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# Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War

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September 11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the current fight against Al Qaeda and ISIS. One of the great strengths of this book is the way Bacevich brings all these events together in sufficient detail to enable the reader to take in “the whole picture.” It allows one to put these events into greater context and see the patterns that have developed. In short, it performs a very complete assessment of where we have been, what assumptions the leaders of the United States have made, what policy decisions were made on the basis of those assumptions, and what the outcomes have been to this time.

Toward the book’s end, Bacevich asks two very pointed questions. First, why “has the world’s mightiest military achieved so little even while itself absorbing very considerable losses and inflicting even greater damage on the subjects of America’s supposed beneficence?” Second, why, “in the face of such unsatisfactory outcomes[,] has the United States refused to chart a different course?” Bacevich goes on to offer what he believes are the answers to these questions, then ends by arguing that, in light of new technology that allows more oil reserves to become accessible in the Western Hemisphere, the United States would be better served by securing its “own neighborhood rather than vainly attempting to police the Greater Middle East.” The question that comes to mind—one with which I’m sure our national leaders wrestle—is this: What will happen to this region, and subsequently the world, if the United States stops its involvement in the Greater Middle East?

This well-researched book is a must-read for all of us who study, plan, and execute the military arm of national

power—and especially for those who make decisions about national policy.

ROGER DUCEY



*Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collins. Washington, DC: National Defense Univ. Press, 2015. 486 pages. \$21.95.

Augmenting the literature of firsthand accounts by senior leaders such as General Stanley McChrystal and Ambassador Christopher Hill, National Defense University faculty members Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins assembled a strong team to make sense of the last fifteen years of war. The editors appreciate the challenges of writing current history, but offer the book as “an assessment of two unfinished campaigns, written for future senior officers, their key advisors, and other national security professionals.” With more than three million U.S. and coalition veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, few undertakings are more important. Veterans of today will shape the future of defense over the next twenty years, just as their forebears, such as Anthony Zinni, Colin Powell, and Richard Holbrooke, were shaped by their Vietnam experiences.

The chapters are at their best when they leverage insights from both senior military and civilian leaders to reach important conclusions, such as the following: “Civilian national security decisionmakers need a better understanding of the complexity of military strategy and the military’s need for planning guidance. Senior military officers for their part require a deep understanding of the interagency decisionmaking

process, an appreciation for the perspectives and frames of reference of civilian counterparts, and a willingness to embrace and not resist the complexities and challenges inherent in the system of civilian control” (p. 71). On this point, it would be important to learn from the productive relationships of Lieutenant General David Barno and Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad in Kabul during 2003, and General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Baghdad during 2007. The editors capture the important civil-military relations discussion in their conclusion, writing that “there is no ‘purely military’ question . . . [yet the advice of senior military personnel as experts] was not used in full” (p. 407). The book raises—and sometimes challenges—persistent myths, such as the belief that the presence of an additional battalion at Tora Bora, Afghanistan, in 2001 would have enabled the capture of Osama Bin Laden. Others addressed include the belief that Kabul could have stood on its own in the early part of last decade, and that a post-Saddam Iraq would be lawless. Further, the book reminds us that these two wars did not begin as insurgencies; that military gains were disconnected from political goals; and that the U.S. government has neither the capacity nor the disposition to promote political and economic development on par with its capacity to develop foreign military forces. Neither U.S. presidential administration could agree on the scope of the problem nor could either generate the unity of effort that we see—in hindsight—would have been needed to stabilize either country. Consequently, the United States abandoned its grandiose national objectives and shifted

its emphasis to training Iraqis and Afghans to fight their own civil wars.

Among the volume’s contributors and chapters, the reviewer particularly notes the following:

- Thomas X. Hammes explores well the challenges of security force assistance, concluding that “the personnel system never really adjusted . . . [and advisers and trainers were] working against incredible handicaps” (p. 335).
- Collins’s chapter on initial planning for the wars lays out the assumptions made and the ill-conceived expectations that developed. At times he reconciles Beltway and theater perspectives; for instance, “DOD civilian leadership did not want to admit—perhaps for public relations or legal reasons—that by mid-summer 2003, there was an insurgency going on” (p. 65).
- Frank G. Hoffman and G. Alexander Crowther follow with an important assessment of the Iraq and Afghan surges, providing a rich narrative that illustrates strategic adaptation. They conclude that “war is an audit of how well states have formulated policies and strategies, and how well prepared their armed forces and other tools are” (p. 146).
- To examine the political context of strategy formulation during the wars, the chapter by Christopher J. Lamb and Megan Franco analyzes senior leaders’ decisions. The authors “conclude that critical strategy handicaps, insufficient unity of effort, and, to a lesser extent, missing or late-to-need capabilities for irregular warfighting offer a compelling explanation for why the United States was not able to fully achieve its goals in Afghanistan and Iraq” (p. 168).
- Nicholas Rostow and Harvey Rishikof identify legal lessons from the wars, noting that “lawyers should be regarded as essential participants in the planning process” (p. 378).

To be sure, there are limits to how much we should draw from these two conflicts, especially since they have not ended yet. Furthermore, the editors acknowledge that whatever lessons might be learned will not necessarily prevent future failures. While the two conflicts are linked temporally, differing rationales for beginning them, different presidential administrations, and different adversaries limit the value of larger comparisons. Inputs from our allies and erstwhile partners—absent here—also would be beneficial to study. Yet the book is rich in detail and analysis, all underscoring the lesson of a decade-plus: that, while the United States might be able to support and enable its international partners, it cannot solve all their problems by itself.

DEREK S. REVERON



*Regional Missile Defense from a Global Perspective*, ed. Catherine McArdle Kelleher and Peter Dombrowski. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2015. 328 pages. \$29.95.

As a collective voice on the topic, *Regional Missile Defense from a Global Perspective* offers a comprehensive discussion of the history, development, and present state of ballistic missile defense (BMD), infused with a distinctive blend of technical aspects and analysis of the geopolitical forces that shaped it. Using the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) as an initial framework for discussion, the works of several notable experts in the fields of international studies, nuclear policy, national defense, foreign affairs, and political science are combined to yield a nuanced overview of the subject, expertly delineating the

parallel development of technological advances and ongoing political realities for participating nations. Threaded throughout the book are significant discussions on the implications of a regionally based missile-defense system having more than just a regional impact.

On the basis of operational concepts developed to protect London from V-2 rockets during World War II, U.S. efforts initially were envisioned to protect select cities from Soviet or Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) attacks. When this proved to be technically and financially prohibitive, scaled-back systems designed primarily to defend ICBM sites and their capabilities for strategic offensive operations were constructed. Arms-limitation talks between the superpowers during the early seventies further reduced the scope of this capability. However, because of President Reagan's concern during his presidency about the lack of an effective BMD for the country and his preference for a strategic alternative to mutually assured destruction, SDI was developed. With the overall goal of eliminating the threat posed by Soviet ICBMs, all aspects of ongoing research were combined under one program.

This point in history is the starting point for the book; from there it begins to construct the foundation for an examination of the technological challenges of developing a missile defense and the political realities these developments foster. Part 1, "U.S. Policies and Programs" (p. 17), starts with an examination of BMD policies as they evolved during the Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations and some of the documents that defined the actual threat, examined technical controversies, and captured