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Introduction by Lloyd C. Gardner

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Introduction by Lloyd C. Gardner, Rutgers University, Emeritus

Since his first major book, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*,[1] Andrew Bacevich has published a timely series of critical inquiries into the motivations and outcomes of American foreign policy. Two previous critics, Reinhold Niebuhr and William Appleman Williams, have influenced his interpretations, but his perspective is informed as well by a twenty-year career in the military.[2]

Yet Bacevich is also a throwback to the kind of public intellectual Walter Lippmann once represented before cable pundits and talk-radio personalities began to shape opinions in ways that stunt intellectual growth. He has appeared on serious talk shows like that hosted by long-time PBS stalwart Bill Moyers, but his frequent op-ed articles in major newspapers across the country from the *Boston Globe* to the *Los Angeles Times*, and longer pieces in magazines with seemingly different perspectives such as *The Nation* and *The American Conservative,* represent an ongoing engagement with readers outside the monographic world, and a commitment to thinking outside ideology labels.

America's War for the Greater Middle East will confirm Bacevich's reputation as a bold thinker. It is a big book well over 400 pages. But it is 'big' in another sense because it forces one to confront fundamental questions about America's 'new' longest war or what has become a series of wars, and not simply focus on specific 'mistakes' of the past, an error that often only leads deeper into the maze. As he sees it, the United States is in the midst of a new effort – not unlike the 'civilizing missions' of the nineteenth-century European powers—to impose its values by military means on the whole area. There is surely something ironic, then, about continued boasts of America as 'the exceptional nation.'

Defining the parameters of the ongoing conflict in the Greater Middle East is a formidable challenge on at least two levels: chronology and geography. Andrew Bacevich has undertaken to explain not just its causes and its constantly shifting location, and why one should see events as far apart as Somalia and Bosnia as part of the same war, but also why, after so many years of theorizing and supposed innovation, American initiatives still lack a coherent strategic vision. As such, this book will start more arguments than it finishes – which is probably the whole point of an exercise in the history of an era so filled with momentous events and stretching from before the end of the Cold War until yesterday and tomorrow. The war has become so muddled that no one seems to remember exactly how it began, except as a response to the attacks of 9/11 2001, or, even more remarkably, to know when it will have really ended.

Bacevich sees the war's true beginning in a Sarajevo-type moment in 1980 when the Soviet Union intervened militarily to prop up a friendly regime in Afghanistan at the same time President Jimmy Carter was struggling with the Iranian hostage situation. Together these seemed to threaten a general breakdown of Cold War 'stability' in the Middle East. Carter's chief adviser, Zbigniew Brezezinski, initially welcomed an opportunity

[1] Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 2004).

[2] See Bacevich's introduction to a new edition of Niebuhr's classic, *The Irony of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), and his afterward to the 50th anniversary edition of Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

to give the Soviets their own Vietnam by aiding the *Mujahideen*. But Carter expanded the boundaries and meaning of the conflict in an exchange with members of Congress on January 8, 1980: "In my own opinion, shared by many of the world's leaders with whom I have discussed this matter, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War. It's a sharp escalation in the aggressive history of the Soviet Union." [3]

Greater than the fears at the time of the1948 Berlin Airlift? Greater than Korea in December 1950 when talk of the atomic bomb brought British Prime Minister Clement Attlee scurrying to Washington? Greater than the1962 Cuban Missile Crisis when two men held the fate of the world in their hands? Whatever one thinks about how Carter's dramatic language shaped policy over the next decades, the first American military response was a humiliating 'failure in the desert.' The "Eagle Claw" mission to free American hostages held in Tehran had lessons for Washington, Bacevich argues, but policymakers drew conclusions that "turned out to be the wrong ones…The underlying premise–that the problems facing the United States in the Greater Middle East would yield to a military solution–not only escaped notice but became more deeply entrenched." (xix)

Carter had vowed in his 23 January 1980 State of the Union message that the United States would use military force to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf. This 'Carter Doctrine' thus became the basis for future policy. And this despite dramatic developments in the Middle East and Europe. First, Moscow finally gave up trying to defeat the CIA-armed *Mujahideen*, and weary Soviet troops walked back from Afghanistan into Soviet territory across the Afghan-Uzbek Bridge. Then the Soviet empire itself shattered into brittle pieces, while chunks of the Berlin Wall went on sale in tourist shops. But the 'Carter Doctrine' including the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), a new military command headquartered in Florida with responsibility for the Middle East, and the Rapid Deployment Force it spawned found a new purpose for their existence. "Conveniently," just as the "(largely fictive) Russian threat to the Persian Gulf" disappeared, a new rationale "appeared with impeccable timing" in the Iran-Iraq War (44). Bacevich contends that U.S. involvement in that prolonged struggle should be recognized as America's Gulf War I, followed by the more generally recognized Gulf War II in 1990, and Gulf War III in 2003. Indeed, he argues, one cannot understand the second and third Gulf Wars without coming to terms with Washington's policy in the first throughout the decade of the 1980s.

Initially Carter had declared that the United States would remain neutral in the war, but when Iran rebounded from early losses and the battle looked to be going the other way, Washington decided to intervene. "Simply put," Bacevich argues, "by 1982 ensuring Saddam's survival had become an American priority" (90). Various international efforts under the code name 'Operation Staunch' were launched to deny Iran weapons, or the spare parts for American weapons shipped by the boatloads at a time when the Shah was considered a rock of stability in a turbulent region. But better weapons did not make the Iraqi dictator a better general–or anything like a fit example for other Arab leaders under American tutelage. Nevertheless, he was what was available in 1983 when the United States suffered another humiliation in Lebanon when a truck drove into a makeshift Marine barracks, detonating a bomb that killed 241 military personnel, and wounding another hundred. President Ronald Reagan vowed that America would never be intimidated by terrorists, and ordered retaliation–if a proper target could be found. According to Bacevich, this caveat allowed Secretary of

[3] "Situation in Iran and Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Remarks at a White House Briefing for Members of Congress," January 8, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33007.

Defense Caspar Weinberger and General John Vessey, chair of the Joint Chiefs to block an ill-advised retaliation, to press instead for getting the marines out of harm's way. If the drone fleets of today had been available at the time, one wonders whether Reagan would have backed off of his request for a suitable target.

However that may be, the United States upped its support for Iraq, and then finally drifted into a policy of dual containment towards the conflict. All the while the politics of war became more and more complicated. On 3 July 1988, the USS *Vincennes* shot down an Iranian passenger plane, killing all 290 passengers and crew. Most of what American military and political spokespersons said about the circumstances of the attack was untrue. The Reagan Administration offered no apology. Vice-President George H.W. Bush, running hard for the succession, declared, "I will never apologize for the United States–I don't care what the facts are. I'm not an apologize-for-America kind of guy" (106).

It is impossible to summarize *America's War in the Greater Middle East* in an introduction like this one. But Bacevich's emphasis on the 1980s deserves serious attention because it frames the argument throughout, and because it provides a new perspective rather than beginning with the response to 9/11. In the immediate aftermath of that tragedy, writes Bacevich, President George W. Bush rightly conceded that the United States now faced a very large-scale conflict, but he "misleadingly and unhelpfully characterized[it] as a 'global war on terrorism.'" This key quotation continues, "In the presidential lexicon, terrorism was interchangeable with evil, so a war to destroy terrorism, as Bush vowed to do, necessarily became a war to destroy evil. With that in mind Bush chose to disregard U.S. military actions undertaken in pursuant to the Carter Doctrine since 1980. The United States embarked upon the global war on terrorism with a clean slate" (220).

Gulf War III has now gone on in one form or another, and in one country or another, for more than a decade. And the situation has descended into the murky depths of civil war in Syria, where nearly half a million have died, with no end in sight. Far away from the carnage, American and Russian diplomats come and go in rooms with bottles of mineral water on the table. They agree about a truce that so far no one really wants enough to make happen, including the actual Syrian participants in the slaughter. Other players in this roulette, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, and the Kurds, have all placed their wagers alongside those of Russia and the United States. The outcome for Syrians is, as it has always been, more pain and suffering.

Meanwhile, we are tantalized periodically by rumors of a page-turning victory. In 2003 George W. Bush descended from the sky in the garb of a warrior prince, landing on an aircraft carrier to proclaim 'Mission Accomplished.' Over the next three years, as the mission degenerated into 'asymmetric' mayhem, prominent prewar supporters of the Iraq debacle fled almost *en masse* to safe points where they set up new lines of pundit wisdom where criticism of the 'way' the war was being fought now singled out Bush—and preserved their places on the *New York Times*' do-call list. All praised the surge as if they had known what to do all along. Then, in 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stole a phrase from Julius Caesar, quipping on national television about Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, "We came, we saw, he died."[4] It is hard to say what is more stunning about these performances: the hubris, or the simple incomprehension of the forces unleashed by American arms from the time the Taliban received hand-held Stinger missiles to the bombs Saudi Arabia drops on Yemen.

[4] FederalJacktube6, "Hillary Clinton on Gaddafi: We came, we saw, he died," YouTube video, 00:11, posted 20 October 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgcd1ghag5Y.

But the miasma that hangs over the never-ending war hovers over the trenches of political debate as well, clouding real issues. Seminar participants in 'think-tanks' simply shrug off fundamental questions with dire warnings that we must press on: The United States may have made–really did make–ghastly mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. But now, like General David Petraeus once said, we can't spend any more time looking in the rear view mirror. The issues are too pressing and dangerous for the world and for the United States to give up on its responsibilities. The predictable—and not far off—result will cost more than anything in the past. Or, as another general once warned President George Bush, "You break it, you own it." No way around it.[5]

Bacevich insists in his book that such starting points deny any possibility of re-imagining America's role, and are themselves defeatist: it is just not possible to look at mistakes of the past as individual errors to be corrected by a more judicious use of American military power. Albeit there is a place for such power, as part of the problem has indeed been the vacillation in military policy, but it is an ongoing and fatal temptation to think, as American policymakers have, that they are in command of the historical forces operating in the Middle East. At one point, as he began his quest for the presidency, Barack Obama did say that he not only wished to end the war in Iraq but to change the mindset that got the nation into that war. But the presidency changed that conviction, although he has said that the Libyan intervention was a big mistake. But again, it was 'stupid stuff.' As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once said as Iraq turned sour: stuff happens. But the real problem the nation must face, writes Bacevich, is that there is no anti-war or anti-interventionist political party worthy of the name: "The War for the Greater Middle East awaits its Eugene McCarthy or George McGovern" (369).

Four of the five reviewers agree that Bacevich has written a much-needed book that ought to provoke a serious re-consideration of what has been written about the wars, as well as the policy choices, for the Middle East. They agree that his description of the 'long game' is a powerful corrective to the 'it all began with 9/11' school. Like the other reviewers, Dipali Mukhopadyay points to the results of the 1980s intervention to aid the anti-Russian forces in Afghanistan as having the unintended result of laying the groundwork for the rise of the Taliban and a safe haven for al Qaeda. Succeeding interventions in other countries also set the stages for civil wars that produced unwanted results. Yet she believes it is hard to see a strong thread connecting all events of those years, as, for example, in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia. Unlike Washington's pressure to rally the 'Coalition of the Willing' before 2003's Shock and Awe campaign, the interventions in those other places were a genuine experimental effort by the United Nations and NATO *and* the United States to use multilateral intervention to stabilize "internal affairs of so-called fragile or failing states." Nor did they foreshadow the central motivation for American involvement in the region after 2001.

But it remains the case, she adds, that these experiments became part of the general conviction that it must be American policy to do something about the world's most troubling spots. In that sense, there is a linkage. This American conviction then devolved into an obsession with 'bad guys' that has led to a downward spiral that elides the "messy details of politics, history, and violent conflicts in other parts of the world." The other

[5] The argument is advanced most recently in an article in the *New York Times* book review by James Traub: "Perhaps the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions really were a terrible, irremediable mistake, but it is a delusion to imagine that these profoundly damaged places will survive, much less thrive, on their own. Americans have learned all too well that they can't do everything in the Middle East; they are now also learning the dangers of doing nothing." In "The End of Intervention: Two Books Explore the American Catastrophe in the Middle East," 4 September 2016, 12. The quoted comment, of course, is Secretary of State Colin Powell's.

reviewers also think Bacevich is right to criticize the idea that 'taking out' the bad guys will answer the questions posed by the Middle East.

But there does arise the question: Having detailed the process of entrapment in its own good intentions, what are Bacevich's alternatives for a better policy? The most pressing question today is the civil war in Syria. Are there some lessons from the settlement of the Balkan Civil Wars that may be of value there and other places?

Douglas Porch also cites Washington's obsession with "whacking bad guys" by Special Forces and drones as no substitute for a strategy. He zeroes in on the fate of General Stanley McChrystal, who was sent to Afghanistan to attempt an all-out counter-insurgency (COIN) "hearts and minds" campaign, patterned after the previous 'success' of the surge in Iraq. McChrystal at least understood, writes Porch, that you could not kill your way to victory, and embarked on "nation building" as the way out of endless war. Because his efforts failed to pacify one small city, Marja, Porch writes with wry understanding, "his efforts to clear, hold and build Washington, D.C. also sputtered." Petraeus, who was sent to save the situation in Afghanistan, unleashed round-ups and killing sprees that only provoked a spate of green-on-blue incidents where Afghan troops slaughtered U.S. and NATO soldiers. Porch believes that Bacevich's solution, a patient "containment-like" policy may be the alternative. At least, even a pessimist would have to say, it would be less costly than to go on camouflaging failures beneath 'Mission Accomplished' banners.

Eleanor Gordon reviews the evidence that American intervention has only produced fertile ground for new threats to emerge in its wake. She suggests that after the original concern about Russia's supposed threat to oil supplies disappeared, the combination of American naiveté, career-minded politicians and military figures, and the absence of an up-close and personal engagement with the war such as would have been the case with a draft, has prevented the natural emergence of possible alternatives to war. But she adds that perhaps this underestimates the power and influence of forces who value the creation of a supposed existential threat to justify increased military spending, on the one hand, and a disregard for human rights and civil liberties on the other, in the name of national security. It can also help domestically by distracting attention from unpopular domestic policies and unite people against a common evil.

There are places in the book, however, where she believes Bacevich has made generalizations that over-simplify aspects of the struggles in Kosovo, for example, in describing the Kosovo Liberation Army as terrorists, as aggressors, and opportunists with blood in their eyes. The assumption that the violence leading up to U.S. engagement consisted of "KLA incitements and Serb reprisals" requires a more nuanced appraisal of a complicated situation. While such generalizations are rare in the book, they undermine the argument that the wars in the Balkans should be considered as part of the war for the Greater Middle East. Along with this point, Gordon notes that the book would have benefited from further reflection on the shared and competing discourses within the international community. In the end, however, she concludes that *America's War for the Greater Middle East* combines powerful analysis and brilliant writing on both the micro-level of personalities and peoples' interactions with macro-levels of strategic dynamics. It should urge others with knowledge of what has been done in the name of national security to hold policymakers to account for the resulting endless war.

Sean N. Kalic agrees with the other reviewers that the book's greatest value is its thought-provoking analysis of what the continued use of military power over decades can mean. But he believes that the focus on the 'Carter Doctrine' in the early pages inhibits a wider consideration of the larger dynamic of Cold War relations. Nevertheless, that section does provide a solid footing for the remainder of the book. Kalic sees

Bacevich as channeling Carl Von Clausewitz's warning that achieving a defined military objective – absent a political strategy–can be a hollow victory. Thus during the critical decade after the end of the Cold War, assumptions about being the sole superpower with the ability to influence actions across the globe with military power did nothing to end the growing menace posed by al Qaeda and trans-national terrorism, Kalic suggests that there is a strong echo over the centuries emanating from Thucydides's history of the *Peloponnesian Wars*. As in that long war between Athens and Sparta, the two nations weakened their perspective states, so that only the Persians gained from the struggle. If things continue as they are, concludes Kalic, *America's Greater War for the Middle East* will consume the nation's material and moral reserves and leave little for future generations.[6]

In a major dissent, Peter Mansoor takes issue with Bacevich's book on both specific and general questions it raises, especially the question of whether the Bush/Petreaus "surge" really worked. Mansoor believes it did and cites several sources to support his opinion that the real failures in Iraq were political not military. He is especially critical of Ambassador Christopher Hill, who failed to understand what Washington must do to keep the advantages gained during the surge. He convinced the Obama Administration to support Nouri al-Maliki, "who was also Teheran's candidate for the job," and thus re-started the sectarian wars. More generally, Mansoor believes that Bacevich has not considered the consequences of what could have happened in all the instances highlighted in the book had America stayed its hand, instead of intervening as the only remaining superpower after the Cold War. Would the situations that could have resulted in Kuwait, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq have been even worse from the viewpoint of protecting American security? In sum, Mansoor concludes, Bacevich's harsh criticism "sheds more heat than light on the critical issues facing the United States in the greater Middle East."

One thing seems certain, the debate over policy, and the history of that policy, will continue as it has already become the dark and bloody ground of recent historiography, with the coming of a new administration, with its own set of beliefs and policy proposals.

Participants:

Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations emeritus at Boston University. A graduate of the U. S. Military Academy, he served for twenty-three years as a commissioned officer in the United States Army. He received his Ph. D. in American diplomatic history from Princeton. Before joining the faculty of Boston University in 1998, he taught at West Point and at Johns Hopkins. His most recent books include *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (2016); *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (2013); *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War* (2010); *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (2008); *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (2005); and *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U. S. Diplomacy* (2002). He is the editor of *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (2012)*; The Long War: A New History of U. S. National Security Policy since World War II* (2007); and *Imperial Tense: Problems and*

[6] Bacevich has now written an article, "Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy," that could have been a final chapter in his book, as it describes alternatives to keeping on, keeping on. *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2016), 36-44.

Prospects of American Empire (2003). Bacevich's essays and reviews have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Foreign Affairs, New Left Review, The Nation, The New Republic,* and *The London Review of Books* among other publications.

Lloyd C. Gardner is Professor Emeritus of History at Rutgers University. A Wisconsin Ph.D., he is the author or editor of more than fifteen books on American foreign policy, including *Safe For Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 1984), *Approaching Vietnam* (W.W. Norton, 1988), and *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Ivan R. Dee, 1995). He has been president of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Affairs. His most recent book is *The War on Leakers: National Security and Democracy from Eugene Debs to Edward Snowden* (The New Press, 2016).

Dr. Eleanor Gordon is a Lecturer in Conflict and Security Studies in the Department of Criminology, University of Leicester, where she has developed and delivers the MSc programme in Security, Conflict and International Development (SCID). Eleanor also works as a consultant for a number of conflict prevention NGOs, universities, government agencies and the UN, primarily on issues related to building security and justice after conflict. She has also served in various management and advisory roles in the field of security, the rule of law and human rights in conflict-affected environments, primarily in the Balkans for a decade, with the UN and other international organisations. Her research draws on her practical experience and often investigates the discrepancy between policy and practice. Her current research and practice focusses on ways in which inclusive, bottom-up and context-specific approaches to building security and justice after conflict can be promoted. Recent publications include: Eleanor Gordon, A. Welch, and E. Roos, "Security Sector Reform and the Paradoxical Tension between Local Ownership and Gender Equality", *Stability: Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1) p.Art. 53 (2015), 1-23; Eleanor Gordon (ed.), *SCID Reader: Researching and Working in Conflict-Affected Environments* (Leicester: University of Leicester, 2015); Eleanor Gordon, "Security Sector Reform, Statebuilding and Local Ownership: Securing the State or its People?" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 8:2-3 (2014): 126-148; Eleanor Gordon, "Security Sector Reform, Local Ownership and Community Engagement", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 3:1 (2014): 25, 1-18

Sean N. Kalic is a Cold War historian. He has a B.A. in Political Science and International Studies from the University of Denver, a M.S. in Defense and Strategic Studies from Missouri State University, a M.A. in History from Youngstown State University, and a PhD in History from Kansas State University. He lectures and publishes widely on topics such as transnational terrorism, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War security environment. Significant publications include *Combating a Modern Hydra: Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism* (2005), *Thinking about War: Past, Present and Future* (2011), and *US Presidents and the Militarization of Space, 1946-1967* (2012). He is a Professor in the Department of Military History at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College where he has taught since 2004**.**

Peter Mansoor is the General Raymond E. Mason Jr. Chair of Military History at The Ohio State University. He served two tours in the Iraq War, as a brigade commander in Baghdad and Karbala in 2003-2004 and as executive officer to General David Petraeus in 2007-2008. He is the author of two memoirs/histories of the Iraq War: *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) and *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

Dipali Mukhopadhyay is an assistant professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, where she is a faculty affiliate of the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies. She recently published the book *Warlords, Strongman Governors and State Building in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), now available in paperback. Prior to joining Columbia, Mukhopadhyay spent 2011 as a post-doctoral fellow at Princeton University. She has been conducting research in Afghanistan since 2007 and made her first trip to the country in 2004. She has been conducting research along the Turkey-Syria border since 2013. Mukhopadhyay received her doctorate from Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and her B.A. from Yale University.

Douglas Porch is Distinguished Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. A Ph.D. from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University, his books include *The French Secret Services. From the Dreyfus Affair to Desert Storm* (1995), *The French Foreign Legion. A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (1991) which won prizes both in the United States and in France, *The Conquest of the Sahara, The Conquest of Morocco, The March to the Marne. The French Army 1871-1914, The Portuguese Armed Forces and the Revolution*, and *Army and Revolution. France 1815-1844. Wars of Empire*, part of the Cassell History of Warfare series, appeared in October 2000 and in paperback in 2001. *The Path to Victory. The Mediterranean Theater in World War II,* a selection of the Military History Book Club, the History Book Club, and the Book of the Month Club, was published by Farrar, Straus, Giroux and Macmillan in the UK in May 2004 as *Hitler's Mediterranean Gamble*. It received the Award for Excellence in U.S. Army Historical Writing from The Army Historical Foundation. His latest book, *Counterinsurgency. The Origins, Development and Myths of the New War of War,* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2013 and has been placed on the Army Chief of Staff's reading list for all officers. He spent 2014-2015 as Academic Visitor at St Antony's College, Oxford and Visiting Fellow at Oxford University's Changing Character of War Programme. At present, he is researching a book on French combatants in World War II.

Review by Eleanor Gordon, University of Leicester

Andrew J. Bacevich's latest book, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, is an immensely engaging, powerful and important book. Given the scope and seriousness of the subject matter, it is also an unusually engaging and accessible book, as well as exceptionally well written. This is borne, perhaps, of the motivation to affect change and thus ensure that what he writes is accessed by a readership beyond academia. The importance of the conclusions he draws for policy makers and those otherwise engaged in or witness to U.S. involvement in the Middle East also demands that communication is clear, direct and persuasive.

In this book, Bacevich challenges the commonly held assumption that current-day U.S. engagement in the Middle East is, for the most part, a response to 9/11. Instead, he traces back the conflict almost forty years to Operation Eagle Claw (24-25 April 1980); a failed U.S. military rescue mission in Iran–hence, the title of this book. He also questions the logic of continued engagement, asking why, after four decades, "the world's mightiest army has achieved so little" (362). Instead, this engagement has resulted in devastating the Middle East, undermining U.S. national security and, of course, casualties in the millions. Those who were the ostensible "subjects of America's benevolence" (362) suffered, by far, the greatest harm. Nonetheless, the U.S. military also suffered thousands of combat deaths. Moreover, as Bacevich highlights, "[s]ince 1990, virtually no American soldiers have been killed in action anywhere except the Greater Middle East" (11). This is in stark contrast to the fact that between the end of World War II and 1980 "virtually no American soldiers were killed in action while serving in that region" (11).

Bacevich also asks why, in light of this evident failure, the U.S. has not disengaged. In other words "why in the face of such unsatisfactory outcomes has the United States refused to chart a different course? In short, why can't we win? And since we haven't won, why can't we get out?" (362)

In answering these questions, Bacevich details how U.S. military power, and its increasing use over time, does not address threats to U.S. interests but, rather, helps generate new threats. The failure to achieve what was ostensibly sought in the War for the Greater Middle East–namely to "alleviate the dysfunction" (367) in the region and by so doing "enhance American freedom, abundance and security" (370)–can be seen to be the result of the use of military force which "rarely stayed long enough to finish the job" (367). As a result, Bacevich argues, rather than "intimidating, U.S. military efforts have annoyed, incited, and generally communicated a lack of both competence and determination" (367). Moreover, the initial rationale that prompted engagement in the Greater Middle East ceased to exist; no longer was U.S. access to natural oil and gas reserves dependent on the Middle East. The strategic purpose for engagement had changed over time and, thus, lost focus and clarity. This was compounded by an expansion of the scope of engagement–an increase in the number of countries in which the U.S. forces were operating as well as the breadth of the mission objectives.

Bacevich contends that the reasons why, in the face of continued failure, the U.S, has yet to disengage from the Greater Middle East include the persistence of an illusion held by many among the political elite that victory can be won "if only a smart president will make the requisite smart moves" (363). Such an illusion, Bacevich argues, is predicated upon a collective naiveté within Washington that, for instance, perpetuates the belief that only those responsible for developing U.S. policy in the Greater Middle East "are able to discern the historical forces at work in the region" (363) by dint of their enlightened views and "adherence to a suitably correct worldview" (363). This collective naiveté further extends to the commonly-held assumption

that the U.S. also has the ability to control the historical forces at work in the region, and that military power provides the most efficient method for doing so–in fact for surmounting any significant threat. The assumption that the U.S. has the ability to control and conquer 'them' rests upon the belief that the United States is good and that good will triumph. This lack of self-awareness among many Americans–not least concerning "what the United States is fighting for and whom it is fighting against" (365)–combined with a predilection for simple binaries (good versus evil, us versus them), and a conflation of morality with the ability to consume, has paradoxically perpetuated the belief that success will be forthcoming while undermining any chance of that actually happening.

Continued military engagement in the Greater Middle East, despite the recurrent failure, is also the result of "the lack of any serious challenge to the war's perpetuation" (368). This is due to many factors, including that career-minded politicians "find it more expedient to "support the troops" (and therefore the war) than to question the war's efficacy or to propose alternative approaches to satisfying U.S. objectives in the Islamic world" (368). Bacevich also draws attention to the lack of awareness among the general public of the harm caused by the war as a significant contributory factor to the absence of challenge. Many groups and individuals also benefit from armed conflict, including, for instance, those who may profit or gain power through increased military spending.

This is perhaps a key point which warranted further discussion by Bacevich. Rather than explanations to be found in a collective naiveté within Washington or oblivion among the broader public, perhaps the main reason for continued engagement in the Greater Middle East despite recurrent failure is, in fact, that such failure is of use to U.S. decision-makers and those who influence them. Beyond the military-industrial complex, the creation of an existential threat to U.S. interests has a use value in that it can, paradoxically, justify increased military spending as well as the curtailment of human rights and civil liberties in the name of promoting national security. The paradox is, of course, that continued military engagement and disregard for human rights principles helps to create the very threat that was presented as hovering like a sceptre at the start. Such a scenario also offers the opportunity to promote a discourse of 'good versus evil' and elevate the U.S. as the main defender of 'good.' It can also help domestically; to distract attention away from unpopular domestic policies and unite people against a common 'evil.' Rather than arguing that those responsible for developing U.S. policy in the Greater Middle East are simply naïve, perhaps Bacevich could question whether there is an altogether less forgiving explanation for continued failure at such cost.

Bacevich concludes his critical analysis of U.S. engagement in the Greater Middle East by arguing that not only is this engagement costly–in human and financial terms–and destined to fail, but that it is distracting the attention of the U.S. away from more pressing concerns. These pressing concerns include changing geopolitical dynamics and new security threats, such as the effects of climate change. Aside from drawing valuable resources and attention away from such issues, the continued war in the Greater Middle East, contrary to the ostensible aims of the U.S., undermines U.S. "freedom, abundance, and security" (370). Bacevich also contends that the aspiration to 'shape' the Greater Middle East matters less than whether the U.S. "can reshape itself, restoring effectiveness to self-government, providing for sustainable and equitable prosperity, and extracting from a vastly diverse culture something to hold in common of greater moment than shallow digital enthusiasms and the worship of celebrity" (370).

The brilliance of Bacevich's writing and analysis, combined with the breadth of focus and the significance of his argument, has made this book one of the most enjoyable and important I have read for a long time. His analytical skills have enabled him to see patterns in seemingly disparate events over the last four decades, as

well as to challenge dominant discourses which allow such events to unfold or assign different explanations to such events once they have occurred. He demonstrates an impressive ability to analyse both micro-level detail regarding personalities and peoples' interactions as well as macro-level strategic dynamics, recognising both are crucial to the development of foreign policy and international relations.

Covering such enormous ground as U.S. military engagement in the Greater Middle East over four decades, the occasional generalisation is unavoidable. The portrait of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is one example. Bacevich's criticism of General Wesley Clark and others who simplified the conflicts in the Balkans (by dismissing political and historical complexities and instead blaming ruthless, immoral and self-serving leaders) could be levied at Bacevich himself when he describes the KLA very much in one-dimensional terms– as terrorists, as aggressors, as opportunists with "membership consisting almost entirely of Muslims with blood in their eyes" (180). While this is undoubtedly true of some within its ranks, the history of oppression of Kosovars that led to the formation of the KLA is glossed over, and their opportunistic machinations are presented as indicative of their deviance, while with other armed groups they could have equally been presented as effective military tactics or part of a clear military strategy. The assumption that the violence leading up to U.S. engagement in Kosovo consisted of "KLA incitements and Serb reprisals" (181) is a value-laden statement which required substantiation or a more nuanced appraisal of what many Kosovars and others would have regarded as Serb incitements and aggression and KLA reprisals and defence. Additionally, assigning blame generically to Kosovars for the atrocities against Kosovo Serbs in the immediate aftermath of the departure of Serb forces from Kosovo is akin to blaming all Serbs for the treatment of Kosovars previously. While such generalisations are rare and unavoidable, in this case they potentially undermine part of the argument that Bacevich is making regarding U.S. engagement in the conflicts in the Balkans being part of the War for the Greater Middle East. The messiness, complexity, multiplicity of agency and motivations, and competing agendas and strategies that characterise the conflicts in the Balkans and international engagement therein are occasionally absent in Bacevich's analysis, which potentially challenges his main argument that there is coherence, if not logic, in U.S. military policy in countries where there are sizeable Muslim populations.

Part of the unique strength of this book is Bacevich's ability to draw together seemingly disconnected events over a significant period of time and a large geography. While it is invaluable to identify patterns where others seek to decontextualize, sometimes there are anomalies, accidents and mistakes; sometimes there is no greater picture, no scheme, no overarching endeavour. The history of modern warfare is arguably defined as much by error, bluff, and oversight as it is by strategy, design, and principle. The U.S. engagement in the Balkans could be seen as having no part to play in the War for the Greater Middle East, other than to give false credence to the ability of U.S. military power to secure quick wins, which paved the way for a lot of what was to follow in the Middle East. U.S. engagement in the Balkans also demonstrates "weaknesses in U.S. military practice" (196) which continued beyond conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, such as a lack of strategic wisdom and generalship combined with a belief that U.S. military power is the best way to enforce global peace.

Bacevich argues that these weaknesses could be overlooked without including U.S. engagement in the Balkans in the narrative on the War for the Greater Middle East. It is true that U.S. engagement in the Balkans is likely to have informed subsequent U.S. military engagements. Looking at U.S. engagement in the Balkans can also enable the observer to see a pattern of behaviours and beliefs which have sustained failure to achieve successive mission statements and contributed to the creation of new threats. However, history and context always influence and it is important to look to the past and the wider context to find explanations for today as

well as projections for tomorrow. Previous military engagements will, therefore, inform current and future practice and perceptions. This does not necessarily mean that U.S. engagement in the Balkans is part of a wider strategy regarding the Greater Middle East, unless, perhaps, religion–and its comparative marginalisation in the Balkans–has been instrumental to military engagement.

What most clearly comes across in this book as the reasons for U.S. engagement in the Greater Middle East and the reasons for recurrent failures, however, is that the U.S. has not always considered the complexity of the context in which it operates and the way that context changes over time when it comes to developing military strategy; that military engagement has, thus, lacked coherent and logical strategy; and that U.S. naiveté has led to the assumption that it alone should and can police the 'new world order' and, most crucially, that military means are the most effective way of doing so. While the Muslim identity of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Kosovars (Kosovo Albanians) was undoubtedly of relevance "to observers outside of the West" (199), the overriding factors which determined U.S. engagement in the Balkans, as it comes across in the book, concern promoting the continued credibility of NATO after the Cold War, further elevating the status of the U.S. on the world stage, 'shaping' the world to that which would benefit U.S. interests, and distracting attention away from domestic problems.

It is also unclear whether the relevance of U.S. military engagement in the conflicts in the Balkans to the narrative on the War for the Greater Middle East is, according to Bacevich, because Bosniaks and Kosovars wore "their Islamic identity lightly" (198) and the U.S. wanted to promote secularisation on a global stage, or because intervention demonstrated that "Islam did not pose an insurmountable obstacle" to the U.S. policing the "new world order" (174). Or was the relevance to be found in the belief that sustained U.S. military presence need not antagonise non-American Muslim populations, but could "reassure or pacify" (176)? Having spent ten years in the Balkans in the aftermath of the conflicts, I am less inclined to regard religion as of central importance to those conflicts and the reason why external actors intervened. Regardless, it is possible to see the U.S. engagement in the conflicts in the Balkans as an enterprise which would have benefitted the U.S. at home and abroad, beyond any strategy regarding the Middle East.

The book also provokes some questions, which is to be expected given its scope and the magnitude of the charges it levies. "What next?" is the most obvious question: should the U.S. withdraw militarily from the Greater Middle East or would this be another example of not staying "long enough to finish the job" (367)? Another question concerns the applicability of the charges levied at the U.S. to other countries. To what extent can the critique of U.S. military policy in the Middle East be applied to other countries engaged in the region? To what extent does collective naiveté within capitals, ignorance of foreign affairs and the harms of war among the general population, the existence of career-minded politicians who support 'our troops,' and the self-interest of the arms industry, exist beyond the U.S.? These questions matter if we are to have a better understanding of the extent of the weaknesses in U.S. military policy as well as a broader understanding of threats and how they are likely to develop and be met on the global platform. At times, the policy and actions of the U.S. appear to be disconnected from the rest of the world. This is, of course, an implicit criticism of Bacevich's–that lack of consideration of changing global dynamics and threats, and absence of critical reflection on the legitimacy of engagement, resulted in military policy and military engagement that were neither informed of nor responsive to context. However, further reflection on the shared and competing discourses within the broader international community would have added further light on recent developments in the Middle East and further shared the burden of responsibility–which is important if lessons are to be learnt by the U.S. and beyond.

It is a testament to any great book that the reader is left with questions concerning the greater implications of the work. It is a brilliant book, which is exceptionally engaging and well written. Most crucially, its argument is of singular importance; that the persistent use of military force in the Greater Middle East will continue to be counterproductive and will continue increase the number and level of threats that such engagement ostensibly addresses.

What makes this book especially powerful is that Bacevich is not only an eminent scholar but also has direct experience of what he is writing about. He is a retired U.S. Army Colonel having served twenty years. He has also experienced the tragic effects of U.S. engagement in the Middle East, when his son, Andrew Bacevich Jr., died in Iraq in 2007 as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Bacevich writes in an impassioned, persuasive, and clear way the message that most needs to be communicated and understood in today's global politics; that U.S. military engagement in the Greater Middle East is harmful to those within the region as well as within the U.S. and beyond, and is distracting attention and resources from the issues that really require attention at this moment in time. More broadly, Bacevich's book contains many important messages for policy makers within the U.S. and other countries which intervene in the affairs of others. These messages include the need to ensure – and regularly ensure–that there is clarity and unity of purpose; frequently assess the strategic landscape, identifying shifts in global power dynamics and new or emerging threats; and assume that military action alone is never effective in responding to threats, and is likely to increase the number of threats and their magnitude. For me, this book also encourages increased awareness of what authorities in the U.S. and elsewhere do in the name of national interest, global peace, and world order. It also urges those equipped with this knowledge to hold these authorities to account.

Review by Sean N. Kalic, US Army Command and General Staff College

In *America's War for the Greater Middle East* Andrew J. Bacevich has written a deeply thought-provoking and insightful history of U.S. military involvement in the Middle East since the Carter administration. He specifically states that the objective of the work is to provide a "preliminary walk-around" of U.S. "efforts to determine the fate and future of the Greater Middle East" (xiii). However, beyond just providing a historical narrative of contemporary U.S. military excursions into the Middle East, Bacevich has produced a much more significant book that offers an alternative understanding of the long-term consequences of the continued use of military power in the Middle East by the United States. Bluntly, Bacevich states "We have not won; We are not winning; and simply trying harder is unlikely to produce a different outcome" (xiii).

With this bold statement in mind, Bacevich builds a slow and methodical case outlining how all U.S. Presidents from Jimmy Carter to Barak Obama came to see military power as the means by which the United States could reshape and stabilize the Middle East, while also maintaining access to oil. As he builds his convincing argument, Bacevich outlines the evolution of how U.S. presidents from Carter to Barack Obama have come to believe in the use of military power as the means to "restore peace," "spread democracy," "protect the innocent," "promote the rule of law," and "advance human rights." (xix) Though these are worthy objectives, he questions whether the pursuit of these objectives through military means have trapped the United States into an entrenched position through which deeper involvement in the Middle East has grown and may continue to suck U.S. troops into the quagmire.

Bacevich presents his argument by breaking his work into three sections. The first section, "Preliminaries," focuses on the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush as they extemporaneously dealt with problems in the Middle East as distractions within the larger Cold War and immediate post-Cold War context. The Iranian Revolution (1979), U.S. intervention in Lebanon (1983), the bombing of Libya (1986), the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), oil tanker reflagging in the Persian Gulf (1987-1988), and Operation Desert Storm (1991) served as steps by which the United States saw the need to use military power as a means to maintain access to oil and shape the Middle East. Though Bacevich highlights how the Cold War containment policy of the United States initially drove this rekindled interest in the Middle East, he does not focus on the larger geopolitical and strategic issues of the late 1970s and 1980s, but rather strives to highlight how Carter and Reagan, specifically, came to see military action as a means to maintain U.S. access to the Middle East.[1] From a Cold War historian's perspective, this section is weak because the larger dynamic relationships among Cold War factions does not get much attention or analysis. However, as one continues through the book, the foundation established in 'Preliminaries' works well as it provides a solid and well-built footing to construct the remainder of the narrative.

[1] To gain insight into the how the Reagan administration specifically failed to understand the reality of the complex environment of the greater Middle East one need only read Timothy J. Geraghty's *Peacekeeps at War: Beirut 1983-The Marine Commander Tells His Story* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009). In his memoirs, Geraghty provides a unique perspective based on his position as commander of the U.S. Marines in Beirut. A consistent theme in his work is the administration's failure to understand the reality of the tactical and strategic situation in Lebanon, as well as the in the Middle East. Consistently, the administration believed that the presence of U.S. troops and the flexing of U.S. military might would be enough to stabilize Lebanon. In making this point, Geraghty's book confirms Bacevich's thesis.

The second section "Entr'acte" covers the period 1992-2000. This is a critical period for the United States and the world. After describing how the perceptive stability of the Cold War withered into the tumultuous post-Cold War and post-Desert Storm world, Bacevich skillfully begins to demonstrate how the fixation with using military power in the Middle East, especially after the triumphant victory in Operation Desert Storm, became the proven method to advance U.S. objectives in the Middle East. Covering the various peace and stability operations of the 1990s from protecting Kurds fleeing Iraq in Operation Provide Comfort, to sending U.S. troops to Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, Bacevich adds nuance to his argument, by subtly making the case that one of the significant consequences of Operation Desert Storm was that the United States became fully obsessed with conventional military power as a means to stabilize, protect, and advance various political agendas in the wider Middle East. Despite a lackluster record of success of these military incursions in the 1990s, the pattern persisted.

The importance of this second section is that Bacevich focuses on the lack of any grand strategy in this turbulent time. Hence, the various U.S. military adventures focused on achieving ill-defined and ambiguous foreign policy objectives.[2] Overall, Bacevich channels Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz by skillfully identifying how the use of military power to achieve a defined military objective can be a hollow victory when it is not tied to an overall political objective.[3] Though this may seem like an obscure military history point, the reality is that Bacevich hits on a very important historiographic point by questioning the accepted narrative that between 1991 and 2001 the United States was the sole superpower and could readily influence actions across the globe with its superior military power.[4] This perception, intertwined with the growth of al Qaeda and the need to deal with transnational terrorists organizations, solidifies the argument made by Bacevich that the application of military force did little to stabilize or pacify the region.

In the third and final section, "Main Card" Bacevich presents the end result of this foray into the Greater Middle East. Working through Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraq Freedom, and the various follow-on operations and deployments Bacevich presents a fantastic, yet brief history of the evolution of U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan to make the point that the United States did not win and is not

[2] By no means is this point exclusive to Bacevich. See Peter Hutchausen, *America's Small Wars: A Short History of U.S. Engagements from the Fall of Saigon to Baghdad* (New York: Penguin, 2003), xiii-xv. Hutchausen makes the point that U.S. interventions tend to be successful when presidential administrations have well-defined foreign policy objectives, which allows the military to focus on defining and executing military objectives to achieve the defined foreign policy goals. Similar points in relation to U.S. peace and stability operations can be found in James Dobbins, *et al.*, *America's Role In Nation Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation), 1-3; Frank N. Schubert, *Other Than War: The American Military Experience and Operations in the Post-Cold War Decade* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint History Office, 2013), 1-4.

[3] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, editors and translators, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 80-81.

[4] Jack F. Matlock. *Super-Power Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray-and How to Return to Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3-31. Matlock confirms Bacevich's assessment by providing a stellar account of how the fabrication of the myth that the United States won the Cold War by itself had a significant impact on how the United States acted and behaved in the post-Cold War security environment. Reliance on overt military power and the lack of recognition of how to use coalitions and alliances to better effect have become hallmarks of the America in the period since 1989, according to Matlock.

wining.[5] In making his case he demonstrates how the lack of an overall grand strategy was supplanted by a neo-conservative obsession with "establishing the efficacy of preventative war," "the prerogative of removing regimes deemed odious," and the need to "bring neoliberal standards to the Islamic world" (240). These key tenets of the Bush doctrine drove U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet Bacevich demonstrates how these tenets failed to synchronize into a coherent grand strategy, which ultimately led U.S. Generals in Iraq and Afghanistan to focus on tactical and operational victories, which had little effect on changing the larger social, political, and cultural dynamics of the region. The end result was a squandering of lives and resources by the United States for little to no gain.

Bacevich has written a very powerful book that gains momentum as one works through the pages and sections. In the end, this book has much in common with Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*.[6] Thucydides wrote his history of the Peloponnesian War as a caution against the unintended consequences of war.[7] In the course of capturing his history Thucydides highlights how embarking on the use of military power in the name of "fear, honor, and interest" resulted in a long war that fundamentally challenged the power and stability of Athens, Sparta, and the Greek world. At the end of the war, Athens and Sparta had fundamentally changed and failed to recognize how their obsession with war weakened not only their respective states, but also the region as a whole, in favor of the Persians. Bacevich makes a similar argument with respect to contemporary America. His point is that the "perpetuation of war in the Greater Middle East is not enhancing American freedom, abundance, and security," but is rather eroding them (370). Further paralleling Thucydides, he cautions that if America wants to preserve its privileged position, it must focus on "restoring the effectiveness of self-government, providing for sustainable and equitable prosperity, and extract[ing] from a vastly diverse culture something to hold in common," beyond the material culture of celebrity worship (370). The concluding chapter "Generational War" serves as an exceptional analysis of the overall impact of America's foreign policy since at the end of the Cold War, which has fixated on using military power to reshape the Greater Middle East. Beyond being an insightful piece of scholarship, Bacevich's analysis can easily be read as Greek history through which those interested in the future of the United States must read and think about the use of military power by the United States so that future generations are not reading a repeat of the Melian Dialogue.[8]

[5] A supporting opinion can be found in Terry H. Anderson, *Bush's Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 235.

[6] Robert B. Strassler, editor, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

[7] Strassler, *Thucydides,* xvii-xx.

[8] Strassler, *Thucydides*, 350-357.

Review by Peter Mansoor, The Ohio State University

Andrew Bacevich, Professor Emeritus at Boston University and retired U.S. Army veteran, posits an American war for the greater Middle East (in which he includes the Balkans, Southwest Asia, and North Africa) waged and fought largely with the military instrument of power from 1980 to the present. Far from providing stability, these conflicts, Bacevich argues, have enmeshed the United States in intractable conflict in the Islamic world under the rubric of the 'Long War.' The results of military intervention in the region have been indecisive at best and have often exacerbated the very problems they were meant to solve. Bacevich connects the various facets of U.S. Middle Eastern policy in a larger framework that sees them as part of a broader, holistic struggle, a "monumental march to folly" (in the words of the dust jacket). His sources include memoirs, journalists' accounts, secondary accounts, and government documents.

For more than three decades, U.S. policymakers have advanced far-reaching goals for the greater Middle East, couched in the expansive rhetoric of democracy promotion, human rights, and rule of law. But the means chosen to achieve these political ends–the use of American military power in continual conflict against a variety of adversaries–have proven inappropriate to the task. As a result the United States remains embroiled in a variety of conflicts it cannot win in a region that defies the power of the United States to bring stability and order to it.

The reason for America's struggle for the Middle East is clear–access to abundant, cheap energy that fuels the world's economy. Beginning with President Jimmy Carter, U.S. policymakers have feared that others (the Soviet Union, Iraq, Iran, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS]) would either dominate the region or destabilize it enough to upset the energy markets dependent on oil. As a result of this dynamic, successive U.S. administrations have crafted policy to support a slew of corrupt and often illegitimate governments in the region. These policies created a stable order in the Middle East–until they did not. Beginning with the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, U.S. policy in the Middle East has faltered, contending against historical, cultural, and religious currents it is ill-prepared to address. The use of military force to counter these tides is akin to trying to sweep back the ocean with a broom.

The Carter doctrine, which stated that the United States would use military force if necessary to defend its national interests in the Persian Gulf, moved the U.S. military center of gravity inexorably towards the Middle East and its oil. With the Shah deposed by the Iranian Revolution, America lacked powerful, effective local allies with the capabilities needed to secure the region in tacit alliance with the United States. Gulf Arab states could not or would not step up to their own defense. So the U.S. military entered the void, first with the creation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force and later with the formation of the U.S. Central Command. U.S. arms flowed into the region, shoring up the militaries of America's partners, which eventually included the Afghan mujahideen. The military framework was now established for America's wars in the Middle East.

Assumptions that should have been questioned and debated were not. Policymakers did not ask whether the Soviet Union really coveted the Gulf, whether America's allies were really incapable of fending for themselves, whether American military power was the right tool with which to address the issues at stake in the Middle East, and what historical, cultural, and religious factors needed to be considered as the United States devoted itself to protecting and stabilizing the region.

The end of the Cold War did not bring with it a reexamination of U.S. Middle Eastern policy. Policy makers and military planners quickly substituted Iraq for the Soviet Union as the greatest danger to the world's energy stores in the Gulf, and created military contingency plans accordingly. The subsequent 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the overwhelming coalition victory in Operation DESERT STORM seemed to confirm the wisdom of these policies and associated strategy. Earlier warnings of the inability of U.S. military operations to alter political realities in the region–in Lebanon, in Libya, and in the Gulf–went unheeded and unexamined. The efficacy of American military power to stabilize the Middle East became an article of faith, at least in certain segments of the policy and think-tank worlds in Washington.

The limitations of U.S. military superiority in resolving political challenges soon became apparent in northern Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In each case it was far easier to embroil U.S. troops on the ground than to have their presence contribute meaningfully to enduring solutions to seemingly intractable political problems. Only an enduring commitment of blood and treasure would suffice, as it finally did in the Balkans beginning in 1995. But Americans were (and are) wary of such commitments, echoing General George C. Marshall's comment that "A democracy cannot fight a Seven Years War."[1] He was wrong on that count, but only by a matter of degree.

Bacevich saves his harshest criticism for the extended conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately, having made some very good points about the flawed strategy that resulted in protracted wars in both countries, he overreaches. "The war against the Taliban became an exercise in strategic irrelevance," he writes, "as if in response to Southern secession, Abraham Lincoln had sent the Union Army to Brazil to liberate the black multitudes held in bondage there" (234). However, given that 9/11 was planned by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda from their sanctuary in Afghanistan, the war there was more equivalent to Lincoln sending the Union Army to invade South Carolina, the hotbed of southern rebellion, and then keeping it there in a messy war of reconstruction against Confederate guerrillas—which is just about what happened historically.

Bacevich's recounting of the surge in Iraq repeats a number of the myths that skeptics have put forward since 2007: that the Sunni Awakening would have accomplished as much as it did without the surge, that sectarian cleansing had already stabilized Baghdad by early 2007, and that the Joint Special Operations Command eviscerated al-Qaeda in Iraq with nightly raids, which did more to stabilize Iraq than the hundreds of thousands of coalition and Iraqi soldiers living among and securing the Iraqi people. To these myths he could have added a few more that doubters have advanced: that General George Casey's strategy of accelerating transition to Iraqi Security Forces could have achieved the same outcome as the surge had the Bush administration given it more time, that the Jaish al-Mahdi cease-fire of August 2007 (declared by the group's leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, after a gunfight among Shi'a Muslims in the shrine city of Karbala) took that group out of the fight and thereby changed the strategic calculus in Iraq, that the surge was merely a forlorn attempt to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, that Multi-National Force-Iraq under Casey had already instituted all the counterinsurgency principles used during the surge under General David Petraeus and Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, or that U.S. commanders simply paid off the insurgents by turning them into "Sons of Iraq." All of these suppositions are either misleading or demonstrably false, as I argue in my

[1] Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), 5.

history of the surge.[2] Instead, Bacevich's book relies on the highly polemical *Wrong Turn* by Gian Gentile, whose twenty-eight page chapter on Iraq reminds one of Winston Churchill's comment on his own account of the Second World War, "This is not history; this is my case."[3]

In fact, the surge acted as a catalyst that enabled various factors at work in Iraq to come together and reduce violence by more than 90 percent in just eighteen months. Bacevich counters, "Ultimately, the surge had no bearing whatsoever on the war's outcome" (288). True enough, but why was this so? As Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor point out in *The Endgame* and Emma Sky reiterates in *The Unraveling*, the surge led to a resumption of political discourse and gave Iraqis the opportunity to put in place a government more representative of their interests.[4] Sunnis voted in the elections of 2009 and 2010 in larger numbers proportionate to their share of the population than even the Shi'ites and Kurds. When their chosen candidate, the secular Shi'ite Ayad Allawi, won the presidential election of 2010, the Sunnis seemed poised to regain a share of power in Baghdad. But it was not to be. Against the advice of the senior U.S. commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, the Obama administration (counseled by U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill) threw its political support behind the highly sectarian sitting Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, who was also Tehran's candidate for the job.[5] So instead of supporting the political process, the Obama administration allowed a backroom deal to keep the authoritarian Nouri al-Maliki in power. So much for democracy. Denied the fruits of their victory at the ballot box, the Sunnis soon returned to armed opposition against a regime that spared no effort to alienate them. The withdrawal of U.S. forces at the end of 2011 was merely confirmation that the war had been lost politically in the previous two years.

This is where Bacevich's argument about the efficacy of the use of military force in the Middle East falls apart. He decries the lack of political sophistication among America's general officers, but during and after the surge they showed a better grasp of Iraq's political dynamics than civilian policy makers, with the sole exception of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, who departed the position in early 2009. The Obama administration gets a pass for its politico-strategic errors in what should have been the war's endgame. In fact, the surge succeeded spectacularly, but the gains were thrown away–not by clueless generals, but by civilian policy

[2] Peter R. Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). See Chapter 10 for a discussion of why the surge worked and what it accomplished.

[3] Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), Chapter 4; Churchill quotation from C. Brian Kelly, *Best Little Stories from the Life and Times of Winston Churchill* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2008), 173.

[4] Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), 688-689; *Emma Sky, The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 238-239.

[5] For a devastating critique of Ambassador Christopher Hill's leadership at the U.S Embassy in Iraq, see Sky, *The Unraveling*, 312-313. For Hill's backing of Maliki as a "Shia strongman" best positioned to govern Iraq, see 322. Hill's own comment on the election, "I concluded we needed to focus on making a better Maliki than he had been in his first four-year term, rather than engage in a quixotic effort to try to oust him," is at Christopher Hill, "How the Obama Administration Ignored Iraq," *Politico*, October 2, 2014, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/how-the-obama-administration-disowned-iraq-111565?o=0.

makers ignorant about the political dynamics at play in Baghdad and intent on ending the war at any cost. The cost was high–and the counter is still clicking.

Bacevich defines counterinsurgency as a "theology" and offers a straw man depiction of it in action (315). However, in the right circumstances it is the best tool to use in the search for victory against an insurgent enemy. Bacevich believes counterinsurgency means less fighting and more nation-building. In fact, more U.S. soldiers and Iraqi insurgents were killed during the surge in 2007-2008 than at any other stage of the Iraq War. The same held true for the Afghan surge in 2010-2011. Properly executed counterinsurgency involves plenty of fighting, but for the purpose of controlling the population, upon whom insurgents rely for sustenance and support. Bacevich does not accept this view, and his book suggests that counterinsurgency is an anti-American way of war best consigned to the dust bin of history. This stance brings to mind the comment of Dr. Conrad Crane, one of the principal authors of the December 2006 version of Field Manual 23-4 (*Counterinsurgency*), on the U.S. military's penchant for forgetting counterinsurgency lessons learned after each occurrence: "We will never be able to never do this again."[6]

Bacevich paints the war for the greater Middle East as being on autopilot, with operations conducted against groups such as the Islamic State "because it [Washington] couldn't think of anything better to do" (344). Witty, but wrong. The Obama administration finally joined the war against the Islamic State when the jihadists threatened the Yazidi people with extinction. The operation continues to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the Islamic State because of the threats it poses to U.S national security and its allies: terrorism, waves of refugees, and the destabilization of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.[7] One can debate whether or not these goals are worth fighting for (or against), but one cannot argue they do not exist.

The larger and more important question raised by the book is whether or not U.S. military intervention in the Middle East since 1980 has done more harm than good. Clearly Bacevich is arguing the former case, but his argument begs the question as to what the Middle East would look like today absent U.S. intervention over the past 35 years. Here some counterfactual history would have been useful. Would U.S. national security interests have been better served with Saddam Hussein's Iraq in control of Kuwait? Would the Balkans be better off without the U.S.-led interventions that stopped the civil war in Bosnia and created the state of Kosovo? What would Afghanistan look like today had U.S. forces withdrawn from the country in 2002? What would Iraq look like today had the Obama administration taken a different approach to the war it inherited in 2009? Would the Middle East be better off under Iranian hegemony, or would the wars plaguing the region be even worse absent the United States as a balancing power? If the United States unilaterally removes its military power from the greater Middle East, would the jihadists be satisfied and stop their terrorist assaults on the United States and Western Europe? Absent the examination of policy alternatives, Bacevich's criticism sheds more heat than light on the critical issues facing the United States in the greater Middle East.

[6] Author's conversation with Dr. Conrad Crane, 21 March 2016.

[7] David Hudson, "President Obama: 'We Will Degrade and Ultimately Destroy ISIL'," The White House, 10 September 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/09/10/president-obama-we-will-degrade-and-ultimately-destroy-isil.

Review by Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Columbia University

Andrew Bacevich has long been a force of sober wisdom in American civil society, cautioning Americans to think hard before they act at a time when attention spans have never been shorter and the global landscape of conflict never more complex. In *America's War for the Greater Middle East,* he has produced a withering critique of modern U.S. foreign policy and military engagement in the Muslim world. Any student of the region or, as importantly, of American foreign policy will finish this book with a disturbing and enriched awareness that the current scene of upheaval, death, and destruction has been a long time in the making.

The value of understanding the last several decades of intervention as a singular "war for the Greater Middle East" is multifold. Most obviously, the reader is able to grasp the reality that the United States has been embattled in this part of the world for a very long time; and, despite the dearth of dividends from this investment, there seems to be no end in sight. The struggle has ebbed and flowed, but the very fact that fighting in the Middle East became "an everyday proposition" (142) has fostered a collective failure to reflect on American military ventures in a more conscious and critical way. Bacevich's book, in this sense, is a desperate plea to the American elite and masses to wake up from a collective "slumber" (370) and take stock.

His framing also allows us to see the long game, wherein short-term gains rarely represent lasting victory and, instead, can sow the seeds of future loss. American support for the Afghan *mujahedin* in the 1980s laid the groundwork for the Taliban's rise and the emergence of a safe haven for al Qaeda (60). The widely celebrated 1991 Gulf War was followed by a dark aftermath when the Shiites and Kurds rose up against Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein only to be brutally crushed in "an epic humanitarian disaster" (130-131). Even a surgical humanitarian campaign like the 1992 United Task Force (UNITAF) operation in Somalia laid the groundwork for civil war and a perpetually failing state.[1] Operation Enduring Freedom was similarly impressive as a lean and swift military campaign to rout Afghanistan's Taliban regime in 2001; but it set the stage for a political settlement that elevated some dubious actors (228) while marginalizing others whose inclusion might have preempted a full-throated insurgency.[2]

Finally, Bacevich's longitudinal view reveals the inconsistency, even hypocrisy, of American engagement in a region where memories are long. A single government, that of Saddam Hussein, went from being a client regime to a member of the 'Axis of Evil' in a matter of years; acts of terror and ethnic cleansing went unanswered when undertaken by 'good' rebels in the Balkans (194-195); the 11 September 2001 attacks failed to force a revision of long-standing relationships with countries like Saudi Arabia (220) and Pakistan, even though they were arguably part of the problem; and, having gone to Iraq to 'liberate' the people from authoritarian oppression, the American presence repurposed one of Saddam's infamous prisons, Abu Ghraib,

[1] On this point, see also Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar, "Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategic for Political Reconstruction," *Brookings Occasional Papers* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

[2] See also Barnett R. Rubin, "Peace Building and State-Building in Afghanistan: Constructing Sovereignty for Whose Security?" *Third World* Quarterly 27:1 (2006): 175-185; Dipali Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Rubin, "What I Saw in Afghanistan," *The New Yorker*, 1 July 2015.

into a detention facility that visited "'sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses'" on its inmates (264). These kinds of inconsistencies and contradictions are striking and come into real relief as a result of the author's long view.

Although there are important threads connecting each military episode to the next, the differences in goals and modalities of the various campaigns included in the larger war gives pause as to the utility of lumping each and every one into a single pantheon. The cases of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia, in particular, do not fit as neatly. To start, the Balkans and Horn of Africa of the 1990s were significantly removed from one another's geopolitics, as well as the regional geopolitics of the Middle East, so as to caution against their inclusion in a single theater of conflict. Moreover, these campaigns reflected a moment of post-Cold War experimentation with multilateral intervention into the internal affairs of so-called fragile or failing states. The United Nations secretariat, the Security Council, NATO, *and* the United States recognized an imperative to act–later framed as a 'responsibility to protect'–on behalf of those suffering from famine, ethnic cleansing, mass displacement–against the ravages of civil war.

These military interventions later turned into highly ambitious attempts at reconfiguring state-society relations.[3] In that sense, they did lay important political, institutional, and normative groundwork for the twenty-first century episodes of regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. But they were divorced from the American strategic interests that drove engagement in the Middle East during the Cold War, and they did not foreshadow the central motivation of U.S. involvement in the region after 2001–to counter violent extremism. Having voiced these caveats, it is hard to disagree with Bacevich's ultimate justification for the inclusion of these cases. They did contribute to the emergence of a near-axiomatic "conviction" on the part of many Americans:

> ...that employing U.S. military power to export universal–that is, Western liberal–values will reduce the incidence of violence globally and holds the best and perhaps only hope for ultimately creating a peaceful world...this conviction, deeply embedded in the American collective psyche, provides one of the connecting threads making the ongoing War for the Greater Middle East something more than a collection of disparate and geographically scattered skirmishes (198).

In this sense, in addition to the work this book does to explicate the American role in Middle Eastern affairs, it reveals a number of larger, disconcerting truths about how the United States has come to conceive of its role in the world more generally. There is, first, this near-religious belief amongst many American elites about the inevitability of liberal democracy as the world's most compelling political project.[4] This belief system was no more evident than in the fantastical thinking that shaped the Bush Administration's decision to topple

[3] In her book on U.S. military intervention after the Cold War, Karin von Hippel includes the cases of Somalia and Bosnia alongside Panama and Haiti as American efforts at nation-building and democratization with Germany, Japan, and Vietnam as relevant precursors, in Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On the paradigm of "democratic reconstruction," also see Marina Ottaway, "Promoting Democracy after Conflict: The Difficult Choices," *International Studies Perspectives* 4 (2003): 314-322.

[4] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

Saddam's regime in Iraq, but it is part of a larger conception of the role of American power in the developing world.[5]

Relatedly, Bacevich unearths the unflagging view that the United States can and must do something in the world's most troubled spots: "To keep the world from cracking up, it [is] incumbent upon America to lead. In the long run, the outcome–freedom's ultimate triumph–[is] foreordained" (177). There is a kind of machismo, resonant in the neoconservative doctrine in particular, that propels the establishment towards action even when a clear case forward cannot be made. "Will the United States and its allies have the will to shape the world in conformance with our interests and our principles?" prodded neoconservative champions Robert Kagan and William Kristol with respect to Kosovo (quoted on 191). Even in a case of near-abstinence like Syria, the Obama Administration and its Western allies have expended aid, training, and other forms of support to shape the politics of rebellion in their own liberal–or "moderate"–image (331).

There are real risks involved in the assumption that "doing *something*" (201) is always better than "doing nothing".[6] But, as Bacevich reveals, a forward-leaning posture has become the American posture of default. That posture has been fueled, in his telling, by an obsession with personalities–heroes and villains, in particular. Americans, it seems, grow easily fixated with 'good guys' like Schwarzkopf, Karzai (at least for awhile), and Petraeus as well as 'bad guys' like Gadafi, Milosevic, Saddam, and bin Laden (366). The idea that one man can salvage or sink the fate of an intervention, even a nation, is absurd on its face and, yet, it is a constant throughout the decades. This fixation has consistently enabled policymakers and citizens to elide the messy details of politics, history, and violent conflict in other parts of the world.

These messy details, if properly considered, might have stopped cold at least some of the intervening enthusiasts in our midst. Ideology and over-confidence often overtook thoughtful contemplation, while military prowess and tactical success disguised the challenges that would arise 'the day after.' Conservative commentator, Charles Krauthammer put it best in 2002 when celebrating the fall of the Taliban:

> Afghanistan demonstrated that America has both the power and the will to fight, and that when it does, it prevails...The demonstration of the Afghan war has already deeply changed the Near East. The area's leaders understand that their future lies with us, not bin Laden. Accordingly, they are listening to us (quoted on 232).

Krauthammer's triumphalism would prove excruciatingly mistaken, but the various fallacies embedded in his thinking were only evident to those who attended to and respected the social, political, and economic history of Afghanistan and its neighbors.

The importance of politics and geopolitics–and the failure of policymakers to study them, to distinguish between "symptom" and "disease" (208)–is an important part of Bacevich's critique. There are points,

[5] Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, and Daniel Brumberg, "Democratic Mirage in the Middle East" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2002).

[6] Consider, for example, the argument that a moral hazard can be introduced, in Alan J. Kuperman, "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans," *International Studies Quarterly* 52:1 (March 2008): 49-80.

however, where he might have attended more to these details himself. To return to the Afghan case, his diagnosis of the challenge includes the following:

> Of the several available explanations for the operation's disappointing outcome, culture–meaning habit, tradition, identity, and religion–deserves pride of place...Alas, Afghans are most emphatically *not* Canadians. The divide separating "us" from "them" is a chasm. Spanning thatchasm, even if theoretically feasible, will necessarily require enormous exertions over an exceedingly long period of time (311).

In a consideration of American failure to pacify Afghan politics, a great many factors bear more attention than a reductive catch-all explanation like 'culture': one should consider the geopolitical and geographical constraints every Afghan ruler has faced as well as the stunting consequences for institution-building and political legitimation that have come with the influx of foreign aid–strategic rent–for centuries.[7] More generally, *any* government would be challenged in its efforts to consolidate a grip on the periphery in the midst of an ongoing foreign military campaign. We also know that violence has consistently played a starring role in state formation and democratization across the developing world and in the West; so we should not be surprised to see it feature in the Afghan case.[8] These points actually bolster Bacevich's larger thesis; one only wishes he acknowledged them more, given his powerful critique of those who failed to do so in the real world.

In his concluding chapter, Bacevich poses the question that haunts the reader throughout the book: "Why in the face of such unsatisfactory outcomes has the United States refused to chart a different course?" He points the finger, ultimately, at a collective arrogance on the part of American decision makers. They have, he argues, routinely overestimated their ability to understand far-away places, to shape the future of these places–often through the use of force–and to be received as welcome liberators with a universally compelling formula for governance in tow:

> None of these assumptions has any empirical basis. Each of the four drips with hubris. Taken together, they sustain the absence of self-awareness that has become an American signature. Worse, they constitute a nearly insurmountable barrier to serious critical analysis (365).

This is a damning indictment and, certainly, one that leaves the reader convinced, frustrated, and angry. But it also leaves her wondering whether the absence of a clear and palatable alternative to the current status quo is

[7] On state formation and state-building in Afghanistan, see, for examples, Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Hasan M. Kakar, *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863-1901* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006); Thomas J. Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[8] On the role of violence in state formation and state-building, see, for examples, Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 169-187; Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," *American Political Science Review* 87 No 3 (September 1993): 567-576; Christopher Cramer, *Violence in Developing Countries: War, Memory, Progress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

part of the reason for the establishment's inertia. Decades of poorly-conceived policy choices and military misadventures have inflicted tremendous damage on this region. Bacevich guides us through the devastation in a comprehensive and biting way that should disturb even the most devoted of interventionists. But what would a viable alternative to the vagaries of America's war-fighting in the Middle East look like? What, in other words, would Bacevich do? In the final pages of the book, he points to a sustained unwillingness on the part of American policymakers to demonstrate patience–either through a commitment "to wait things out" or to pursue "sustained relentless military action"–choosing, instead, a middling approach in the Middle East that has failed to achieve much:

> With politicians and generals too quick to declare victory and with the American public too quick to throw their hands up when faced with adversity, U.S. forces rarely stayed long enough to finish the job. Instead of intimidating, U.S. military efforts have annoyed, incited, and generally communicated a lack of both competence and determination (367).

Is the implication here that a more patient approach–more troops, more money, more time–might have made a difference? With respect to the war in Iraq, he notes that the U.S. military fielded only a fraction of the forces it had sent to Vietnam and Korea, drawing, instead, on private security firms to fill in the gaps: "A 'nation at war' was incapable of putting even 1 percent of the population in uniform" (278). Might a government prepared to dedicate a larger military presence, with more sensible rotation schedules (279) and better command leadership (280), have prevailed, despite Iraq's hopelessly complex and vitriolic politics (and geopolitics) after 2003? While Bacevich's minimalist leaning is evident throughout the book, his attitude about the possibility of a *meaningfully better* kind of intervention remains unclear to the end.

One wonders, more generally, if there are any military ventures into this part of the world worthy of support? Some scholars have innovated their own standards by which to assess the expediency, legality, legitimacy, and morality of military interventions of different sorts.[9] While the construction of an *ex ante* standard is neither necessary nor necessarily advisable here,[10] it becomes difficult to ascertain whether Bacevich would see merit in any American foray into the greater Middle East–or any other part of the developing world, for that matter. Take the Syrian civil war. It has generated the gravest humanitarian crisis in the world today (332); it also stymies thoughtful outsiders who seek a resolution–diplomatic, military, or political–to an exceptionally thorny conflict. The author describes the Syrian case as a choice for Obama, "between plunging in and holding back" and concludes that the president's approach has been one of resistance, or at least attempted resistance, to "calls to intervene further in the Syrian civil war" (332). Was this the prudent approach, or are there conditions under which we might have seen a path forward for constructive American escalation?

[9]See, for examples, Michael W. Doyle, *Striking First: Preemption and Prevention in International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Robert A. Pape, "When Duty Calls: A Pragmatic Standard of Humanitarian Intervention," *International Security* 37:1 (Summer 2012): 41-80.

[10] Barry Posen critiques Robert Pape's attempt to establish "clear rules" for humanitarian intervention, in Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014): 196.

Relatedly, are there any interventions that we can define as 'successful' in retrospect? How could we, more generally, ascertain what victory would look like[11] for the United States in the Greater Middle East? Since American efforts in the Balkans are, canonically, considered relatively 'successful,'[12] let us consider the Bosnian case. Here, Bacevich attributes the Clinton Administration's eventual decision to intervene to a calculation about "a core geopolitical interest: preserving the viability of NATO" (169). If the campaign reasserted the alliance's relevance, helped bring the Serbs to the negotiating table, and produced an accord that "did cement an end to violence" (173), why does this case fit into a larger narrative of naïve, failed overextension? Why is it not, instead, an example of (at least partial) success?

The fact that Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims are now traveling to Syria to fight on behalf of ISIS (200) is hardly a fair measure of the international community's efforts and achievements (or lack thereof) in the Balkans two decades ago. There are, after all, Muslims traveling to the Levant to fight today from all over the Western world.[13] Nor does it seem relevant that Western intervention in Bosnia did not generate "gratitude elsewhere in the Islamic world" (200), as this was not the mission's explicit or implicit goal. The notion of 'success' is a slippery one that often has limited analytical value. And, yet, while those of us who study intervention in the Middle East have become quite good at identifying the innumerable missteps taken, we may need to expend more intellectual energy thinking through what viable, fruitful engagement in the region would actually look like.

Perhaps most disconcerting about American military history in the Middle East is the degree to which, almost unconsciously, the United States has opened a new chapter in "the pernicious legacy of Western imperialism" (48) that long defined this part of the world. American foreign policymakers and military brass have consistently assumed a posture of aggressive concern without giving due consideration to the necessity or feasibility of each endeavor. Advances in technology have only further insulated acts of aggression from deeper debate and discussion.[14] Americans are living, as a result, in a perpetual "war-that-[is]-not-a-war," (347) whereby the vast majority of the country's citizens have little knowledge of and feel no pain from the surgical–but ubiquitous–strikes against an enemy with no borders, uniform, or timeline. They are told–by politicians, policymakers, and military officers–that the threat is constant and the risk without bounds.[15] The country is, somehow, simultaneously not at war and, yet, perpetually at war just the same.

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[11] One attempt to theorize about victory can be found in William C. Martel, *Victory in War: Foundations of Modern Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[12] James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Beth Cold DeGrasse, *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 2007): vi, xxxvii.

[13] Eric Schmitt and Somini Sengupta, "Thousands Enter Syria to Join ISIS Despite Global Efforts," *The New York Times*, 26 September 2015.

[14] On targeted killings and UAVs, for example, see Antonia Chayes, *Borderless Wars: Civil Military Disorder and Legal Uncertainty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[15] On the relationship between risk and accountability in the realm of national security, see Anna Leander, "Risk and the Fabrication of Apolitical, Unaccountable Military Markets: the Case of the CIA 'Killing Program,'" *Review of International Studies* 37:5 (December 2011): 2253-2268.

Andrew Bacevich is alerting his readers to the quiet creep of this embattled stance and urging us to consider the well-evidenced possibility that this stance is unnecessary and, in fact, has become "a diversion that Americans can ill afford" (370). His scholarly confederate, Barry Posen, echoes this point in his advocacy for a grand strategy of "restraint," whereby the United States would "focus on a small number of threats, and approach those threats with subtlety and moderation."[16] It is difficult to anticipate, for all the reasons Bacevich so artfully lays out, that the elite and popular imaginations of this country will be capable of so thoughtful a pause and redirection. And, yet, this book makes clear how desperately just such a moment of reflection is needed today.

[16] Posen: xii.

Review by Douglas Porch, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Emeritus

"Like the present-day GOP, (Afghanistan's) Northern Alliance was a loose coalition of unsavory opportunists, interested chiefly in acquiring power," writes soldier historian Andrew Bacevich, even before Donald Trump had secured his American party's presidential nomination. His latest book becomes *really* depressing after that. Known for his anti-interventionist stance as well as his careful studies of U.S. military affairs in the past and present, Bacevich kicks off his rubble tour of U.S. foreign and military policy in the Islamic world beginning with President Jimmy's Carter's catastrophic April 1980 attempt to rescue the American embassy hostages in Tehran–'Eagle Claw.' Since its founding in 1983 towards the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM–the theater command for the Middle East of the U.S. armed forces) principal activity has been to manufacture invasion scenarios of the Middle East with aspirational operational labels like 'Iraqi Freedom,' 'Enduring Freedom,' 'Desert Fox', 'New Dawn,' and so on. Although the primary accomplishment of each mission is to leave what British staff wags in World War II called the Muddle East more muddled than ever, each is customarily closed out by celebratory speeches delivered under triumphant 'Mission Accomplished!' banners. Meanwhile, each U.S. intervention sows the region with yet more political and sectarian time bombs primed to detonate in a more-or-less proximate future.

Bacevich's relentless march through the mangled U.S. military interventions into Middle Eastern affairs demonstrates that no operational use of force has been left unauditioned–Marine amphibious intervention in Beirut under President Ronald Reagan in 1983 which ended ignominiously in the Marine barracks bombing; proxy war in what Bacevich labels Gulf War I between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s; the application in 1991 of a Cold-War strength dose of 'shock and awe' in Gulf War II; a light footprint in Somalia's 1992-1994 'Restore Hope' which crashed and burned like a downed Blackhawk; the 1990s 'air occupation' of Iraq; air power in the Balkans under President Bill Clinton and twice in Libya directed first by Reagan and subsequently by "We came. We saw. He died" Madame Secretary Clinton; the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) inspired invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq under George W. Bush. And when these invasions inevitably served to stir up a backlash of popular resistance, the United States turned to 'nation building' through 'armed social work.' Iraq and Afghanistan proved remarkably resistant to U.S. visions of democracy, leaving Washington with a "strategy" of whacking bad guys via Special Operations Forces and drones in a broad swath from the Hindu Kush to the Gulf of Aden, to the shores of Tripoli, and who knows where else.

Even the most intellectually challenged military or political leader must invariably conclude that this application of U.S. military power has encountered its limits in that troubled region. Do not believe it, Bacevich assures us, for all sorts of reasons. President George H.W. Bush crowed at the conclusion of Desert Storm in 1991: "And, by God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all," But Vietnam should have reminded the veterans of that war like Joint Chiefs Chairman General Colin Powell, Desert Storm commander General Norman Schwarzkopf, and General Tommy Franks who led both the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, of the limits of military power applied in an inauspicious political environment. With the souvenir of Saigon safely locked like a bad dream in a memory vault, U.S. policy in the region careened toward "a heedless absence of self-restraint, with shallow moralistic impulses overriding thoughtful strategic analysis" (143). 'Victory' in the Cold War in 1989 swamped Washington in a tsunami of 'end of history' hubris. Underemployed CENTCOM hit upon the export of 'Western values' to 'liberate' 'lesser breeds without the law' as its default mission. Those sifting the ashes of the Mogadishu security building fiasco concluded that insufficient force had been applied, not that the political goals were unrealizable. (159) The war of Yugoslav succession of the 1990s taught that "bad leaders were preventing

good outcomes" (184). As a consequence, military constituencies assembled their boosters to promote the next military fad, weapon system, operational doctrine, or 'savior general' as the winning number that would pause the spinning roulette of Middle Eastern madness. In this way, the foundation for strategic overstretch had been laid in the decade before 9/11 unshackled U.S. military power. Clausewitz became the ghost at the Pentagon banquet.

If the facile early success of 'Enduring Freedom'–CENTCOM's righteous moniker for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan—seemed too good to be true, that is because it was. Most Afghans evinced no desire to embrace female emancipation and other paraphernalia of Western democratic practice the Northern Alliance proved to be a pick-up team of opportunists and thugs, while the operation 'endured' far past its culminating point of victory. Desultory pursuit allowed al-Qaeda founder Osama Ben Laden and his henchmen to slip out of their caverns at Tora Bora and over the Pakistani border. Afghan President Hamid Karzai made Republic of (South) Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem look like a paragon of constitutional legitimacy and integrity. Nevertheless, facile early success in the Hindu Kush wetted the appetite of President George W. Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz and their claque of neo-conservative journalists and think tankers to push their luck, firm in the knowledge that, to paraphrase Hilaire Belloc, "whatever happens we have got, the RMA and they have not."[1]

Many theories compete as the real explanations for the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003, all equally plausible because they are impossible to disprove. Bacevich boils them down to three "mutually supporting propositions:" the desire to validate "the efficacy of preventative war;" to assert Washington's prerogative to remove regimes deemed odious on the banks of the Potomac; finally, to force the Islamic world to modernize along what National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice called "the paradigm of (neoliberal) progress." (240) The usual cast of neo-conservative cheerleaders were mobilized, led by journalists Max Boot, Charles Krauthammer, and Robert Kagan to stitch together the latest 'Mission Accomplished!' banner, which was unfurled on 1 May, 2003 on the deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* by a grinning President Bush masquerading as a fighter pilot. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and Syria's Bashar al-Assad were put on notice. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. But to be a neo-con was very heaven.

[1] The RMA was a 1990s military doctrine that sought to impose "full spectrum dominance" over an enemy by the use of technology and maneuver. This was part of the "technological conceit" that was satirized by British politician and poet Hilaire Belloc in his 1898 book of light verse *The Modern Traveller*:

> *Blood understood the Native mind.*
> *He said: "We must be firm but kind."*
> *A Mutiny resulted.*
> *I never shall forget the way*
> *That Blood upon this awful day*
> *Preserved us all from death.*
> *He stood upon a little mound,*
> *Cast his lethargic eyes around,*
> *And said beneath his breath :*
> *"Whatever happens we have got*
> *The Maxim Gun, and they have not."* (41)

The remainder of the on-going saga with 'boots on the ground' is depressingly familiar. Military commanders could never grasp the 'nature of the war' when the Iraqis responded to U.S. forces not with flowers and kisses, but with car bombs and machine pistols. First, at Rumsfeld's direction, the U.S. invaders settled on a policy of mass incarceration. After Abu Gharib–"a political setback of monumental proportions," (266)–the policy of incarceration was converted to decapitation of High Value Targets (HVTs), which was not only "beside the point" (261) according to Bacevich. It also intensified the insurgency. Hardly had the V word escaped from the lips of Marine General Tony Zinni, than in June 2004, General George Casey arrived in Bagdad to call for a switch to the kinder, gentler ministrations of COIN-inspired 'nation building.' The problem, according to Bacevich, is that Casey failed to convince his hard-hitting subordinates that the Iraqi population needed to be won over and protected, not treated as the enemy. He might have added that a people with a Biblical identity and a history of Ottoman and British imperial domination were unlikely to be receptive to a national remake along Western lines. After two and one-half years of failure, on January 2007, President Bush replaced the hapless Casey with General David Petraeus.

Do not count Bacevich among 'King David's' fan base. Rather, the author sees Petraeus as a self-promoting careerist and prestidigitator with "a gift for manipulating appearances so that perception displaces reality" (283). Armed with his wiz-bang FM 3-24, a highly political document long on public relations but short on helpful 'doctrine,' and a 'surge' of extra forces, Petraeus promoted his so-called 'Anbar Awakening.' Violence dipped. On the news that Iraq had been 'saved,' the neo-con fraternity in beltway think tanks and the Hoover Institution, their overnight conversion from the RMA to "population centric" COIN complete, hailed Petraeus as their new Messiah, the second coming of Generals Grant, Sherman, Patton, MacArthur, Ridgway, fully deserving of a fifth star. Alas, Anbar and Iraq had merely experienced a 'pause' in mayhem, for reasons largely unrelated to Petraeus and FM 3-24. 'The Surge' proved to be a 'pseudo event' which temporarily camouflaged failure, on the lines of Petraeus' equally ephemeral 'achievement' in Mosul in 2003-2004.

Bacevich passes in silence over "Peaches"' downfall in the arms of his admiring biographer Paula Broadwell, because by 2009 his story has shifted to Afghanistan where newly elected President Barack Obama had dispatched General Stanley McChrystal to generate some Anbar surge magic in Kandahar. If Petraeus is, in Bacevich's view, "arguably the most overtly political senior military officer to grace the American stage since MacArthur," McChrystal proved to be a complete novice in the art of civil-military manipulation in the higher echelons of command and war. An Airborne Ranger/black ops guy with a buttoned up–Bacevich says 'focused'—personality, McChrystal seemed at least to have realized that the United States could not kill its way to victory in the Middle East. Instead, he proposed a huge 'nation building' investment. But COIN requireds troops, resources, time, and above all an adulatory entourage of Ph.D. colonels, think tank 'strategy experts' and witless TV chatterers to sell the vision to a, by now, very skeptical American public and political elite. With an able assist from Petraeus and in the best traditions of U.S. civil-military relations, McChrystal began to "engage in all sorts of shenanigans to advance the agenda" (303). Alas, because McChrystal failed to pacify "one small Afghan city" of Marja, his efforts to clear, hold, and build Washington, D.C. also sputtered. McChrystal was sacked, Petraeus returned. 'Hearts and minds' gave way to a Special Operations Forces led series of round-ups and killing sprees which not only saw U.S. and Afghan casualties skyrocket. It also provoked a spate of so-called green-on-blue incidents, that is, where Afghan troops slaughtered U.S. and NATO soldiers. By June 2011, Obama went on television to pronounce his own 'Mission Accomplished!' as a prelude for the expansion of an expanded drone and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM)-led

offensive that encompasses Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and West Africa. This phase of conflict has been brilliantly chronicled by Lloyd C. Gardner.[2]

So, what is the moral to this sad story? "U.S forces are scattered across the Greater Middle East without actually making a difference anywhere in particular," Bacevich concludes (321). With the mangled corpse of bin Laden finally dumped into the sea in 2011, SOCOM has expanded exponentially, operating in 150 countries, applying solutions to serious strategic problems that owe more to T.E. Lawrence and post-World War I air power theorist Giulio Douhet than to Clausewitz. U.S. policy now evinces "a stubborn belief in the efficacy of decapitation" (335). While Bacevich concedes that the drones/SOF combination allows Washington to act without committing "more than a fragment of the nation's full military strength," (351) he holds out hope that Obama's opening to Iran and the decline of the geopolitical importance of oil might signal a realignment of U.S. priorities in the Middle East. But the reflex in U.S. statecraft to resort to military force remains strong, although such actions have in Bacevich's thorough telling produced nothing but policy bankruptcy, irrelevance, and ashes. Basic questions like: what are our goals? Who is the enemy? What is military force meant to achieve? are not being asked by those who must do so because no constituency exists to ask them. Bacevich's rather sensible solution appears to be a return to a patient, cold war-like containment of the Middle East. Nevertheless, he remains pessimistic that, given the divided state of American politics, this restrained policy can happen anytime soon. But at least, 'containment' would be less costly than repetitively to 'camouflage failure' beneath a 'Mission Accomplished!' banner.

[2] Lloyd C. Gardner, *Killing Machine: The American Presidency in the Age of Drone Warfare* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

Author's Response by Andrew J. Bacevich, Boston University, Emeritus

My thanks to the editors of H-Diplo for organizing this roundtable review and to Professors Caroline Gordon, Sean Kalic, Peter Mansoor, Dipali Mukhopadhyay, and Douglas Porch for their thoughtful and comprehensive assessments of my book.

In the hierarchy of literary enterprises, reviewing books ranks pretty close to the bottom. This fact alone may help explain the dubious quality of reviews appearing even in otherwise reputable publications–reviews that fail even to satisfy the most basic requirement of providing a fair-minded description of the work under consideration.

For a writer, this can be pretty discouraging. How could the reviewer so radically misunderstand your purpose, you wonder? So grotesquely mangle an idea or argument over which you labored so diligently and for so long? It is not disagreement that is troubling, but the apparent absence of simple comprehension. What's the explanation? Stupidity on the reviewer's part? Laziness? Sheer ill-will?

Soon enough, however, second thoughts begin to creep in. Perhaps you're the one at fault. After all, a writer's most fundamental obligation is to communicate clearly. If a reader takes from a text something other than what the author intends, then the problem may lie with the text itself and its creator. Even to entertain such a possibility can suffice to shake a writer's confidence.

I've been there—and with this book.

So it is beyond gratifying that each of the four reviews here conveys a clear appreciation for what I thought I was doing when I set out to write *America's War for the Greater Middle East* in the first place. That each of the four reviewers finds in the book things to commend makes it all the better.

Lest I dislocate my shoulder patting myself on the back, however, let me turn to the substantive comments and reservations that the reviewers express.

Caroline Gordon wonders if the failure of U.S. military policy in the Greater Middle East may actually serve the purposes of policy elites in Washington. Threat inflation and scare-mongering provide a rationale for maintaining a bloated national security apparatus and curtailing civil liberties, all in the name of keeping Americans safe. She suggests that I might have discussed this possibility in greater detail.

There is much to be said in favor of this argument (which I did explore in a prior book called *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War).*[1] It is certainly the case that those who benefit from the perpetuation of that apparatus have no incentive to question the assumptions and habits that have served as the basis of U.S. military policy going back to the earliest days of the Cold War.

So for now at least, to quote President Obama, the Washington 'playbook' remains sacrosanct, with dissenters routinely written off as 'isolationists' or worse. The foreign-policy narrative that lodged itself in the nation's

[1] Andrew J. Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010).

collective consciousness back in 1941 persists, unaffected by events since. I cannot help but think that this represents a judgment–and not a favorable one–on the craft of diplomatic history as presently practiced.

Somewhat more sharply, Gordon (as does Dipali Mukhopadhyay) takes me to task over my treatment of the Balkan interventions of the 1990s. A friend of mine, who read the manuscript prior to publication, warned me against defining the Greater Middle East so as to include that region. Perhaps I should have heeded his counsel.

As it is, I do not view the U.S. military involvement in Bosnia and Kosovo as central to America's War for the Greater Middle East. Much as the Balkans are located on the fringes of the Islamic world, U.S.-led interventions there during the 1990s occupy the periphery of my narrative. Indeed, the impetus for intervention there derived less from whatever passed for a Clinton administration strategy in the Islamic world than from a concern to preserve the credibility of NATO and satisfy cries at home for the United States to 'do something.'

A reader could probably skip the two Balkan chapters and be no less wise. Still, I chose to retain them for two reasons. First, there, as in every other instance of U.S. military action recounted in my book, the political nexus of conflict was inextricably tied to Islam. I do not mean that Islam as such caused the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo–far from it. I do mean that only by taking Islam into account does it become possible to understand why the wars there occurred and what people were fighting about.

The second reason is this: Whereas Western leaders viewed the Balkan wars as part of the post-Cold War reconfiguration of Europe, some governments within the Islamic world—notably those of Iran and Saudi Arabia—saw them as part of an ongoing struggle that had nothing to do with Europe. So even if the Clinton administration was seeking to demonstrate the continued viability of NATO (while using a humanitarian rationale as a cover), it was also inserting itself more deeply into that intra-Islamic competition.

So while I agree with Mukhopadhyay that the Balkan wars of the 1990s might be seen as experiments with multilateral intervention into the affairs of failed states, I would insist that they simultaneously illustrate Washington's increasingly heedless inclination to conduct its own experiment, based on expectations that some way or somehow the application of force was going to bring the peoples of the Greater Middle East into compliance with American values (thereby affirming their universality) and with Washington's requirements (thereby demonstrating the futility of resistance). To my mind at least, the Somalia intervention of 1992-1994, another operation on the periphery, falls into a similar category.

Gordon chides me for depicting the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) "in one dimensional terms—as terrorists, as aggressors, as opportunists" and for glossing over "the history of oppression of Kosovars that led to the formation of the KLA." Perhaps I should plead guilty and leave it as that. My discussion of the KLA was necessarily cursory, intended to provide context for a detailed look at Operation Allied Force and its consequences. It was not my intention to portray the Kosovars as aggressors (although the KLA certainly did wage a campaign of terror directed against Serb authorities). It was, however, very much my intention to push back against the black hats vs. white hats framing of the Kosovo War, which the Clinton administration and many in the mainstream media promoted at the time.

Gordon asks the question "What next?" Of course, the historian's turf is the past rather than the future. My own sense is that those in the "What's next?" business—officials charged with formulating policy—will not

come anywhere near to devising a plausible answer until they first acknowledge the failure of U.S. and Western military efforts in the Greater Middle East, now dating back several decades. Only then, with the demilitarization of U.S. policy, will opportunities for creative statesmanship open up. In my judgment, the essential, albeit very challenging task, is to bring countries within the region to recognize that, whatever their differences, they share a profound common interest in collaborating to restore some semblance of stability. In short, they need to take ownership of a problem that ultimately is theirs, not Washington's.

Sean Kalic suggests that the first several chapters of *America's War for the Greater Middle East* might have devoted greater attention to the relationship between the ongoing Cold War and the preliminary instances of U.S. interventionism in the region, both overt and covert. That the Carter Doctrine, triggering the militarization of U.S. policy toward much of the Islamic world, derived in considerable measure from Cold War-related considerations is certainly the case. Much the same can be said of Washington's support for the *mujahidin* resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, a program launched by President Jimmy Carter and then greatly expanded by President Ronald Reagan. Yet my own sense is that most other U.S. actions at this time—sending 'peacekeepers' to Lebanon, jousting with Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, throwing in with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran, secretly and illegally providing weapons to Iran in hopes of freeing a handful of hostages held by Islamic militants—had little or nothing to do with the Cold War. Other considerations were driving policy.

As to Mukhopadhyay's point that 'culture' alone cannot explain the difficulty any outside power confronts in attempting to impose its will on Afghanistan, she is undoubtedly correct. She cites several other relevant factors. My joking reference to Canadians was simply meant to suggest that Americans, persuaded that ultimately everyone everywhere wants to be 'like' us, are too quick to wish away cultural differences.

Regarding my reference to a public too quick to give up and U.S. forces rarely staying long enough to finish the job, I may have conveyed the mistaken impression that hanging in there longer holds the key to eventual success. That is most definitely not my view. I was merely suggesting that a vast gap exists between Washington's aims as the U.S. military project in the Greater Middle East has evolved and the level of commitment undertaken to achieve those aims.

As historical events, we tend today to classify Iraq and Afghanistan as among this nation's big wars, more or less comparable, say, to Korea or Vietnam. Yet apart from dollar cost and number of noncombatants killed—neither of which is a factor of real concern to most Americans—they both qualify as fairly puny. With a half-million combat troops camped in Afghanistan for twenty years, I doubt that the United States would succeed in pacifying the place. To imagine that fewer than two-hundred thousand troops could do it in a couple of years, as President Obama and General Stanley McChrystal once fancied, is patently absurd. One of the abiding characteristics of American military practice in our day is that war managers, military and civilian alike, do not face up to what it would take to have even a remote chance of fulfilling their ambitions.

Douglas Porch summarizes my book with both accuracy and dark humor. He chides me ever so gently for nursing the hope that "Obama's opening to Iran and the decline of the geopolitical importance of oil might signal a realignment of U.S. priorities." He rightly notes that "the reflex in U.S. statecraft to resort to military force remains strong." Little in the ongoing presidential campaign contradicts that assertion.

Yet hopefulness is one charge to which I will not plead guilty. With members of the policy elite astonishingly resistant to learning, while even more astonishingly susceptible to self-serving amnesia; with the forces

sustaining the playbook to which Obama refers both stubborn and powerful; with what passes for a national security 'debate' being shallow, repetitive, and devoid of bite—long on platitudes and short on substance—, ours is not a season that encourages hope.

However vainly, I do cling to the conviction that the American people retain some residual capacity to recognize that they are being ill-served and eventually to insist upon a different approach to providing for the country's wellbeing. But do not see that as hope. It is merely a device to fend off despair.

Finally, Peter Mansoor offers a lengthy summary of the book's contents followed by a sharp critique that focuses on four points: 1) the strategic utility of the U.S. war in Afghanistan; 2) what the Iraq "surge" did and did not do; 3) how to apportion responsibility for the failure of U.S. policy in Iraq since 2003; and 4) whether or not alternative policies would have produced even less desirable outcomes.

On the first point, Mansoor objects to my contention that the Afghanistan war "became an exercise in strategic irrelevance." Note the predicate: "became," i.e., evolved into. One can certainly make that case that in the immediate wake of 9/11, the United States needed to demonstrate that any government harboring or providing sustenance to anti-American terrorist groups was going to pay a very heavy price. At that moment, punishing the Taliban served the interests of the United States.

But punitive action, however justified, led willy-nilly into an exercise in nation-building that has since become the longest war in all of American history. Evidence that this conflict is headed toward a successful conclusion is difficult to discern. As the war has dragged on from one year to the next, U.S. policy objectives have become ever fuzzier. If there is in fact a coherent strategic rationale in what the United States has been doing in Afghanistan for the past fifteen-plus years, I have yet to encounter it. As far as I can tell, for the United States at least, it has become a war in search of a purpose.

On the second point, Mansoor derides my depiction of the Iraq surge as riddled with "myths." To sustain the charge, he mischaracterizes my interpretation of that episode. Nowhere do I suggest that the Sunni Awakening "would have accomplished as much as it did without the surge" or that "sectarian cleansing had already stabilized Baghdad" before 2007 or that Joint Special Operations Command's (JSOC) counterterrorism campaign "did more to stabilize" Iraq than did the application of counterinsurgency doctrine under the auspices of General David Petraeus. What I do argue is that the surge alone provides an inadequate explanation for the substantial (but alas, only temporary) reduction in violence that occurred in Iraq beginning in 2007. That is to say, other factors also contributed. Nor is Gian Gentile the only scholar to advance this argument, as Mansoor implies. Indeed, on this point, I refer readers to Porch's superb book *Counterinsurgency*, with particular attention to chapter 10.[2]

Why does this matter? Because proponents of the Petraeus-turns-the-tide narrative employ it to obscure larger truths about the Iraq War itself.

In a sense, it is a bit like that hardy perennial, the never-ending argument over which side prevailed in the Tet Offensive. Those who claim that U.S. forces in 1968 inflicted a decisive defeat on the North Vietnamese

[2] Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

army and the VC only to have victory thrown away when (pick one or more) President Lyndon Johnson's Wise Men or the Congress or the American people lost their nerve, thereby deflect attention from the matters that actually count. Such matters include 1) whether U.S. military intervention in Vietnam made any sense in the first place; and 2) why after several years of being on the receiving end of American firepower on a prodigious scale, the enemy remained capable of mounting such a large-scale counteroffensive.

In short, even conceding for the sake of argument that the American side 'won' the Tet Offensive, the Vietnam War still remains unnecessary, misguided, and mismanaged. So too with the Iraq surge. It figures, at best, an event of passing interest in a war that was unnecessary, misguided, and mismanaged. The surge did not yield conclusive success. It tamped down without eliminating an insurgency. It settled nothing. Indeed, as Mansoor concedes, the surge "had no bearing whatsoever on the war's outcome."

Which brings us to his third point: who then is to blame for the epic mess to which the United States has given birth in Iraq? Reviving the hoary old "stab in the back" argument, Mansoor puts the entire onus on the civilian leadership. Here, indeed, we enter the realm of myth.

Tidy judgments rarely explain war. In this case, Mansoor's verdict will not do much to promote our understanding of an exceedingly complex historical event to which policymakers and generals and ordinary soldiers and contractors and allies and sundry other actors—not to mention Iraqis—contributed.

Mansoor's comments amount to a rear-guard defense of counterinsurgency doctrine as "the best tool to use in the search for victory against an insurgent enemy," even though the onward rush of events is chipping away at whatever significance the Iraq surge was once thought to possess.

Mansoor says that I view counterinsurgency as "an anti-American way of war." I am not sure where he dreamed that up. Let me put the record straight. My view is this: The application of counterinsurgency principles in Iraq did not redeem that misbegotten war. A subsequent application of those principles in Afghanistan produced even less.

Finally, we have Mansoor criticizing me for not considering "what the Middle East would look like today absent U.S. intervention." To illustrate his point, he poses a splendidly imaginative series of counterfactuals.

I remember as a kid reading a little paperback by McKinley Kantor called *If the South Had Won the Civil War*. As entertainment, it was pretty good. As history—well, it was not history.

Scholars can conjure up alternative pasts, even several of them. I confess that I do not know what would have ensued had the United States exhibited greater self-restraint in its use of military power in the Greater Middle East. I also do not know what would have occurred if the United States had refrained from overthrowing Iran's Mohammad Mossadegh, or if the British had decided against carving up the Ottoman Empire, or if Christian Europe had found something better to do than launch the Crusades.

What I do know is this: The emphasis on military power as the preferred instrument for securing U.S. interests in the Islamic world has done more harm than good, has cost the United States and others a great deal, and has left things in a considerable mess. As I see it, it's the historian's job to explain how and why that happened. Fantasizing about might-have-beens I will leave to others.

But again, thanks to all for this exchange.