, and that accounted for far more of Washington's uncertainty than the flaws and foibles of the novice administration did. The bifurcated political imagination of the United States, which had for so long seen good and evil in stark relief, was useless when it came to making sense of the world coming into being now.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 10685

Ironically, Nitze's last public word on the subject to which he had devoted his life suggested that his true commitment had never been to any deeply held principle but to mere contrariness. In 1999, toward the end of a Clinton administration that had needlessly kept the nuclear arsenal near Cold War levels, Nitze denounced that cache of destruction in an op-ed piece in the New York Times. "The fact is, I see no compelling reason why we should not unilaterally get rid of our nuclear weapons . . .," he wrote. "I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for their prior use against us. What, for example, would our targets be? It is impossible to conceive of a target that could be hit without large-scale destruction of many innocent people." The man who had done more than any other to justify America's dependence on nuclear weapons now reversed the entire thrust of his career. To repeat: "I see no compelling reason why we should not unilaterally get rid of our nuclear weapons."²⁰² Now you tell us. . . .

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 10741

The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was established in 1958, as a result of warnings sounded by Curtis LeMay, the Gaither Commission, and, in his own small way, my father. Jet interceptor squadrons, armed with nuclear weapons, would protect the homeland.²¹⁵ But the airspace of the North American continent had never been penetrated by enemy aircraft or missiles until September 11, 2001. That day was NORAD's first test, and despite the billions of dollars spent on "ready alert," it failed miserably, a shocking lesson in the foolishness of both America's generation-old illusion of air defense and its ludicrous hopes for a future National Missile Defense. NORAD failed on September 11 because, never imagining that enemy aircraft could attack from within, it responded to threats as defined by the Cold War, which had ended a full decade earlier.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 10797

In the minutes after the airliners hit the World Trade Center, Cheney took over. Invoking what proved to be a mythical danger, the vice president told the president that Air Force One was targeted by "a specific threat," and, in effect, he ordered Bush not to return to Washington.²²² Cheney was later unable to say where exactly he had learned of that specific threat or what it consisted of. Despite the constitutional implications of the question, the 9/11 Commission did not press Cheney, and wrote off his usurpation as a "misunderstood communication in the

hectic White House Situation Room that morning.”²²³ Giving orders from that room, it was Cheney who defined America’s response as war mobilization pure and simple. He then went into a bunker of his own, and so did several other important members of the government, where they would remain for many months.²²⁴ By the time George W. Bush returned to Washington, long hours after the crisis began, Cheney had set America’s belligerent response in motion, defining the trajectory it would follow for the next five years. In doing so, he was not only unleashing the impulses of trigger-happy neoconservatives and calling on three decades of his own post-Vietnam career. He was also removing the last brakes from the flywheel set running fifty-five years before, when Stimson’s proposal for another way was slapped down by Forrestal. That date, recall, was September 11, 1945.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 11031

Yet the concerns about weapons of mass destruction that justified the attack on Iraq, and may yet do so on Iran, are absurdly misplaced. When it comes to nuclear danger, Washington is by far the graver problem, beginning with its post-Cold War refusal to significantly downsize its own nuclear arsenal; continuing through its early-1990s failure to fully secure “loose nukes” in Russia;²⁰ to the Pentagon’s 1994 Nuclear Posture Review, which kept a sizable nuclear arsenal as a “hedge”; to the Senate’s 1996 refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; to the Bush administration’s 2003 repudiation of the Antibalistic Missile Treaty and the 2004 deployment of missile defense, which motivated Russia and China to add “hair” to the hair trigger; to the Bush administration’s stated—and unprecedented—readiness to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear states. In 2005, Jimmy Carter blasted American-led NATO for maintaining the “same stockpiles and policies as when the Iron Curtain divided the continent.”²¹

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 11039

Under Donald Rumsfeld, the Pentagon embarked in 2002 on the stunning project of developing a new generation of nuclear weapons, including a burrowing device designed to go after underground targets and “mini-nukes” to be used in concert with a conventional attack.²² Congress was skeptical, and the international arms control community was appalled, but as of 2005, Rumsfeld was still pushing for such weapons. However marginal it may seem, a new nuclear system, usable at last, amounts to an ultimate repudiation of nuclear downsizing (and a reason to restore nuclear testing facilities). Indeed, there is reason to believe that that is the system’s real usefulness to military planners. In seeking “conventionalized” nukes, Rumsfeld, of course, was in the powerful tradition of Forrestal, Schlesinger, Nitze, and all the other Pentagon officials who had sought to make the absolute weapon a relative one. The Bush administration’s attack dog, in charge of reviling the U.S. tradition of arms control as “decades of stillborn plans, wishful thinking, and irresponsible passivity,”²³ was the right-wing ideologue John Bolton, whom Bush appointed (without Senate approval) ambassador to the United Nations in mid-2005. Bolton was the living icon of the two most dismaying facts of global politics today: nuclear arms control is dead; America killed it.

Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 11049

The effect of all this, whether new weapons are actually deployed or not, is to legitimize nuclear-based power politics, giving other nations, friend and foe alike, compelling reasons to acquire a nuclear capacity, if only for deterrence, and prompting them to behave in similar ways. That pattern was fully evident in Iran and North

Korea, beginning almost immediately after the launching of the Global War on Terror, and the pattern promises to show itself in “nuclear-capable states” like Brazil, Argentina, Egypt, Australia, South Africa, and others that long ago renounced nuclear ambitions. Meanwhile, Russia, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan are all furiously adding to their nuclear arsenals.²⁴ The Pentagon has become the engine of proliferation.
