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Tanker War: America's First Conflict with Iran, 1987–1988

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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.

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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

effectively established the American maritime dominance in the Persian Gulf that exists to this day.

Among the key issues that Zatarain raises in his gripping account of the various battles fought between the United States and Iran is the controversial claim by many U.S. Navy commanding officers that Iran used Chinese-made Silkworm antiship missiles against American ships. Their claims were discounted by senior military commanders, who refused to acknowledge that any such attacks had occurred, despite extensive evidence to the contrary—such attacks would have required a military response that the United States and the U.S. military were neither willing nor able to undertake.

As political tensions have continued to rise in recent years between the United States and Iran, *Tanker War* is a must-read for those who have a desire or a duty to understand how recent history may shape perceptions of these protagonists in the future.

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Graham, Bradley. *By His Own Rules: The Ambitions, Successes, and Ultimate Failures of Donald Rumsfeld*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2009. 803pp. \$35

In a speech given to Pentagon employees on 10 September 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that the “adversary that poses a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States” is not “decrepit dictators” but rather “the Pentagon bureaucracy.” The blunt message of this speech was very

soon to be bound together in a tension-filled relationship with the ensuing wars initiated by the terrorist attacks of the next day. This tension gives dramatic shape to the career of Donald Rumsfeld as portrayed by Bradley Graham in his well researched book *By His Own Rules*. A veteran *Washington Post* correspondent, Graham intends that the title be regarded literally, as his detailed story focuses on Rumsfeld as a master bureaucratic infighter who did indeed work by his own rules. (The rules encapsulated Rumsfeld’s views on serving and surviving in government and were eventually printed in the *Wall Street Journal*.)

Rumsfeld applied the rules in his intense commitment to the type of U.S. military President George W. Bush had called for during his campaign, an “agile, lethal, readily deployable” armed force. To build this force required a significant transformation of the outsized and ponderous military developed during and immediately after the Cold War. Graham portrays Rumsfeld as a reformer who “had never met an organization he didn’t want to change” and who had come well prepared to transform the Defense Department, but for two untimely wars.

Rumsfeld’s personal goal of transforming the military seemed to overshadow his responsibilities for prosecuting the wars. Graham describes at length how Rumsfeld’s missteps in managing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused him to become the “personification of the arrogance and misjudgments of the Bush Administration,” from damaging interagency power struggles to intolerance of differing viewpoints, to a lack of ability to acknowledge mistakes or change strategies.