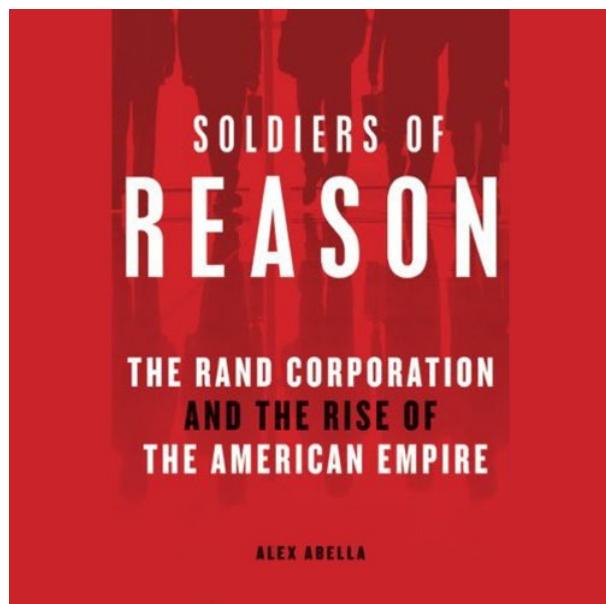
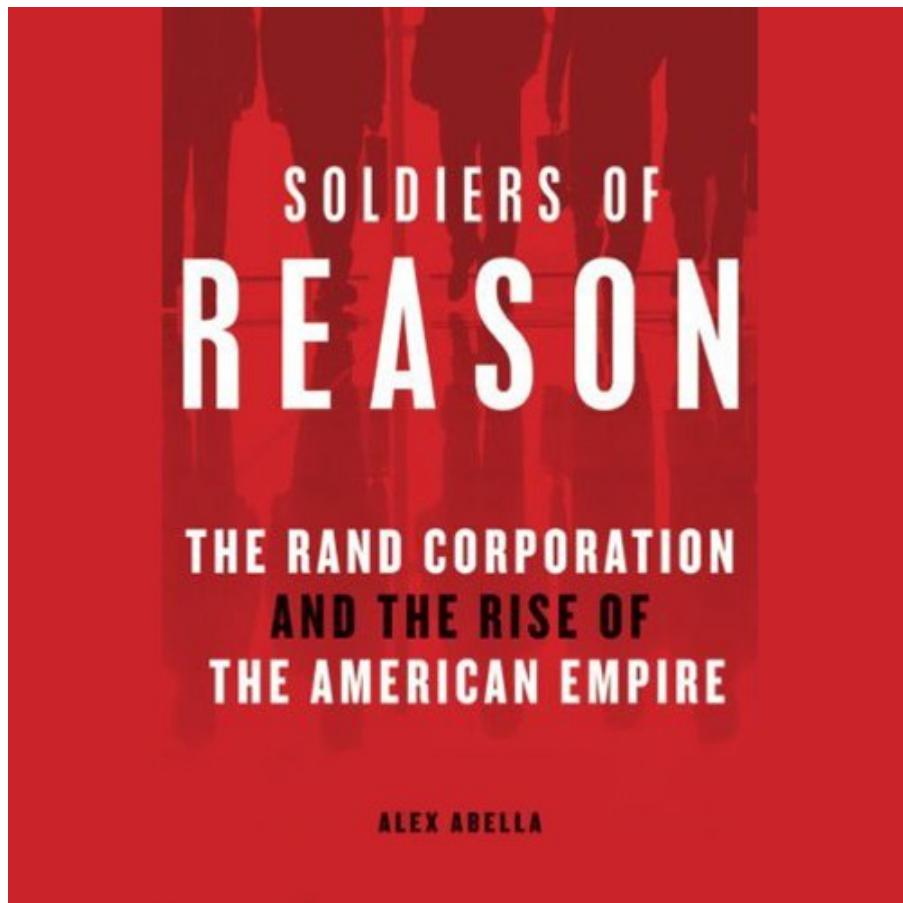


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SOLDIERS OF REASON: THE RAND CORPORATION AND THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE BY ALEX ABELLA

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The first-ever popular history of the RAND Corporation, written with full access to its archives, *Soldiers of Reason* is a page-turning chronicle of the rise of the secretive think tank that has been the driving force behind American government for 60 years. Born in the wake of World War II as an idea factory to advise the air force on how to wage and win wars, RAND quickly became the creator of Americas anti-Soviet nuclear strategy

.A magnet for the best and the brightest, its ranks included Cold War luminaries such as Albert Wohlstetter, Bernard Brodie, and Herman Kahn, who arguably saved us from nuclear annihilation and unquestionably created Eisenhowers military-industrial complex.In the Kennedy era, RAND analysts became McNamaras Whiz Kids and their theories of rational warfare steered our conduct in Vietnam. Those same theories drove our invasion of Iraq 45 years later, championed by RAND affiliated actors such as Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, and Zalmay Khalilzad. But RANDs greatest contribution might be its least known: rational choice theory, a model explaining all human behavior through self-interest. Through it RAND sparked the Reagan-led transformation of our social and economic system but also unleashed a resurgence of precisely the forces whose existence it denied religion, patriotism, tribalism.

With *Soldiers of Reason*, Alex Abella has rewritten the history of Americas last half century and cast a new light on our problematic present.

- Sales Rank: #103911 in Audible
- Published on: 2010-03-02
- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 574 minutes

Most helpful customer reviews

66 of 91 people found the following review helpful.

author of reason?

By Robert Reinstedt

Soldiers Of Reason may have been okay if it were the biography of Wohlstetter. As it is, it resembles someone who has visited the Louvre for five days and writes a book about what Europe is like.

To consider Wolfowitz and Perle as RANDites is absurd. C Rice came a bit closer, but not much. Rumsfeld was on the Board but only on the Board, and that was a long time ago.

There was never a fist fight in any managment meeting. Shapley (a member of the National Academy of Science) and Belman were mathematicians, not an economist and a physicist. The correct decription of RAND by Pravda was The Academy of Death and Destruction. These are minor errors and are perhaps to be expected in any book. It always is a plus, however, for authors to do their homework.

The author makes RAND look like a group of wild eyed hawks bent on death and destruction without a thought for human lives or social consequences.. An assemblage of Dr Strangeloves. To imply that ethics and morals was a luxury that the researchers couldn't afford or chose not to address is an insult to the vast majority of RAND researchers.

My guess is that most of the real RANDites will gasp in horror at what is portrayed of the organization. Yes, a great deal of emphasis was on the cold war and how to fight it, but also how to avoid it. To imply that our current policy in the Middle East is a direct result of RAND is another absurdity. There may be many who have taken what they wish to further from some of the studies performed at RAND, but there are different interpretations and indeed different studies to the contrary. Those mentioned above as RANDites who never were, may have been influenced by Wohlstetter but their work should not be represented as part of the history of RAND and their philosophies differ considerably from the majority of RANDites of that era.

No mention was made of the System Development Division, comprised almost entirely of psychologists who studied much of what the author says never happened at RAND. The Division spun off and formed the System Development Corporation and rapidly outgrew the parent. How could someone doing a so called history of RAND not include this?

No mention was made of the tremendous contribution in Artificial Intelligence which had much of its beginning at RAND involving Newell, Shaw and Simon as well as Minsky from MIT who was a consultant. The entire computing field including programming (linear, dynamic and heuristic) perhaps was furthered by RAND as much or more than any other organization including IBM. The first professional computing societies were originally headed by people such as Paul Armer, Willis Ware and others from RAND Computing as we know it today was very largely a result of the early efforts at RAND.

The really historic contributions made by the Information Sciences Department and the Mathematics Department (later merged into one) were not mentioned.

But no, we hear almost only of how Herman and Albert and few others did such damage with their concept of rational choice.

Studies at RAND included the first (outside of the Secret Service) study and design of Presidential protection and RAND played a key role in the security of the 1984 Olympics.

Machine translation and was largely inaugurated at RAND.

Tom Lincoln began some of the very first definitive work on the treatment of leukemia.

Much work was done to avoid unauthorized launching of nuclear weapons and assistance was given to the DOD in establishing what at the time was known as The Human Reliability Program to ensure the behavioral soundness of those with access to those weapons. Safeguards such as the launch enabling system was of real concern within the corporation and contributions were made to the Air Force to develop such a system.

Cost analysis and a myriad of other novel sophisticated management approaches in the various commands were presented and adopted by the Air Force.

The Logistics Department made many substantial contributions to the Air Force.

Many such studies resulted in almost monumental savings of tax dollars.

The role RAND played in counterterrorism was hardly recognized for its significance, particularly its role in counter nuclear terrorism. Brian Jenkins could well be called the father of counterterrorism in this country, not only in his and his team's continued studies and analysis

but in giving the rest of the various agencies (starting, at first, with the Department of State) a jump start in combatting this threat.

The New York City debacle was fairly well covered. The eight or so people who first presented the concept to the Mayor (not the other way around) at a breakfast at Gracie Mansion envisioned the same type of atmosphere that was enjoyed at RAND Santa Monica (and Washington). That was not to be, and the head of the effort was not a researcher of the parent corporation. Many thought that this doomed it from the beginning. The effort seemed to be more of a job shop than research. And while it was an experiment in what might be accomplished with a RAND- like approach to the problems and complexities of running a large city, it failed.

Almost no mention was made in the book to the contributions to the Health field. And there have been many. There are countless other studies too numerous to mention, and contributions of a much more benign nature that Rand addressed that were not covered in the book.

Instead, we read continuously all about a few people (admittedly influential) many not ever even RANDites, and get a picture that is certainly not representative of this great corporation. To do so sadly did a very major disservice to the RAND corporation and the many researchers who will remember its history in a completely different way.

!

36 of 51 people found the following review helpful.

Penetrating revisionist view of American foreign policy

By R Candlewood

First of all, the book is about a lot more than foreign policy, but that's what I find most interesting about RAND and what I think really shines in this compelling history. Yeah, yeah, there's social science that RAND did, too, and that's good to know, but where the writing really comes alive is with the great larger than life characters who were at the center of the Cold War -- people like Albert Wohlstetter, Herman Kahn, Bernard Brodie, Paul Wolfowitz, Daniel Ellsberg, Donald Rumsfeld, and on and on. A lot of the material has been glancingly covered elsewhere, but never has one book presented the whole story. And with the whole story in one place, it becomes shockingly clear what enormous influence RAND's "soldiers of reason" had in every administration for over 60 years.

It's a relief that for most of the book Abella just presents history -- story after story of all the players and their deeds (and more important, their incredibly influential ideas). It's also a relief that at the end Abella sums up the achievements and failings of RAND's systems analysis and approach to problems by stating: "the problem with rational choice theory is that it is not rational. It fails to comprehend the world as it is..." Exactly. One need look no further than Viet Nam (or Iraq!) for proof.

A very good secret history of American foreign policy during and after the Cold War.

34 of 49 people found the following review helpful.

Important and Thought-Provoking...

By Laurence Jarvik

I came across Alex Abella's fascinating book in the LAX airport newsstand, moments before boarding my \$230 Virgin America flight to Washington. After my late friend Kevin's disturbing RAND conference room memorial service, I simply had to read it cover-to-cover on the flight. It took me until somewhere over Ohio. I really could not put the book down. The desire to reduce all questions to a matter of numbers was one I had come across last week in my late father's 1941 diary. It turned out we had moved into a home of one of the founders of RAND--J. Richard Goldstein--when we arrived in Santa Monica.

Coincidentally, a high school friend had been the son of RAND researcher Daniel Ellsberg, of Pentagon Papers fame. The cousin of someone I know worked for RAND after leaving the CIA. The girlfriend of another cousin of someone I know worked at RAND while on leave from the State Department. When I saw the book in the bookstore, I realized that I had known practically nothing about the "mother of all think-tanks." From the book I found out that the Hudson Institute was a bastard child of RAND, set up after Herman Kahn left the mother ship. The Albert Wohlstetter room at AEI is named after a RAND guru. And almost everyone who is anyone in Washington these days--especially the architects of America's Iraq and Afghanistan quagmires--seem to have some sort of RAND connection.

Yet so far as I know, there had been no book about RAND, until this. It explained a great deal, and I recommend it highly. It is about the possibilities--and limits--of operations research and systems analysis. Reading "Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire" helped me better understand the sudden and tragic death of my friend...

Must reading for anyone interested in the ways of Washington, or what President Eisenhower (apparently with RAND in mind) called "the military-industrial complex."

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