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INTRODUCTION "IF WE BUILD THEM, WARS WILL COME"

There's obviously no easy answer to why the United States—or, more accurately, its government and its military—has been fighting almost without pause since independence. Some might invoke biological metaphors to suggest that the answer to this question lies in the country's DNA, in the soil, in the people's blood. Of course, these are just metaphors. Countries have no DNA; a propensity to wage war doesn't get transmitted through the soil, nor through blood or genes, although the history of a land and the people who live there is critically important. Some suggest the answer lies in the country's birth in a revolutionary war for independence. Others point to the culture of the United States or the psychology of its people. Some say the record of war has its roots in economic forces or the capitalist system itself. Others link the pattern to the power and influence of the Military Industrial Complex, about which President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned in his famous 1961 farewell address. Some identify domestic politics as providing the answer. Others point to race and racism, gender and hypermasculinity, nationalism and ideas of U.S. "American exceptionalism," or a missionary Christianity exemplified by the idea that the country has a "manifest destiny" to expand. This book offers a new way to think about why the U.S. military seems to fight wars without end. The approach I take is simple but somewhat unusual. Rather than looking primarily at the wars themselves, this book looks at the infrastructure that made the wars possible. Rather than being a book about battles, this book uses military bases as windows to understand the pattern of endless U.S. wars. To fight wars, especially wars far from home, armies and navies generally need bases to organize, support, and sustain combat. Bases are logistical centers for organizing military personnel, weaponry, and supplies and for deploying troops to wage war. Domestic bases serve that role. But if a military wants to fight a war far from home, as the United States has generally done, it needs to move and maintain its forces over long distances. Extraterritorial bases, bases far from home, bases in foreign lands, make this much easier, facilitating the logistics of war hundreds or thousands of miles away. Since independence the U.S. government has built the largest collection of military bases occupying foreign lands in world history. Today the military controls around eight hundred military bases in some eighty-five countries outside the fifty states and Washington, DC.1 At other times the total has been higher. While many in the United States take it for granted that the U.S. military maintains hundreds of bases in places as far flung as Germany and Japan, Djibouti and Honduras, Greenland and Australia, the thought of finding a foreign base in the United States is basically unimaginable. For most it's a challenge to imagine what it would feel like to have a single foreign base anywhere near a U.S. border, for example in Mexico, Canada, or the Caribbean, let alone in the United States. Rafael Correa, then the president of Ecuador, revealed this rarely considered truth when in 2009 he refused to renew the lease for a U.S. base in his country. Correa told reporters that he would renew the lease on one condition: "They

let us put a base in Miami—an Ecuadorian base. If there's no problem having foreign soldiers on a country's soil," Correa quipped, "surely they'll let us have an Ecuadorian base in the United States."2 From the United States' earliest days, bases abroad have played key roles in launching and maintaining U.S. wars and other military actions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hundreds of Army forts beyond U.S. borders launched dozens of wars against Native American peoples, resulting in the conquest of lands across North America and the deaths of millions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the military built bases farther from the North American mainland, in Alaska, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Panama, and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. During World War II U.S. forces built and occupied two thousand base sites and a total of thirty thousand installations touching every continent.3 Holding on to hundreds of those bases and building new ones after World War II made it easier to wage war in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, as well as to support proxy armies from Central America to the Middle East. The wars the U.S. government launched after October 7, 2001, would have been significantly more difficult to wage without a collection of bases of unprecedented breadth around the globe. Bases in the Middle East, central and southern Asia, the Indian Ocean, and as far as Thailand, Djibouti, Italy, and Germany have played critical roles in allowing U.S. troops to fight in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, and far beyond. This book looks at the bases that have enabled U.S. leaders to launch and sustain wars as well as the bases that the U.S. military occupied and retained after the wars ended. Research funded by none other than the U.S. Army indicates that since the 1950s a U.S. military presence abroad is correlated with U.S. forces initiating military conflicts.4 In other words, there appears to be a relationship between establishing bases outside the United States and the incidence of wars. Notably, the historical record also shows that U.S. wars have often led U.S. leaders to establish more bases abroad. The establishment of more bases abroad, in turn, has often led to more wars, which has often led to more bases, in a repeating pattern over time. Put another way, bases frequently beget wars, which can beget more bases, which can beget more wars, and so on. By this I don't just mean that the construction of bases abroad has enabled more war. I mean that the construction of bases abroad has actually made aggressive, offensive war more likely. Since the revolution that won independence from Britain, the construction and maintenance of extraterritorial bases has increased the likelihood that these bases would be used. They have increased the likelihood that the United States would wage wars of aggression. Map 3. U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 2020. As of 2020, the United States controlled around eight hundred bases outside the fifty U.S. states and Washington, DC. The number of bases and the secrecy and lack of transparency of the base network make any graphic depiction challenging. This map reflects the relative number and positioning of bases given the best available data. Oceans not to scale. For details and additional sources, see Vine, "Lists of U.S. Military Bases." Key source: Base Structure Report: Fiscal Year 2018. Historian and former U.S. Army officer Andrew Bacevich has shown how maintaining "a far-flung network of bases and other arrangements to facilitate intervention abroad" has been an "essential predicate" of U.S. political life and a deeply ingrained, unconscious "matter of faith" about the role of U.S. power in the

world "for decades." Bacevich says that "a central purpose of" what elites have called "forward presence"—a euphemism for bases and troops on other people's soil—"has been to project [military] power anywhere on earth." Bacevich traces this tendency to President Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine. The corollary asserted the U.S. government's right to invade any country in the Western Hemisphere committing what U.S. leaders deemed "chronic wrongdoing," which mostly meant not paying debts to U.S. banks and other businesses.5 While Roosevelt's proclamation was bold, the belief in the U.S. military's right to invade other nations and peoples was not new. Invasions of other people's lands have been part of U.S. history since the Revolutionary War (although many refer to them euphemistically and antiseptically as military "interventions," "operations," or "contingencies"). From the creation of the Continental Army and the establishment of the first bases on Native American peoples' lands, most U.S. leaders have shared a deeply held belief in their right to deploy military power into and seize the lands of others. Given the patterns of who invaded whom, this belief was clearly shaped by ideas of white, male, Christian, U.S. American supremacy and socially constructed ideas of masculinity tied to the infliction of violence. Maintaining bases abroad has not always made war more likely, and it has not always resulted in war. At particular times and in particular places, U.S. leaders avoided, averted, or didn't consider war. War has never been and is not inevitable. Frequently, however, bases beyond U.S. borders have made war and the deployment of military force too easy, too tempting for politicians, high-ranking military and civilian officials, and other elites with the power to shape government decisions. These bases have provided what is by design an easily deployable form of offensive military power. With this offensive power readily available, elites often have been tempted to advocate for its use to advance their own economic and political interests and the interests of fellow business leaders and politicians, land speculators, miners, traders, farmers, and settlers, among others.6 For these reasons and reasons related to the immediate profits to be made from building and running military installations, exterritorial bases have been a foundation of U.S. foreign policy since 1776. Bases abroad have become, as some say, foreign policy written in concrete (and, in centuries past, written in wood, brick, iron, and adobe). As anthropologist Catherine Lutz writes, bases abroad, and the military forces that occupy them, have been the main tool in the U.S. foreign policy toolbox. They have been the hammers that have left little room for diplomacy and other foreign policy tools. And when hammers dominate one's toolbox, Lutz says, everything starts looking like a nail.7 The hammers become all too tempting, especially when mostly male policy makers perceive them, consciously or unconsciously, as visible demonstrations of their masculinity and strength. Let me be clear. I'm not saying that bases abroad are the sole cause of all U.S. wars or of any one war. I'm saying that bases beyond U.S. borders are a particularly important cause. To focus this book's attention on bases abroad is not to dismiss economic, political, social, ideological, or psychological explanations for the U.S. record of persistent war making. I am not dismissing explanations rooted in capitalism, racism, patriarchy, nationalism, or religious chauvinism. All these dynamics are important parts of the history that follows. Bases abroad, however, provide a lens through which to see

the intersection and interaction of these forces, which have together created the United States' history of war. Bases beyond U.S. borders provide a key to help unlock the complex question of why the United States has such a long and consistent record of war. Specifically, bases abroad show how U.S. political, economic, and military leaders (themselves shaped by the forces of history, political economy, racism, patriarchy, nationalism, and religion) have used taxpayer money to build a self-perpetuating system of permanent war revolving around an often expanding global collection of extraterritorial military bases. These bases have expanded the boundaries of the United States, while keeping the country locked in a state of nearly continuous war that has largely served the economic and political interests of elites and left tens of millions dead, wounded, and displaced. Military bases need not facilitate war. Bases can be defensive in nature. Bases can protect. For example, the walls and fortifications of castles—a type of base—provided a place of safety from foreign invaders and protected entire cities from attack; during World War II British bases helped protect the British Isles from Nazi invasion. But when bases are occupying foreign lands, history suggests they aren't likely to be defensive in nature. Military and other government leaders often claim otherwise, portraying extraterritorial bases as deterrents and forces of stability and peace. But that is rarely the case.[8] Bases abroad are generally offensive in nature. They are not designed for peace. They are designed to threaten, to deploy military force, and to wage offensive wars. There should be no surprise that, as U.S. history shows, an unprecedented collection of foreign bases has led not to peace but to war. For millennia empires and other major powers have used extraterritorial bases to wage offensive wars. Powerful leaders have used far-flung bases to conquer territory and protect conquered lands, to extract resources and secure access to markets and labor, and to threaten and exert influence. Bases abroad have been a foundation for empires' control over foreign lands and foreign peoples, from the ancient Egyptian, Chinese, and Roman Empires to empires and regional powers of the second millennium such as the Mongols, Malians, Normans, Incans, Ottomans, and Genoese to the European empires of Spain, France, and Britain. In the Americas in particular, fort construction by European empires after 1492 enabled more than three centuries of deadly colonizing warfare. That U.S. leaders began building a large collection of extraterritorial forts and embarked on a similar record of warfare helps show the continuity between the U.S. Empire and empires past. Many Revolutionary War–era elites in the thirteen states saw the British, French, and other European empires as models for what the United States should and would become: an expanding nation and expansionist "American Empire." George Washington referred to the United States as a "rising Empire." Thomas Jefferson was one of many who hoped and assumed the country would expand its territory in virtually every direction, including into Canada and Cuba.[9] U.S. military and civilian leaders began working toward that goal during the revolution, with the Continental Army's attacks on the Iroquois Confederacy. The construction of a growing chain of extraterritorial military bases—army forts—on indigenous peoples' lands became a key tool to waging a century of wars to expand the boundaries of the United States, seize the land and its natural resources, and displace, dispossess, and kill American Indians in frequently genocidal ways. "From the time

the first settlers arrived in Virginia from England and started moving westward, this was an imperial nation, a conquering nation," historian Paul Kennedy explains.10 Many of us in the United States have long had great difficulty seeing our nation as an empire like others. I certainly have. The country's birth in a revolution against the British Empire and powerful foundational ideologies of democracy, liberty, and freedom, coupled with changing attitudes about empire, have made it hard to accept the reality of U.S. Empire. Some have called the United States an "empire in denial."11 Since the nineteenth century the language of "manifest destiny" has helped hide U.S. imperialism by suggesting that the country's westward conquest and expansion were inevitable phenomena, the natural or divinely planned progression of history. At other times "the history of territorial expansion that required more than a century of wars with hundreds of indigenous polities," writes Nikhil Pal Singh, "is forgotten or else quietly inscribed as a lasting achievement of US nationhood."12 If the country was ever an empire, many have learned, it was only briefly and perhaps absentmindedly so around the "Spanish-American War" of 1898 and the conquest of Spain's colonies of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. But what, if not an empire, is a country that violently conquered lands and displaced, dispossessed, and killed millions clear across North America, before seizing colonies in the Caribbean and on a chain of islands across the Pacific Ocean? What, if not an empire, is a country that since World War II has had the world's most lethal military; that has a near-monopoly on nuclear weapons capable of destroying the planet; and that has launched dozens of coups and overthrown a long series of foreign governments? What, if not an empire, is a country that largely designed the post–World War II international political-economic system; that has had the world's most powerful economy; that can print dollars to pay its debts because the U.S. dollar is the world's reserve currency; that has unparalleled control over the United Nations and other international organizations; and that has had unparalleled media and cultural influence over other nations and peoples, thanks to Hollywood, pop music, the Internet, and social media? What, if not an empire, is a country that has such an unbroken record of warfare since its founding, including, in recent years, the invasion and long-term occupation of two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, the size of Texas and California, respectively? What, if not an empire, is a country that maintains eight hundred military bases on other people's soil? Since the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, there's actually been little debate about whether the United States is an empire. While the existence of U.S. imperialism was the subject of ideological arguments during, for example, the U.S. war in Southeast Asia, there's now widespread agreement across the political spectrum about the fact of the U.S. Empire. Today the main debates are about the kind of empire the United States has become and the morality of imperialism.13 Imperialism and empire are helpful concepts to characterize a type of expansionist power and rule that has recurred across millennia of human history.a At times the language of empire has been used too casually and with too little precision. At times the terminology has been more political rhetoric than a useful lens to help understand the United States or the world. Some use the Roman Empire as a metaphor to describe the United States. But the United States is not Rome. No two empires are alike. If the concept is to be meaningful, if it

is to illuminate, the challenge is not just to say that the United States is an empire. The challenge is to explain why the United States is an empire, what kind of empire it has become, and what effects it has had. Comparing the U.S. Empire to prior empires, one sees continuities and shifts.14 The United States in the post–World War II era represents a break with previous empires in the extent to which imperial control has been exercised through the base network and not through a large collection of formal colonies.15 Still, this is not entirely new. Bases abroad have been a frequently overlooked but critical dimension of the U.S. Empire since the earliest days of U.S. history. For the United States, bases have been a crucial imperial tool for launching wars and other military actions to advance profit making and domestic political fortunes; for maintaining systems of alliances; for keeping other nations in subordinate relationships; and, in the post–World War II period, for upholding a global political, economic, military order to the perceived benefit of the United States and its elites. In other words, bases and other military tools have worked in tandem with and undergirded economic and political tools of empire. That most U.S. leaders have pursued a path of empire since shortly after independence makes the U.S. record of war unsurprising. Just as building bases abroad has made wars more likely, building an empire has done the same. Riffing off the famous line from the baseball movie Field of Dreams, one might say, "If we build them, wars will come." Except the reference is to bases and empire rather than baseball: If we build bases abroad, wars will likely come. If we build an empire, wars will likely come. If we use aggressive military force to build an expansionist nation focused on dominating and controlling the lands and lives of others in the pursuit of profit for some, wars will come. Still, the "if" in "If we build them, wars will come" is an important reminder of the choices involved in both the history and the future of the United States' relationship to war. There was nothing inevitable about the United States becoming an empire. There was nothing inevitable about any single war or the long history of wars. U.S. leaders could have made different choices in the past. At times leaders avoided wars, often as a result of pressure from large groups of people. Today there are choices to be made about the country's future. Despite many signs that the U.S. Empire is in decline, many government officials and other elites appear content to perpetuate the status quo. Many are undeterred by the pattern of moving from one catastrophic war to the next: from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya to Syria to Yemen to . . . . During President Donald J. Trump's administration, some senior officials, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and now former military adviser John Bolton, have appeared committed to instigating a new conflict. Despite Trump's declared opposition to interventionist wars, he and his administration's actions have brought the country close to war with North Korea, Venezuela, and Iran. Map 4. The United States of America and Its Empire. Most maps of the United States are inaccurate. Most depict the fifty U.S. states or, often, just the continental forty-eight and Washington, DC. These maps hide the U.S. Empire. They hide the U.S. colonies (territories), where, by law, people lack full democratic rights. Traditional maps also hide the occupation of lands worldwide by some eight hundred U.S. military bases in around eighty-five countries. This map tries to depict the United States more honestly. Land areas not to scale. Inspired by Daniel Immerwahr, How to Hide

an Empire: A History of the Greater United States (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019). With U.S. troops currently or recently engaged in some form of combat in fifteen or more countries, interventionist military and civilian officials are already planning for what they assume will be another major war.16 At the Pentagon military leaders no longer talk about the so-called war on terrorism as the "long war." Now they call it "infinite war."17 Air Force General Mike Holmes predicted in 2018 that, after fighting three wars in Iraq since 1991, "odds are there's another one ten years from now, to go back into the Sunni areas up north. We've been fighting for almost 20 years in Afghanistan. These are infinite wars."18 More frighteningly, a growing number of government officials, politicians, pundits, and think tank analysts are talking, directly and indirectly, about the inevitability of a future war with China or Russia. (Often one senses a certain sports-like enthusiasm in such talk, despite the potential for millions of deaths, if not planetary nuclear annihilation.) Alternatively, brave U.S. citizens and leaders can demand the country give up this catastrophic pattern of war. They can demand the country give up on offensive foreign bases and give up on empire. They can demand the country embrace a foreign policy built around diplomacy, cooperation, and respect, and principles that are at the heart of the best traditions in U.S. history: democracy, equity, and justice. The United States of War is divided into five parts that reflect five distinct periods of U.S. imperialism.b Part I uncovers the roots of the U.S. Empire. It shows the connections and similarities between the U.S. Empire and its imperial predecessors, dating to the arrival of Cristóbal Colón in Guantánamo Bay in 1494. Like its predecessors, the U.S. Empire has been defined significantly by the now long-debunked pseudoscientific idea of race and the racist belief in white supremacy as justification for the conquest of those deemed "not white." That the U.S. government's conquest of territory has almost always involved the territory of non-European people of color is no coincidence. Race and racism have been defining features of contemporary imperialism since the emergence of race as a concept around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Part II tells the story of the growth of the U.S. Empire from independence to the wars the U.S. military waged against forces of the dwindling Spanish Empire and locals in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico beginning in 1898. At the beginning of this period, the first U.S. bases abroad—forts located on the territories of Native American peoples—helped enable the violent conquest of territory and peoples across North America. Near-constant offensive warfare allowed the U.S. Army to push the country's borders westward. U.S. soldiers effectively served as an advance guard and protection service as Euro-American settlers colonized lands across the continent. The result was the dispossession and death of millions. Other nineteenth-century bases helped enable invasions and wars in Canada, Spanish Florida, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and as far as the Middle East and beyond. Unlike some histories, The United States of War treats the U.S. wars beginning in 1898 not as an aberration or historical disjuncture or the birth of U.S. imperialism but rather as a continuation of linked processes of war and empire, profit seeking and expansion.19 The third part of The United States of War corresponds with the third period of the U.S. Empire, from the end of the wars of 1898 to the start of World War II. This period featured a new, less territorially focused imperialism, during which

there was less formal expansion of U.S. territory and the addition of a relatively small number of bases abroad. This period is marked by greater use of economic tools of imperial control, symbolized by "Open Door" trade policies initiated in China around the time of the "Boxer" Rebellion and backed by frequent military invasions and occupations of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Part IV, covering the fourth period of the U.S. Empire, stretches from before the United States formally entered World War II to the early twenty-first century. Beginning with President Franklin Roosevelt's 1940 "Destroyers-for-Bases" deal acquiring ninety-nine-year leases on military bases in eight British colonies, U.S. leaders built the world's largest-ever collection of foreign bases by the end of World War II. After the war, in the era of decolonization, U.S. officials invented a new, more discreet form of empire. This new form of empire relied heavily on foreign bases working in tandem with economic and political tools and other forms of military power, such as periodic military invasions and wars, the threat of nuclear war, CIA-backed coups and political meddling, and support for proxy armies. The foreign base network became a major mechanism of U.S. imperial control, helping to keep wayward nations within the rules of an economic and political system favorable to U.S. corporations and elites and allowing the control of territory vastly disproportionate to the land actually occupied.20 Part V focuses on the current period of the U.S. Empire, which began with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, and the launch of the so-called global war on terrorism. In many ways this period has seen a continuation of the same imperial tools and trends in evidence since World War II. But this period is distinct because it features the emergence of a hyperimperialism marked by (1) unprecedented levels of military spending despite the absence of an imperial competitor akin to the Soviet Union or any comparable threat; (2) unprecedented levels of power and influence for the Military Industrial Complex as a result of and reinforcing skyrocketing military expenditures; (3) unprecedented breadth in the deployment of U.S. military bases and troops abroad, with installations now in around eighty-five countries and territories and a growing number of secretive special operations forces in nearly every country on Earth; and (4) unprecedented U.S. military intervention, base construction, and warfare in the Greater Middle East, resulting in levels of death, injury, displacement, and destruction not seen since the U.S. wars in Southeast Asia. U.S. leaders' increasing reliance on the U.S. military has also been a reaction to escalating geopolitical-economic competition with Europe, Russia, India, other rising powers, and especially China, at a time when the U.S. Empire has been weakened by deindustrialization, economic instability, mounting inequality, escalating national debt, and astronomically costly wars. The story that follows is the culmination of eighteen years of research about foreign military bases and their relationship to U.S. wars. During this research I visited more than sixty current and former bases in fourteen countries and territories, including Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Great Britain, Guam, Honduras, Italy, Japan, Mauritius, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Seychelles, South Korea, and the United States. In these places I conducted more than one hundred formal interviews, had hundreds of informal conversations, and engaged in ethnographic participant observation with current and former U.S. government officials, U.S. military personnel and their family

members, and locals living near U.S. bases abroad. I coupled this work with extensive archival research in the U.S. National Archives, the Lyndon B. Johnson and John F. Kennedy Presidential Libraries, the U.S. Navy's archives, and the National Archives in Britain. Given the breadth of the story that follows, this book and I owe a great debt to the excellent work of countless historians, social scientists, journalists, advocates, lawyers, and filmmakers, among others. In the chapters that follow, I have tried to weave these disparate sources into a portrait of everything from British forts occupying colonial Boston to one of the earliest U.S. bases abroad, on the Kansas prairie. Elsewhere I describe visits ranging from Germany to Guam to Guantánamo Bay. In London and around Washington, DC, I introduce military base contractors and senior government officials who show how the Military Industrial Congressional Complex has helped sustain the global collection of bases and a system of imperial war. I offer these descriptions of contemporary life in tandem with descriptions of the past to emphasize the connections between the past and the present. I do so also to stress the role of individual agency in the past, as well as the contingency of history and the future. While people and countries are shaped by historical patterns and political-economic and ideological forces, futures are in no way predestined, inevitable, or leading to some ultimate goal. Any suggestion to the contrary erases the ability of human beings, however constrained and shaped by larger structures, to shape and change the world around them. Ultimately, I am writing this book with the hope of contributing to such change. I start my tour of bases and the infrastructure of U.S. wars in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The naval station there has long been the best-known U.S. base overseas. It has also been the most infamous since it began hosting a prison in 2002, shortly after the start of the George W. Bush administration's self-declared global war on terrorism. While some describe Guantanamo Bay Naval Station as the oldest U.S. base abroad, my two trips to Guantanamo helped me see that the history of U.S. foreign bases and the relationship between the United States and war goes far deeper, dating to a time before the existence of the United States of America.