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In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan

Douglas J. Wadsworth

Seth G. Jones

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search-and-rescue operations. The authors argue that because these steps are limited, practical, and focus on the interests of all sides, China may be willing to engage here, and that further, because of Tehran's desire to stay on good terms with Beijing, Chinese participation might induce some restraint on Iran's part.

The Vital Triangle is well worth reading. It provides a useful contextual framework for placing in perspective overhyped news reports on Sino-U.S. disputes over Chinese arms deals with countries in the region, Beijing's growing concerns about ensuring the security of its oil imports, threats from Egypt and Saudi Arabia that they may seek Beijing's political-military support as an alternative to Washington, and attempts by Iran to appeal to China as a counterweight to Western pressures. Because the book cogently illustrates Beijing's reluctance to take risks or choose sides and thereby diminishes the credibility of China as a counterweight, Americans working diplomatically in the Mideast could even find it useful to provide copies to their host-country interlocutors the next time they try to play "the China card."

ROBERT A. HARRIS
Defense Intelligence Agency, Burke, Va.

(The views and opinions expressed in this review are the author's alone and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, or U.S. government.)



Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: Norton, 2009. 414pp. \$27.95

In an August 2009 *Wall Street Journal* article, Seth Jones described meeting villagers in Afghanistan who had never heard of President Hamid Karzai and even thought the U.S. military forces he was traveling with were Soviets, "not realizing that the Soviet army withdrew in 1989." This lack of knowledge may seem implausible in an era of cell phone and Internet communication, but Jones offers a detailed narrative of the historical and modern-day challenges in Afghanistan that makes this ignorance believable. He describes a country populated by diverse ethnic tribes with strong aversions to central governance. As the title implies, he recalls the failure of foreign forces time and again to tame and govern this disparate Afghan populace. From Alexander the Great in 330 BC to the British Empire in the nineteenth century, to the Soviet invasion of the 1970s, Afghanistan has been seemingly unconquerable. Against this background Jones demonstrates the monumental challenge that the United States faces as it attempts to do what other "empires" could not—"create a new order" in Afghanistan. He clearly demonstrates that "the lessons from the past empires provide a stark lesson."

A well-respected political scientist at RAND, Seth Jones clearly has the credibility to take on the task of breaking down and explaining the complicated Afghan environment. Jones is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University, has taught at the Naval Postgraduate School, and has visited Afghanistan numerous times since 11 September 2001. *In the Graveyard of Empires* is painstakingly researched, with over a thousand notes citing interviews, documents, books, news articles, video clips, and written statements

from numerous U.S. and international figures who have played prominent roles in Afghanistan since before and after 9/11. In fact, Jones's many citations and his approach of listing diverse players with one-line, anecdotal physical descriptions or personality traits can be overwhelming and even detract from the narrative.

Nonetheless, this book does a superb job of filling in the details of Afghanistan's complex politics for scholars who are interested in gaining a better understanding of the history, the state and nonstate actors involved, and the many civil and military leaders who have attempted to calm the political upheaval in Afghanistan. Jones ably explains how, after the United States and its allies quickly knocked the Taliban from power, routed al-Qa'ida, and set up a popularly elected central government, the country nonetheless failed to establish an adequate justice system and security for its populace—instead allowing a robust insurgency to develop. With the experience of someone who has walked the ground and talked to the leaders on all sides, Jones effectively argues that the drug trade, high-level government corruption, and the lack of resources could, if not resolved, lead to one more headstone in Afghanistan's graveyard.

DOUGLAS J. WADSWORTH
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Naval War College



Zatarain, Lee Allen. *Tanker War: America's First Conflict with Iran, 1987–1988*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2008. 388pp. \$32.95

Lee Zatarain, an attorney, has crafted a compelling and immensely readable account of one of the least-known chapters of the U.S. Navy's maritime combat operations, the tanker war of 1987–88. The tanker war was fought by three now very familiar foes—Iran and Iraq (who had been at war with each other since 1980), and the United States, which became embroiled in the conflict when an Iraqi aircraft attacked and nearly sank one of its frontline warships in 1987. Using new information gained from the U.S. Navy and other U.S. government sources, as well as extensive interviews with the officers and crew who served in the Persian Gulf during the fifteen-month war, Zatarain examines and explains with lawyerly precision the events that constituted the U.S. Navy's combat operations against Iranian naval forces.

Tanker War begins with a detailed account of the Iraqi attack on the guided-missile frigate USS *Stark* in May 1987; the first successful antiship-missile attack on a U.S. Navy warship, it resulted in thirty-seven deaths. That attack, however, precipitated no military response against Iraq by the United States, largely because it was considered to have been an unfortunate accident, and Iraq was more of a friend than Iran. Iran's subsequent actions—laying mines in the heavily trafficked channels of the Gulf to interrupt the flow of Iraqi oil and attacking civilian oil tankers—forced the United States to side with Iraq. As Zatarain explains in straightforward fashion, the conflict that ensued nearly cost the U.S. Navy another warship, USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, and subjected the Navy to several antiship-missile attacks by the Iranian military. In retaliation, the U.S. Navy destroyed a good part of the Iranian navy and