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Reviewed by Anne-Marie Slaughter

**The Best of All Possible Worlds:
An Analyst Diagnoses a Case of Wishful Thinking among Policymakers**

Review of DAYDREAM BELIEVERS: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power, By Fred Kaplan, Wiley. 246 pp. \$25.95.

Excavating the failures of the Bush administration's foreign policy has almost become a genre in itself. Bob Woodward's trilogy documents virtually every decision since 9/11 by every key player. Fiasco (by Thomas Ricks), Cobra II (by Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor) and The Assassins' Gate (by George Packer) recount the missteps in Iraq step by painful step. And books like Zbigniew Brzezinski's Second Chance chronicle just how far we have fallen in the world's esteem. Daydream Believers, by Fred Kaplan, who writes the "War Notes" column for Slate, is a valuable addition to this category. A lively and entertaining -- if occasionally horrifying -- read, it offers a cautionary tale for any administration and for the men and women who hope to serve in one.

Like a master archaeologist who can see through the shards and stones of a dig to reconstruct the culture of the city below, Kaplan lays out all the failures, omissions and delusions of Bush administration officials as a set of four dreams. The "fog of moral clarity" describes the comfort that many Bushites took in seeing a world of black and white. "Breaking the world anew" charts how the president and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice came to believe that advocating universal democracy would dissolve the age-old tension between ideals and interests. The "mirage of instant victory" recounts Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's obsession with the transformation of the military. Finally, "chasing silver bullets" recounts the less often told story of the determination of Rumsfeld and President Bush to build anti-missile defense systems regardless of how many scientists, defense experts and even generals said they wouldn't work.

Even when the facts are familiar, Kaplan weaves these stories together in a way that highlights the often hidden connections between them. The result is an account of the pathologies not only of individuals and departments in the Bush administration, but also of Washington itself. Successful op-ed writers typically prepare their pieces well in advance and then wait for a news peg that will motivate editors to run just such a piece. Kaplan describes the development of new policy in much the same way: Ideas put forth in countless books, articles and think tanks lie fallow for years, even decades, until one of their proponents finally achieves high office. For example, when Paul Wolfowitz first advocated American global primacy in 1992, in a document called the Defense Policy Guidance, his ideas went nowhere. In 2000, he and several co-authors tried again, building on the same concepts in the Project for the New American Century's report "Rebuilding America's Defenses." When Wolfowitz rejoined the Pentagon on

March 2, 2001, those ideas became the template for the Bush administration's National Security Strategy in 2002.

Nothing is necessarily wrong with this model of seeding and harvesting new policies. In an effective and functioning policy process, however, all policy proposals would have to pass through a filter of feasibility. Their champions would have to explain what their proposals would cost, how they would overcome anticipated obstacles and how to define success. Better yet, proponents would have to justify themselves to officials with adverse bureaucratic interests, or even, perish the thought, Congress.

The absence of that process in the Bush administration resulted not only from arrogance and ignorance, but also from a failure of management at the very highest levels. Kaplan claims that the disastrous twin orders given by Coalition Provisional Authority head L. Paul Bremer to remove Baathist party members from virtually every level of the Iraqi government and to disband the Iraqi army were in fact dictated by Douglas Feith, then undersecretary of defense for policy. Yet two months earlier the National Security Council had decided to remove only the top level of Baathists from the government and to decommission only the Republican Guard, not the entire army. Feith and his boss Rumsfeld simply disregarded these decisions. But when then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told Bush that Rumsfeld was disobeying NSC decisions approved by Bush himself, Bush responded by telling Rice to meet with chief of staff Andrew Card -- he'll take care of it, he said. Card, however, was no more willing to face down Rumsfeld than Bush was. As a result, flagrant insubordination, with criminally negligent consequences, went unremarked, not to mention unpunished.

Daydream Believers is an odd title, suggestive more of a pop song than a foreign policy book. Its source is T.E. Lawrence, describing those who dream by night as harmless, because they wake up to reality: "But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible." For Kaplan, the daydreamers of the Bush administration started out with some good ideas. But "the ideas morphed into a vision, the vision into a dream. After September 11, they took their dream into the real world -- acted it with open eyes -- and saw it dissolve into a nightmare."

Along the way, Kaplan notes, we have learned just how hard it is to try to transform the internal politics of another country. The tide of transformation all too often crashes on the hard rocks of factional interests. Kaplan makes this point repeatedly as a caution about the limits of purely military power and the dangers of seeing the world as a morality play. But in a political season in which both Republicans and Democrats are talking about sweeping change and transformation, it is also a lesson worth remembering at home.

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