



America's War for the Greater Middle East

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Retired army colonel and *New York Times* bestselling author Andrew J. Bacevich provides a searing reassessment of U.S. military policy in the Middle East over the past four decades.

From the end of World War II until 1980, virtually no American soldiers were killed in action while serving in the Greater Middle East. Since 1990, virtually no American soldiers have been killed in action anywhere else. What caused this shift? Andrew J. Bacevich, one of the country's most respected voices on foreign affairs, offers an incisive critical history of this ongoing military enterprise—now more than thirty years old and with no end in sight.

During the 1980s, Bacevich argues, a great transition occurred. As the Cold War wound down, the United States initiated a new conflict—a War for the Greater Middle East—that continues to the present day. The long twilight struggle with the Soviet Union had involved only occasional and sporadic fighting. But as this new war unfolded, hostilities became persistent. From the Balkans and East Africa to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, U.S. forces embarked upon a seemingly endless series of campaigns across the Islamic world. Few achieved anything remotely like conclusive success. Instead, actions undertaken with expectations of promoting peace and stability produced just the opposite. As a consequence, phrases like “permanent war” and “open-ended war” have become part of everyday discourse.

Connecting the dots in a way no other historian has done before, Bacevich weaves a compelling narrative out of episodes as varied as the Beirut bombing of 1983, the Mogadishu firefight of 1993, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the rise of ISIS in the present decade. Understanding what America's costly military exertions have wrought requires seeing these seemingly discrete events as parts of a single war. It also requires identifying the errors of judgment made by political leaders in both parties and by senior military officers who share responsibility for what has become a monumental march to folly. This Bacevich unflinchingly does.

A twenty-year army veteran who served in Vietnam, Andrew J. Bacevich brings the full weight of his expertise to this vitally important subject. *America's War for the Greater Middle East* is a bracing after-action report from the front lines of history. It will fundamentally change the way we view America's engagement in the world's most volatile region.

Advance praise for *America's War for the Greater Middle East*

“In one arresting book after another, Bacevich has relentlessly laid bare the failings of American foreign policy since the Cold War. This one is his sad crowning achievement: the story of our long and growing military entanglement in the region of the most tragic, bitter, and intractable of conflicts.”—**Richard K. Betts, director, Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, Columbia University**

“An unparalleled historical tour de force certain to affect the formation of future U.S. foreign policy . . . Every citizen aspiring to high office needs not only to read but to study and learn from this important book. This is one of the most serious and essential books I have read in more than half a century of public service.”—**Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)**

“Bacevich asks and answers a provocative, inconvenient question: In a multigenerational war in the Middle East, ‘Why has the world's mightiest military achieved so little?’ ”—**Graham Allison, director, Belfer**

Center for Science and International Affairs, and Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Reader Review America's War for the Greater Middle East for online ebook

Andrewh says

This is a highly critical overview of US actions in the 'Greater Middle East' since the 70s, which is more of a series of unsuccessful military interventions than a unified strategic campaign. This endless war's provenance lies, according to the author (who is a military professional and academic), originally in the 70s oil crisis (which led to some US security analysts positing an occupation of Saudi Arabia to secure cheap oil), and then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which led to the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine, which essentially set out that the US would defend its 'interests' in the region. The Iranian revolution then led to concerted US support for Iraq in the first gulf war, and over the 80s US governments gradually increased their level of intervention in the region (notably against Libya).

This ratcheting up of military activity in the region, often without defined strategic goals, was then turbo-driven by the second Gulf war, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This was in the post-cold war era and the heyday of US military technological hubris, when the smart weapon advantages of US military technology were first shown off to a awestruck TV audience. The easy military victory did not have a strategic payoff and this is perhaps one of the first clear instances where US power failed to achieve broader policy goals - Saddam stayed in power and the US policy shifted to 'containment' on two fronts (Iraq and Iran). Throughout the 90s, US presidents exploited US technology to fight 'post-heroic' wars, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, without losing troops and without achieving concrete results. This is a pattern that the author sees being repeated in most of the US interventions in the region ever since, from Gulf War 3.0., Afghanistan and up to the current war on ISIS. In essence, the US has overwhelming air power (and sea power) but is reluctant to commit the number of troops on the ground to complete its strategic goals (especially in the Iraq and Afghan conflicts, and the subsequent counterinsurgencies). Even if it had done, it is unlikely that their goals (such as transforming Iraq into a 'democracy' or building a state in Afghanistan) would have succeeded, since these things are not achievable by military force. Essentially, military power is a blunt instrument without political goals and matching the means to the ends is quite difficult in alien environments, to say the least.

The book's prose is informed by the author's own experience and accessible to those without specialist knowledge, as well as quite acerbic, which makes for an enjoyable read as well an informative one, even if this is all quite well known stuff. The case for strategic restraint is making a comeback in US policy think tanks (so I hear), and it will be interesting to see how the new administration deals with the ongoing issues created by 40 years of reckless intervention.

David M says

Andrew Bacevich may not be a Marxist, or even a leftist really, but then as a comrade of mine one remarked, You don't need to read the German Ideology to see what a fucking stupid idea the Iraq War was.

The second - or third, depending on how you count it - Gulf war was a watershed at least in that it showed definitively that the most powerful military in the history of the world was powerless to do anything but sow chaos and more random violence. No victory could be won, no enemy defeated because there never was anything resembling a coherent enemy.

And yet, while he wouldn't make any single decision as disastrous as the invasion of Iraq, Bush's successor would continue to expand America's endless wars. The ascent of Donald Trump to the presidency must surely be seen as god's judgment.

AC says

This is a valuable book, as Bacevich is an important writer. The first two parts are a general survey of familiar material (1976 - 2000). But Part III contains an insightful and novel look at the Bush/Obama years, and paint a grim picture of the utter catastrophe we have wrought in our Mideast policy -- the result entirely, in Bacevich's view, of American hybris and delusion -- The last chapter is especially interesting.

My one complaint is that I believe that he underestimates the degree to which we are dependant on Middle Eastern (esp. Saudi) oil, and on the entire region as a source for natural gas. He suggests at one point that we would do better to focus on Canada and Venezuela -- which suggests that he thinks that oil sands are the solution, which is absurd. They are very expensive, and very dirty, and nowhere near scalable in the way that cheap Saudi oil is scalable. If so, this vitiates his argument to a significant degree. For it means that we are more stuck there than he would like to think, and that it is not simply the adoption of false assumptions that is the source of our woes. The Middle East is intractable and contains the seeds of a holocaust. The only way to render it irrelevant is to wean ourselves off cheap oil.

(I listened to this on audible; the narration was mediocre -- but not too awful).

Larry Bassett says

Occasionally I come across a book that I fervently wish everyone would read. This is one such book by an author whose thoughts I have come to value. Andrew Bacevich served 26 years in the military. This should give him a certain amount of credibility from an audience that might generally disregard us peaceniks and pacifiers.

This 2016 book covers the last 50 years of US military involvement in the middle east. It goes year-by-year and battle by battle and policy by policy and administration by administration and failure by failure. In some ways it will wear you out. I listen to it in Audible and it is very well done. The one problem with Audible is that you cannot underline the paragraphs that you wish to remember and to share with others. There is many a brilliant paragraph in this book. The author does not pull any punches or favor any political parties. There are very few heroes among those who have fought the policy battles about the Middle East in recent decades.

The book is filled with inside and if you do not remember any of the history of the Middle East in the past 50 years, this book will remind you of it. I lived through the entire period. I have a fairly vivid recollections of the. Beginning with the 2003 invasion of Iraq but had forgotten the details of the 1970s 80s and 90s. It was distressing to be reminded of those continuous missteps.

This is a book you should read or listen to! If you need a reason to think we might need a strong third political party, this book may provide you with that reason. The Obama era began with him receiving the Nobel peace prize but it was all downhill from there!

Jonathan says

Disclosure: I received a review copy of this book from NetGalley.

In *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, Andrew Bacevich lays an argument that America has a chronic obsession with the Middle East, which spans all ideological divides, and which ultimately ends in failure with each foray. Bacevich has something of a reputation for being anti-partisan and taking the long view of history, and *America's War* largely builds upon previous arguments in *The Limits of Power*, *The Long War*, and *The New American Militarism*: that America is too reliant on military force to achieve foreign policy goals, and this is a cultural rather than a partisan problem which goes back a very long way.

In the context of *America's War*, it begins in 1979. The Iranian Revolution, more specifically the following hostage crisis, upset the balance in the larger Middle East. Calculations moved from considering Iran as the ally to provide stability to the region to assuming the US had to do it themselves. This allowed formerly obscure thinkers, who had been quietly campaigning for the US to take an active role in the world's oil supply, to move to the forefront of the professional intelligence and diplomatic corps and thereby dominate the foreign policy of every President from Carter to Obama.

It is the continuity between Presidential administrations which is most supportive of Bacevich's narrative. As Carter rolled over into Reagan, the point of view stayed the same. Reagan to Bush to Clinton to Bush to Obama, military force is the number one tool. And the Middle East is the number one region.

The subtitle of the volume "A Military History" is largely misleading. While Bacevich speaks about military campaigns, it is far more a history of foreign policy and thought. There is not much military analysis, save for continual castigation of the RMA thesis: that is, briefly, that technology made the American military unbeatable in the field. To echo the North Vietnamese Colonel Tu: That may be so, but it is also irrelevant. War is not won in battles, but in the Clausewitzian wrestling match of collective will.

Bacevich constructs a very impressive argument, but fails one important logical test. He argues that there is this geographic entity called a "Greater Middle East". This is composed of the so-called "Arab World", which includes the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, with the addition of Anatolia, Iran, Central Asia, certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, and even the Balkans in Southeast Europe. This vast area is outlined on included maps which point to American military actions in those countries since 1979. And this region is regularly mentioned in the context of government policy and decisions being made as if it were a cohesive defined entity for those people in the past, for which they were specifically making policy. Except Bacevich does not establish that those planners and decision-makers understood that this defined region existed, or that they made those decisions knowing this defined region existed. While it does not invalidate the discussion of individual events, it does weaken the argument for a "war" for a "greater middle east".

Nevertheless, this book puts forwards many questions and attacks many edifices of faith in American public culture. Bacevich was an armor officer, retiring as a colonel, and so has some direct knowledge of the early phases and a firm understanding of military affairs. He may be charged with too close to his subject, his son was killed in Iraq in 2007, and his emotion is palpable--but his arguments are consistent with his prior works. It's a good book, highly recommended.

Brook says

Five stars for those interested in US policy in the Middle East. This book will, intentionally or not, make you angry at U.S. foreign policy, specifically at the Executive branch since Truman (Presidents of both parties being implicated in folly, lies, and/or uninformed idiocy), with an even harsher light shed on the General Officers who have led the efforts there, with some exceptions. Reagan and H.W. Bush actually made the fewest errors. However, in the case of Reagan, there is a lot here to knock him down as a Great President, at least internationally. Beirut and Iran-Contra are the biggies. Rumsfeld comes out as both the biggest liar and the biggest idiot in the book (neither of which are uncommon at the Federal government level when it comes to foreign policy, but in this issue area he is the biggie).

What I think readers and voters don't understand is that, while the U.S. President does have significant power domestically, it's really Congress (and state, county, and local governments) that drives U.S. policy. Where the President wields the most power, relatively, is internationally. Presidents may issue Executive Orders that can be rescinded day 1 of a subsequent administration. However, U.S. Presidents may also commit U.S. forces to war (and the book does a great job of saying that we truly have been at a constant state of directly-involved war since 1991, and indirectly since the start of the Iran/Iraq war) that goes well beyond their term. H.W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq and liberate Kuwait is directly, no-questions, the cause of Obama inheriting a war in Iraq in 2008. There are no guesses or jumps. It is shown to be a direct causation.

For this reason, for this reader, the measure of a good President is as much - or perhaps more - dependent on what they do for U.S. interests abroad. This is not even taking into account what they do humanitarily for the people of other nations, but *simply* what is done for the interests of the American people and economy abroad.

You're going to walk away from this frustrated/angry at (if you trust in the reporting, which is taken directly from speeches and memos from these people):

Reagan
Carter
Chaney
George W. Bush
Obama
Rumsfeld
Robert Gates
Leon Panetta
Schwarzkopf (a man I admired as a kid)
Tommy Franks
Dempsey
Petraeus

Note that I have listed most American Presidents, most American SecDefs, and most American CENTCOM commanders, the latter two especially since 2001.

You are going to be frustrated by the mission in Beirut, by the bay in Lybia, by Iran-Contra, by the mission in Somalia, by the obvious missions in AF and IQ, by the missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, pretty much every incursion except for the evacuation of Beirut. There will be more.

You will see how open-ended policies and "goals" lead to intractable, never-ending wars. The evacuation of

Beirut is shown as an example of a success, as it had a clearly defined goal and finish line. It will be the only clear "win" in the entire book.

This is not a short read, but you will walk away with a greater understanding of the Middle East conflict, and the impression that Muslims have of the U.S., as well as a likely mild depression at where we are today.

This single book has made this reader much more of an isolationist, or at least a non-interventionist in the Middle East.

Joseph Stieb says

This is a solid book as long as we are clear on its intention. It's not breaking a lot of ground in academic scholarship, other than the broad conception of America's post 1980 foreign policy in the Middle East as a single conflict (I have my doubts here). Rather, the purpose seems to be to challenge Americans to think about how we arrived at the present, with our feet stuck in the mud of this region with a clean break seemingly impossible even as our dependence on the resources of the region lessens. In keeping with his earlier works, he also wants Americans to think about their own complicity in these policies, especially their tendency to ignore US actions and errors because they have no skin in the game.

The best point in Bacevich's book is that the last 35 years of US foreign policy in the ME have witnessed a giant version of mission creep derived from establishing certain principles at the end of the 70's. As soon as Carter said that the US would use force to prevent an outside power from seizing territory or resources in the Gulf the US became committed to broad involvement in the region. This involvement was originally predicated on the need to assure access to energy resources for us and other centers of economic power (Why Ike's promise to do basically the same thing in the late 50's doesn't feature more prominently in Bacevich's story, I'm not sure). This led to a progressive dipping of toes, feet, legs, and finally our whole body in the region as the main guarantor of security and stability. 9/11 shifted our emphasis from stabilization to transformation and the destruction of the terrorist threat, leading to the disastrous Iraq and Afghanistan wars (whether the purpose of these wars was really transformation depends on who you ask. I doubt that Rumsfeld and Cheney really cared about democratizing Iraq or the region given their utter lack of planning and obsession with getting out of IQ and AF as fast as possible. In fact, the warlord strategy in Afghanistan all but guaranteed that the country would not change). We now find ourselves with at least one foot still in the region and no clear idea of how to extricate ourselves.

The big problem I have with this book is how the shadow of the Iraq War casts a shadow forward and backwards in time. Was America's foreign policy in the Middle East really a disaster on September 10, 2001? Sure, Iraq policy drifted, the Arab-Israeli conflict simmered, and we had lots of people who hated us. If you see this period as setting up the Iraq War, then it looks much worse than it was. But if you take it by itself, without 9/11 we probably would have just muddled through as we had always done. Although the presidents from Carter to Clinton treated the Middle East as a region of vital strategic interest (it was, and mostly still is) and set up certain principles that steadily increased the US role in the region, there was no reason that this slow increase of military and diplomatic involvement had to lead to the occupation of Iraq. These presidents all exercised restraint in the exercise of US power in the region, studiously avoiding excessive commitment and costly intervention in most cases (Daddy Bush is the best example of this). Barring Saddam doing something rash, the Iraq War required both 9/11 and the particular constellation of leaders in power at the time to delude themselves into thinking that SH was an existential threat and that the invasion would bring good to Iraq and the region. The problem with this book is that Bacevich allows the shadow of Iraq to cast a pall of failure and incompetence across a much more complex 21 years of US involvement in the Middle East.

My second main problem with Bacevich is that he's just too harsh. We need to be harsh about these episodes in our history, especially Iraq. But do we have to be cynical? Bacevich seems to think that every general and president is really only out for his or herself. I'm sure there's plenty of egotism at those levels, but there's also a lot of smart people making good faith efforts to solve extremely difficult problems. This is maybe my biggest pet peeve among academics: the insinuation, via excessive criticism, that they would have known better, chosen a better path, been smarter, or are smarter. Bacevich strongly emphasizes the downsides in situations where the US chose among bad options and still brought about outcomes better than the alternatives (Bosnia, GWI, Kosovo, possibly Somalia). If you are going to criticize for failures, you should recognize successes, even very partial ones (it's worth noting that these partial successes saved tens if not hundreds of thousands of lives and entire countries from eradication). As one of my professors, Navin Bapat, once said: Never assume you are smarter or know more than the people you study. Bacevich is a brilliant scholar with a genuine desire to guide his country onto a more ethical, responsible path, but he's fallen into this trap with this book (see how granting the assumption of good faith is done?). This is why I'd avoid assigning it as an undergraduate text: it would only encourage students' already powerful proclivity towards cynicism and thinking they know everything.

Bacevich has a lot of good points that I didn't cover above: US ignorance of Islamic history and practices, the erroneous belief that we can "fix" the Middle East, a tendency to militarize solutions, a tendency to abandon certain situations once our broad geopolitical aims had been achieved, the dictation of policy aims by domestic politics. I particularly liked his argument that the US sees the GWOT as a continuation of the struggles against fascism and communism (see Norman Podhoretz and the 2002 NSS) when really this is a separate part of the world with its own history that calls for a different framework.

Nevertheless, this book tells me that Bacevich is actually a better critic of culture and politics at home than foreign policy. In *Breach of Trust and New American Militarism*, he shows how certain aspects of American culture since Vietnam have given birth to a cheap patriotism that exacts no price on the average American for wars abroad and gives presidents far more leeway to conduct foreign adventures without suffering politically at home. By identifying this rot in our collective notions of service (or lack thereof), Bacevich is really on to something. But with foreign policy, he is far too caustic. He doesn't seem to know what he wants in many cases. For a follower of Niebuhr, he's oddly unsatisfied with incomplete successes like those in GWI, Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere where the alternatives could have been much worse. For example, this whole book criticizes America's tendency to dip its toes into conflicts and then fall in completely, but he also seems to dislike Obama's mostly hands-off approach to Syria and his lack of a military response to Assad's use of chemical weapons. I therefore have to leave off with the question: What do you want?

Matt Papes says

This book is an immensely readable, indescribably profound, devastating critique of our foreign policy in the Middle East that dates back to the Carter administration. After reading this book, you will not view anything you hear or read about the war and our policies in the Middle East the same way again. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Laurie says

This is the book that anyone - and that includes every American - who cares about our place in the world and is even minimally curious about how we got so seemingly inextricably involved in the greater Middle East,

should read. The new administration's populist "America First" policy will be sorely tested by establishment forces pushing us into an ongoing war that many of us continue to view as irrelevant to our daily lives. Bacevich provides both important historic context linking seemingly disparate military actions and a realistic if pessimistic view that multiple forces - lack of a viable anti-war party, politicians who wrap themselves in patriotism, the still-viable military-industrial complex, and the remoteness of war to most Americans - will keep us locked in a costly and destructive pattern of fighting without success.

Valerie says

I read this book because I realized I knew very little about America's involvement in the Middle East. My memory and knowledge of the Middle East starts with 9/11 and gets increasingly fuzzy from there. I was only 7 when Operation Desert Storm happened and so I have no memory of that. On 9/11 I was a junior in high school. In the ensuing weeks and years I sometimes wondered about our objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq, but I assumed our leaders knew what they were doing.

But as our involvement in the Middle East continued without any clear or lasting results I started to wonder what it was all about. Hence I decided to read this book.

This book looks at every military action in the Middle East since 1980 as part of one large war. Things that happened during the presidencies of Obama and Bush had their seeds sewn during the Carter and Reagan Administrations.

This book illustrated that time and again the US's best (and sometimes worst) intentions in the Middle East yielded disastrous and unintended results. And time and again those results were ignored, misinterpreted or, flat out covered up by a string of Presidents, High Ranking Military Officials, members of the Cabinet, and congressional leaders.

If you want to understand what we are trying (and failing) to do in the Middle East you should read this book.

Hadrian says

Depressingly familiar history of American military intervention in the Middle East - showcases successive administrations' bowing to political expediency in hopes for a quick victory, ignoring cultural and historical trends, and treating the entire region as a bed of nails and the military as a worn-down hammer.

Most of the story is already known: Operation Eagle Claw, Beirut, Iran-Iraq, Afghanistan, Desert Storm, Somalia, Bosnia, Enduring Freedom, etc., etc., etc. Much of the newer material concerns post-2008 Iraq and Afghanistan and DAESH, which is also important to have.

Murtaza says

This book does a profound service by knitting together and making coherent several decades of American policy in the Middle East. First initiated in 1980 under Carter, Bacevich posits (convincingly) that U.S. policies in the region have formed one broad campaign. While initially this campaign started out being about

securing oil supplies from the Persian Gulf - something its proponents at the time were frank about - it shortly thereafter became an aimless and vague enterprise. Without any coherent or consistent agenda The War for the Greater Middle East continues on of its own volition, at great cost to the people of the region as well as the people of the United States, who are largely checked out of it.

Aside from the indispensable task of creating a grand narrative of America involvement in the region, Bacevich also draws on a vast history of U.S. policy documents that chart what foreign policy has historically been about. The book is bracketed by two of these. A strategy plan by Paul Wolfowitz that identified the USSR and then-ascendant Baathist Iraq as the two threats to American hegemony in the region gives insight into why American troops first came to the region and much of why they've stayed since. An older document, by George Kennan in the 1940s, that identifies maintaining the global disparity of wealth in America's favor, closes the book and gives insight into what historically the aim of U.S. foreign policy has been.

Somewhere along the line the United States developed an obsession with "shaping" the Middle East by force into a vision that suited its interests and ideology. Whether and why this needed to be accomplished was not much examined. U.S. troops first arrived in the Middle East to protect it from the threat of Soviet encroachment. After the fall of the Soviets, they found a new task, one that (not coincidentally) justified the continuance of the massive set of domestic interests that Eisenhower termed as the military-industrial complex. To this end America has attempted to impose its will on the region, often in ways that made little sense, and, as the track record laid out here shows, almost invariably with disastrous consequences for its people.

The Middle East is by any account less stable, free and hopeful than it was when America first began its involvement in 1980. It has used its people as fodder for a variety of policies. While sometimes malevolent and sometimes beneficent in intent, the end results have almost uniformly been malign.

Bacevich's book is invaluable, as it places history in its full context. We often take events in the Middle East as discrete (indeed we are encouraged to do so by a sclerotic media environment), and thus end up seeing many trees but never a forest. This book is full of memory. Its also full of philosophical insight, including into what is meant by the "American way of life" as remembered by him, a career army officer who lost his own son in a messianic government adventure to "change the way they live" in Iraq. This work is also a clarion call for Americans to wake up and pay attention to their government's disastrous policies in the Greater Middle East, if not for the benefit of the peoples of the region then at least for their own benefit, as a new set of real, material challenges emerge to America's privileged position in the world.

Mikey B. says

Page 109 (my book)

Reinhold Niebuhr had chided Americans about entertaining "dreams of managing history", a temptation to which he deemed his countrymen peculiarly susceptible. "The recalcitrant forces in the historical drama," he warned, "have a power and persistence beyond our reckoning."

Page 61 in the 1990's

For the moment, Washington fancied that it had finished its work in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Afghanistan was not yet finished with the United States.

This book provides a powerful analysis of the history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East (including Afghanistan) in the last forty years. It was Jimmy Carter who decided that the Persian Gulf was essential to American interests (i.e. oil, the American way of life...). This eventually led to escalation and several military “solutions”.

Initially it was to protect the Middle East from the Soviet Union. The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1980 was seen erroneously as a preliminary step by the Soviets to move into the Persian Gulf. To counter this the United States, along with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan supported the Afghan “freedom fighters”.

There are several recurring themes in this book. One is the ignorance of the U.S. government (the Pentagon, the military) in what they were supporting or doing in the Middle East; supporting Afghanistan in the 1980's being a prime example.

Page 49

For Generals Kingston, Crist, or Schwarzkopf to incorporate history or religion into their thinking alongside geography or the perspective enemy's order of battle would have required an enormous leap of creative imagination. At CENTCOM headquarters, such imagination was – and would remain – in short supply.

Other themes are announcements on multiple occasions of purported “end of mission”, “victory” - when in fact the mission was hardly over and was soon to enter a more violent, deadly, and anarchistic phase that would last for several more years.

Also was the idea of setting up a “liberal democracy” in Iraq and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan. This love for democracy, supposedly, was to spread to neighboring countries in the Middle East. Instead of democracy we have had the metastasis of Al Qaeda to ISIS. This shows no signs of abating.

Page 366

Removing the likes of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Mohamed Farrah Aidid, ... Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi held the key to putting things right.

This terrorist hit-list many fear simply leads to more and more.

History has repeated itself, the U.S., like in Vietnam has become bogged down in an endless spreading war. And worse, it keeps being drawn back in to subdue the chaos resulting from the initial military invasion. And the Middle East is far more complex than Vietnam with multiple religious and tribal conflicts.

So another theme is the inability to face facts – the reality that military intervention is not providing a solution, that Saudi Arabia is neither an ally nor a “friend”.

In contrast to World War II and Vietnam when there was a draft, the American people have not been asked to make a sacrifice after 9/11. President Bush told them to go on with their current lifestyle – much of which took a nosedive after the recession in 2008.

American leaders, after ousting Saddam Hussein, repeatedly told the world that Iraq was becoming democratic.

I also learnt that after the first Gulf War of 1991 U.S. Air forces were constantly active over Iraq in order to enforce the no-fly zone. One could say that from 1991 until the U.S. invasion in 2003 there was a continual war being fought in Iraq. In fact it goes on to this day.

Perhaps this book is short on solutions. I also feel that the comparisons the author makes with Bosnia and Kosovo to events in the Middle East are not that valid.

In a historical sense, by examining the history of the interventions and invasions all in one context, we see many patterns repeating themselves over the last 40 years. We come out of this book with a strong sense of the historical fallacies perpetuated by the U.S. government since the 1980's.

Steven Z. says

As a student of history over the years I have studied and taught the 100 Years War between England and France in the 14th and 15th centuries, the 30 Years War in western and central Europe in the 17th century, and now Andrew Bacevitch suggests the 40 Years War in the Middle East that began in the 20th century and continues to this day. Bacevitch, a former career soldier and professor of history at Boston University, has written a number of important books on American foreign and military policy including *BREACH OF TRUST*, *WASHINGTON RULES*, and *THE LIMITS OF POWER* explains in his new book, *AMERICA'S WAR FOR THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST: A MILITARY HISTORY* that the United States has been engaged in a war in the region that dates back to 1979 and is still ongoing. He has labeled this continuous struggle, the 40 Years War in which the United States has been involved in conflict in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen. After reading his latest work two questions come to mind. First, over the period discussed in the book, did the United States ever have an actual strategy? Second, did American military supremacy obviate the need for a strategy? After exploring Bacevitch's narrative the answer is a resounding no to the first question, and yes to the second as successive administrations relied on the latest military technology to achieve its goals as it careened from one crisis in the region to the next. For example, Bacevitch describes President Clinton's policy in the Balkans in the 1990s as "intervention by inadvertence," and the NATO air campaign in the same region as "military masturbation." Further, after discussing President George H.W. Bush's approach to dealing with Saddam Hussein after forcing the Iraqi dictator out of Kuwait in 1991, Bacevitch describes United States policy as "occupation by air," setting up "no-fly zones" rather than instituting a realistic approach to dealing with the situation on the ground.

Bacevitch's work is provocative and reflects the ability to synthesize a great deal of information in developing sound conclusions. The author constructs a narrative that encompasses the period 1979 to the present as he explains the origins of American involvement in the region and how it fostered the "Greater War in the Middle East." As he does so he develops his arguments like a prosecutor at an evidentiary hearing as he dissects the approach taken by five presidential administrations. He carefully crafts his thesis in a step by step approach as each event builds on the next and how they are linked to produce the idiocy of American policy. As each building block is presented, Bacevitch digresses to compare policy decisions for the Middle East with other somewhat comparative situations in American history from the American Revolution, the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I and II, and the Vietnam War creating interesting parallels. What is clear from Bacevitch's narrative is that in many cases American decision makers repeatedly reached conclusions in a vacuum that reminds one of Kurt Vonnegut's "cloud cuckoo land."

As the author traces America's "War for the Greater Middle East" what becomes clear is the lack of a coherent strategy. Administration after administration succumbed to fallacies of their own making. Jimmy Carter hoped to develop a new foreign policy agenda of alleviating Third World poverty, resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, and eliminating nuclear weapons. This agenda would be shattered by the Iranian revolution and a president who "lacked guile, a vulnerability that, once discovered, his adversaries at home and abroad did not hesitate to exploit." Bacevitch provides an astute analysis of Carter's overall foreign policy, focusing mostly on Iran and Afghanistan. Carter concerned for his own reelection would auger in the "Greater War in

the Middle East” by announcing the Carter Doctrine which stated that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” Wonderful in theory, but American fecklessness was on full display in the Iranian Desert in April 1980 as it seemed that American planes and helicopters were playing bumper cars.

The problem with the Carter Doctrine and subsequent American policy under Ronald Reagan is that it was based on the false premise that the Soviet Union coveted the Persian Gulf and possessed the will and capacity to seize it. The American response was the creation of a new command for the region called CENTCOM. Though created to deal with the Soviet threat, CENTCOM would provide the United States with a platform to launch and continue its wars in the region. What was also very troubling is that CENTCOM paid little attention to the Shi'ite-Sunni divide, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the climate of the region in its planning. As the Cold War drew to a close, the Reagan administration shifted its focus from the Soviet Union to Iraq as public enemy number one, and did not take into account that state actors were not the only enemies that confronted the United States. For Reagan, Afghanistan seemed like a major victory as we contributed to the defeat of the Soviet Union. Another victory was supposedly achieved as we backed both sides in the First Persian Gulf War between Iran and Iraq, a policy we would pay heavily for in the future. But in endorsing the Carter Doctrine in stepping up American military activity in the region we achieved little of lasting benefit and over time we created an incubator for terrorism that drew the United States into a quagmire later on. As Bacevitch points out, by supporting the Mujahidin we helped foster Islamic radicalism and with our support Pakistan became a nuclear power. Further, by meting out punishment to Libyan dictator Moamar Gaddafi it led to bombings in Berlin killing American soldiers and German civilians and the downing of Pan Am flight 103 over Scotland and the death of hundreds of Americans. The Reagan administration was not just content with an erroneous approach in Afghanistan and Libya, its policy toward Lebanon was hard to fathom resulting in two separate incursions into the Beirut area resulting in further radicalizing Hezbollah and causing the death of 241 Marines. When the United States withdrew from Lebanon and engaged in the Iran-Contra scandal it reflected American ignorance, ineptitude, and a lack of staying power that Islamists would take note of for the future.

Bacevitch is correct in arguing that the end of the Cold War provided the United States with a freedom of action that it had not enjoyed since the mid-1940s allowing George H.W. Bush to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. The second Persian Gulf War, was a proxy war against a past to eradicate feelings of inadequacy induced by Vietnam. This was reflected in the rhetoric surrounding the conflict and commentary evaluating America's technological and military superiority as we crushed Saddam's forces. As much as the war seemed a success American intervention would produce conditions that were conducive to further violence and disorder. Once Saddam was expelled the United States had no real plan for the post-war situation. Substantial elements of the Republican Guard remained intact, and Shi'ites and Kurds rose up against Saddam. Bacevitch points out that a myth developed concerning the 1990s as a relatively peaceful decade for the United States in the region. This myth was fostered by the supposed success of “Operation Desert Storm.” However, almost immediately the plight of the Kurds led to a “no-fly zone” in the north, and Saddam's revenge against Shi'ites led to a “no-fly zone in the south.” In effect the United States occupied Iraq in the air and flew thousands upon thousands of sorties in the 1990s to control Saddam's forces. Once Bush left office Bill Clinton continued the Bush approach of the gap between raw military power and political acuity. In confronting events in the Balkans and Somalia, the United States widened the “Greater War for the Middle East.” The United States sought to protect Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo from the Serbs, as well as the Somali people from murdering warlords, but as in most instances the “commitment of raw military power might get things off to a good start, a faulty grasp of underlying political dynamics leaves the United States susceptible to ambush, both literal and figurative.”

Bacevitch digs deep in his analysis integrating American military strategy, the theoretical arguments between military men and their civilian overseers, as well as the application of strategies developed for the battlefield. Bacevitch explains military concepts in a very understandable manner and the conclusion one reaches is that

conceptually American military planners were repeatedly off base in their approach. Bacevitch's description of the cast of characters involved is very important and insightful. Whether discussing Generals Norman Schwarzkopf, Tommy Franks, Stanley McChrystal, David Petraeus, or others, the reader is exposed to personalities and egos that dominated military policy planning and implementation in an overly honest and blunt fashion.

Bacevitch leaves his most scathing analysis of American policy for the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. As the 1990s evolved with terrorist spectaculars at the World Trade Center in 1993, Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the outgoing Clinton administration explained that these events resulted from American leadership responsibilities in the world, and because we acted to advance peace and democracy. This explanation as most offered by the government during the period under discussion were "designed not to inform but to reassure and thereby to conceal." The "Greater War for the Middle East" now widened to include Osama Bin-Laden and al Qaeda. As the United States exaggerated the threat it posed, it ignored the underlying circumstances that created it. What developed was a pattern, if we could decapitate al Qaeda and kill Bin-Laden all problems would be solved. We tried that with Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Moamar Gaddafi in Libya and look what resulted. For the United States "policy formulation was becoming indistinguishable from targeting."

After 9/11 the United States immediately shifted from crushing al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan to the invasion of Iraq. Bacevitch argues that the Bush administration was fixated on Saddam Hussein, and did not accept or ignored the fact that the battle in Afghanistan was far from over. Afghanistan reverted to the back burner, another "phony war" that the United States ignited, but failed to carry to fruition and let simmer. Many have pondered why the United States invaded Iraq - was it about oil, weapons of mass destruction, or humanitarianism? Bacevitch correctly places these reasons aside and concentrates on the American intent on establishing the efficacy of preventive war. Washington was going to assert the prerogative that no other country had - overthrowing any government the United States found wanting or as it is better known as, the Bush Doctrine. This premise was based on the fallacious conclusion that the Islamic world could easily adapt to democracy, limited government, a market economy, and respect for human and woman's rights no matter what their opponents argued. For the Bush administration Saddam and Iraq fit this paradigm perfectly. The United States invaded Iraq not because of the danger it posed, but because of the opportunity it presented. Bacevitch explores in detail all the key aspects of the war from its outset, to the capture of Saddam, the Shi'ite-Sunni civil war, to the "surge," and again what is clear is American incompetence be it the fault of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Bremmer, Franks, or others.

Bacevitch's overall evaluation of the Obama administration's Middle East policy is harsh, but extremely accurate as the President seemed to continue Bush policies. First, Obama was committed to the withdrawal of American troops by the end of the 2011 deadline that Bush had negotiated with the Iraqi government. However, as troops returned home from Iraq, many made a "U-turn" and were sent to Afghanistan, or for many who were redeployed once again to Afghanistan! During the Obama years the "Greater War for the Middle East" was confronted by three important changes that had major implications. First, after almost 40 years of war, an "Iraqi Syndrome" developed with the reluctance to put American troops in harm's way. Second, the turmoil from the Arab Spring. Lastly, the chasm that developed in American-Israeli relations. Obama has had a great deal of difficulty navigating these changes. A surge was tried that accomplished little but increasing American casualties. Support for aspects of the Arab Spring resulted in little improvement in Egypt and other Arab autocracies. Problems with Israel became a partisan political football in both countries and an inability of leaders to work with each other. Further, the Obama administration resorted to decapitation in Libya that has been disastrous. Finally, the administration dithered over the civil war in Syria and looked foolish when it did little to enforce its own "red line." It seems that Obama's strategy is wrapped up in special operations and drone attacks, not really conducive to improving America's reputation in the region and the overall Islamic world.

In closing, Bacevitch has written an extremely important book that policy makers should consult very

carefully. Granted, the author has had the benefit of historical hindsight in preparing his arguments. But one cannot negate the intelligent conclusions he puts forth. If you would like to gain insight and understanding of the 40 Year War, consult Bacevitch's narrative because as events in Libya, Syria, and Yemen continue, it does not seem as if this war is going to end in the foreseeable future. As Bacevitch states in his conclusion; the perpetuation of the "War for the Greater Middle East" is not enhancing American freedom or security. It is accomplishing the opposite, but hopefully one day the American people will wake up from their slumber regarding its prosecution. Until that time the wars end will not come about.

Darwin8u says

*"The Lord's anger burned against Israel
and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years."*
-- Numbers 32: 13

"To be sure, Bush's Second Inaugural qualifies as a thoroughly American text, the president reiterating sentiments voiced by more than a few of his predecessors. Yet the speech also bears the unmistakable imprint of self-indulgent fantasy, of sobriety overtaken by fanaticism. Bush's expectations of ending tyranny by spreading American ideals mirrored Osama Bin Laden's dream of establishing a new caliphate based on Islamic principals. When put to the test, the president's vision of peace gained by waging preventative war had proven to be just as fanciful as bin Laden's and harry less pernicious. As adversaries, truly they were made for each other."
-- Andrew J. Bacevich, America's War for the Greater Middle East.

Ouch!

Dr. Andrew "Skip" Bacevich is a national treasure. He is fairly unassuming in person. He would pass for a conservative banker, a thoughtful pastor, or reserved high school principal if you just happened to see him sitting across from you on the Amtrak from North Station to DuPont. But step out of line, and just his gaze alone would stop you in your tracks. He could stare down a bear, perhaps stop a shark in Hawaii with just his gaze. Obviously, I exaggerate. I'm not sure how wildlife would react to retired Colonel Bacevich, but the couple times I met him when he was commanding the 11th ACR in Fulda, Germany ... well, let's be honest ... he scared the shit out of me. And I don't intimidate easily. Even the 17-year-old version of me.

Anyway, I've read many of Bacevich's previous books like: (The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism, Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War, Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country). I still have two other Bacevich books: (The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War, American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy) sitting stoically on the shelf right behind me (between a Gary Wills and a Steve Coll) waiting patiently to be read. I would consider myself to be a hyper-Bacevich-acolyte. I will read them soon.

Anyway, enough wind-up. This book isn't flashy. It isn't full of new revelations. It is just solid military and historical scholarship and probably one of the key historical pieces on the military adventurism of the United States in the Middle East since the Carter Administration. Bacevich isn't a lawyer, but this book seemed to me basically an airtight legal brief exploring: 1) what motivated the United States to act as it has in the Middle East? 2) what both the civilians and the military tried to accomplish there? 3) Regardless of what US policy makers and military planners wanted to do, what actually happened there? 4) What are the

consequences of US policy towards the Middle East? What have our wars wrought?

This is a book everyone needs to read. If our military adventurism has continued to roll on, not just in the Middle East but Africa and to a smaller degree in South America and Asia, we need to understand why we constantly seem to screw it up. How are we as citizens going to hold our leaders (both in the Military and in political office) to account if we don't seem to really give a shit. Less than one percent of our citizens have been involved directly in these wars, but the wars have affected all of us. We all pay the monetary debt and burden of the Billions and even Trillions wasted in stupid wars, we pay the moral debt for the blood left on the battlefield, the wounds brought home, and the citizens killed to further American interests when we have no sense any longer exactly what that interest is.

We are trapped in generational, perpetual wars in the Middle East and to what end? Most of the Neo-Con arguments should have been put to bed with the absolute failure of America's longest two wars. We seem to have left both Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria and Libya less stable than we found them. We keep sending our damn military bulls into foreign Pottery Barns and we don't seem to grasp WHY exactly we are doing it or HOW the hell we can get out.

Anyway, this is a must read from a philosopher/historian of the highest order. It is his masterpiece. Read it, and weep.
