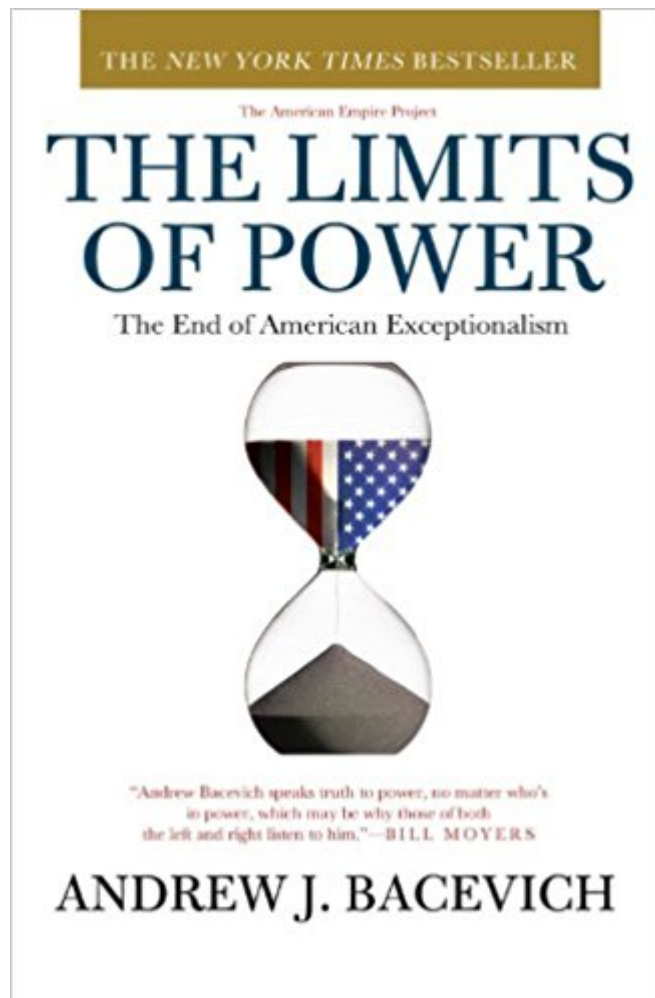




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# The Limits Of Power: The End Of American Exceptionalism (American Empire Project)



## Synopsis

"Andrew Bacevich speaks truth to power, no matter who's in power, which may be why those of both the left and right listen to him." — Bill Moyers

An immediate New York Times bestseller, *The Limits of Power* offers an unparalleled examination of the profound triple crisis facing America: an economy in disarray that can no longer be fixed by relying on expansion abroad; a government transformed by an imperial presidency into a democracy in name only; and an engagement in endless wars that has severely undermined the body politic. Writing with knowledge born of experience, conservative historian and former military officer Andrew J. Bacevich argues that if the nation is to solve its predicament, it will need the revival of a distinctly American approach: the neglected tradition of realism. In contrast to the multiple illusions that have governed American policy since 1945, he calls for respect for power and its limits; aversion to claims of exceptionalism; skepticism of easy solutions, especially those involving force; and a conviction that Americans must live within their means. Only a return to such principles, Bacevich eloquently argues, can provide common ground for fixing America's urgent problems before the damage becomes irreparable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this caustic critique of the growing American penchant for empire and sense of entitlement, Bacevich (*The New American Militarism*) examines the citizenry's complicity in the current economic, political, and military crisis. A retired army colonel, the author efficiently pillories the

recent performance of the armed forces, decrying it as an expression of domestic dysfunction, with leaders and misguided strategies ushering the nation into a global war of no exits and no deadlines. Arguing that the tendency to blame solely the military or the Bush administration is as illogical as blaming Herbert Hoover for the Great Depression, Bacevich demonstrates how the civilian population is ultimately culpable; in citizens' appetite for unfettered access to resources, they have tacitly condoned the change of military service from a civic function into an economic enterprise. Crisp prose, sweeping historical analysis and searing observations on the roots of American decadence elevate this book from mere scolding to an urgent call for rational thinking and measured action, for citizens to wise up and put their house in order. (Sept. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Crisp prose, sweeping historical analysis and searing observations on the roots of American decadence elevate this book from a mere scolding to an urgent call for rational thinking and measured action, for citizens to wise up and put their house in order.”

“In this utterly original book, Andrew Bacevich explains how our ‘empire of consumption’ contains the seeds of its own destruction and why our foreign policy establishment in Washington is totally incapable of coming to grips with it. Indispensable reading for every citizen.”

“A clear-eyed look into the abyss of America’s failed wars, and the analysis needed to climb out. In Andrew Bacevich, realism and moral vision meet.”

“In The Limits of Power, Andrew Bacevich takes aim at America’s culture of exceptionalism and scores a bulls eye. He reminds us that we can destroy all that we cherish by pursuing an illusion of indestructibility.”

“Andrew Bacevich has written a razor sharp dissection of the national myths which befuddle U.S. approaches to the outside world and fuel the Washington establishment’s dangerous delusions of omnipotence. His book should be read by every concerned US citizen.”

“Anatol Lieven, author of America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism

“In The Limits of Power, Andrew Bacevich delivers precisely what the Republic has so desperately needed: an analysis of America’s woes that goes beyond the villain of the moment, George W. Bush, and gets at the heart of the delusions that have crippled the country’s foreign policy for decades. Bacevich writes with a passionate eloquence and moral urgency that makes this book absolutely compelling. Everyone should read it.”

Àçâ –â çMark Danner, author of *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*

Bacevich is an excellent analyst, and the book is highly worth reading for that reason. His solutions are somewhat more vague, which is to be expected. Whose aren't? He is an absolutist in his thinking- the strength and weakness of the military mind set. He doesn't quite catch the fact that the imperial presidency he bemoans the formation of over the last several decades, is as much the product of the increasingly dysfunctional legislative branch, as anything. Further, the military always expects clean solutions, else, there is little reason for trying, but again, he doesn't catch the fact that there is a legitimate, political reason for using armies sometimes- only to stop bad situations from degenerating into worse catastrophes. Given that caveat- he delivers worthwhile reads.

This is a rare work that grips me and doesn't let go. I've listened five times now to this audiobook and don't know if I'm done yet. The only other military/geopolitical author to move me like this is General Wesley Clark. Interestingly, Author Andrew Bacevich and Wesley Clark have a lot in common. Both came out of West Point and are highly decorated war veterans. Both taught at West Point. Bacevich retired a colonel, became a Ph.D. at Princeton and became a professor at Johns Hopkins and now Boston University. Bacevich and Clark are men of action and at the same time brilliant thinkers. The U.S. is blessed with unbelievably patriotic officers and non-commissioned officers, many of whom have written excellent books after retiring from the military. This large set of books reveals military men and women that are deep thinkers, tested in leadership, action and danger. No other country has anything like it. Bacevich, a Vietnam War veteran, a group loved by most Americans and still not embraced by some, lost his only son in the Iraq War. I know a lot of people are appalled that he, along with all the other military authors except Tommy Franks, has written critically about the political process in DC. To some this cancels the extreme patriotism lived an entire life. True warriors are never fully appreciated when they reveal such intellect. It was the same in ancient Athens following the Greek Golden Age. Bacevich's work is a constructive self-criticism for the country. He gets us to look at ourselves differently. We're never the same after reading/listening to his book. Famously, Bacevich identifies a theme of hubris mixed with narcissism that dominated the thinking of the group that took us to war in Iraq this time. I cannot imagine a more qualified man to deal with such a controversial and emotional subject. Those of us who were in the military tend more often to gravitate to Bacevich and his intellect than those that never served in this capacity. This author has credibility. Looking back, we see that civilian leaders, confident of reaping a windfall, voted for "forever war" without deadlines in response to that horrible day,

nine-eleven. We now know our thinking military leaders understood what was going on and probably most did not approve. *Limits of Power* is a seminal book that some lucky high schoolers will discover and become wiser than their peers on international affairs. A book like this at the right time in life could completely change the course of a young person's life. They will learn to not blindly trust their government anymore and that they are not alone. We are not alone in our admiration for Andrew Bacevich and love of his book. If you enjoyed this book, I think you'll appreciate Wesley Clark's: *A Time to Lead: For Duty, Honor and Country*.

Americans need to understand the limits of military power. Our country cannot continue to bomb those we disagree or have issues with. Raining bombs unexpectedly from the sky is its own form of terrorism making US the biggest terrorists in the world.

Every person in a power/leadership position should be required to read this book. Speaks truth to power.

This is one of those books you might find yourself sitting down to read chapter and verse over and over again, only because the writing is so intelligent and so profound. "*The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*," by Andrew Bacevich, is one of those works that will enthrall the reader with its insight and analysis. According to the author, the US has reached its limit to project its power in the world. His rationale for this conclusion are three central crises we now face: economic and cultural, political, and military, all of which are our own making. The first crisis is one of profligacy. Americans want more, whether it is wealth, credit, markets, or oil, without consideration for cost or how these things are acquired. There is complete apathy in what policies are being produced as long as they provide plenty. The political crisis was born of our mobilization in World War II to meet the threat of tyranny, and from the Cold War to meet the challenge of the Soviet Union. Both gave rise to unprecedented presidential power, an ineffectual Congress, and a disastrous foreign policy. Bacevich contends that our legislature no longer serves their constituents or the common good "but themselves through gerrymandering, doling out prodigious amounts of political pork, seeing to the protection of certain vested interests" with the paramount concern of being re-elected. Our presidents have been willing accomplices in keeping the American dream or greed alive by using our military as part of a coercive diplomatic tool to feed and fuel the first crisis. Bacevich traces the end of the republic to the start of both wars, which gave rise to the "ideology of national security." The mission of the new Department of Defense is not defense, but to

project power globally where we will view any nation as a threat that tries to match us in military might. At the same time, the largest intelligence agencies in the world are created to afford us more security, but after seventy years are unable to defend our cities and buildings in the US while it worries about intrigues worldwide. Competition and rivalry lead to a lack of cooperation, intelligence, and security when it was needed most. The third crisis is our military which has been employed to satisfy the neuroses of the first and second crises. The author puts much of the blame squarely at the feet of inept military leadership, which he believes has confused strategy with operations.

Content with the resilience of the American fighting man or woman, he is scathing in his critique of their leadership finding them "guilty of flagrant professional malpractice, if not outright fraud." He illustrates how improvised explosive devices that cost no more than a pizza have checked a military that is designed for speed and maneuver--that was considered invincible. Andrew Bacevich contends that nothing will change as long as Americans are told to go to Disney World instead of making sacrifices, as long as the same one half percent of our population continue to populate the military that the president sees as his personal army, as long as an apathetic public and an ineffectual Congress continue to make periodic, grand gestures of curbing presidential power, the United States will have reached the limits of its power and exceptionalism. This book profoundly moved me, and I was impressed by the insight that Professor Bacevich could bring in such few pages. Passages of this book should be plastered in the halls and offices of Congress, as well as the West Wing. This book really stands out as a jewel in a sea of mediocre publications by radio and TV personalities who think they know what they are talking about when it comes to economics or geopolitics. The difference is that Andrew Bacevich does--without exception. Also

Recommended: Mayer, Jane, "The Dark Side, The Inside Story How The War on Terror Turned into a War on America's Ideals." Schlesinger, Arthur, "War and the American Presidency." Mann, Thomas & Ornstein, Norman, "The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track." Zinni, Tony (Gen. Ret.), "The Battle for Peace: A Frontline Vision of America's Power and Purpose." Niebuhr, Reinhold, "The Irony of American History." Anything else by this author. One hundred seventeen days and a wake-up until someone else's power is thankfully limited forever.

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