

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Beth Bailey, Richard H. Immerman, eds. *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 368 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4798-2690-2; \$89.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4798-7143-8.

Richard D. Hooker Jr., Joseph J. Collins, eds. *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015. Maps. 488 pp. \$32.98 (paper), ISBN 978-1-329-62849-6.

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach



Although hundreds of articles and books concerning the war on terror and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have now been published, relatively few authors have focused on the interaction of these conflicts.[1] With different foci and audiences, the two edited books in this review are significant additions to the relatively sparse existing literature. While the contributors focus on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they differentiate between the two wars' purposes, intents, and outcomes. Indeed, the contributors to both generally agree with Richard Haass that the war in Afghanistan was "a war of necessity" and the war in Iraq was "a war of choice" (*War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* [2010]). Retired military leaders were particularly critical of the Iraq war. Former Central Command (CENTCOM) general Anthony Zinni called the Iraq war "the wrong war at the wrong time with the wrong strategy." [2] The former head of the National Security Agency, General William Odom, was even more scathingly critical; he said that "the invasion of Iraq may well turn out to be the greatest strategic disaster in American history" (quoted by Michael Reynolds in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, p. 22).

*Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, edited by Beth Bailey and Richard Immerman, consists of essays by mostly civilian academics and has a broad focus that includes an examination of societal and cultural factors regarding the interaction between these wars. *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, edited

by Richard D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, consists of essays by former US government policymakers and advisers who offer strategic advice for four-star generals and admirals, their staff, and their family members. The different intended readerships of the books result in contrasting, but complementary, approaches from which readers will benefit. Both books have an intended purpose of discerning the lessons of the war on terror and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; however, the Hooker-Collins volume is more restrained in its ambitions, calling for "lessons encountered" rather than "lessons learned," because it is, in fact, rare that policymakers learn the lessons from previous wars (p. 2).

The audiences of the two books are dramatically different. The former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, suggested the central questions that constitute the basis of the Hooker-Collins book whereas the Bailey-Immerman book focuses on broader, more academic themes. To some extent, the Hooker-Collins book is an "inside baseball," or rather "inside the beltway," book because it is written for senior officers; the book is based in part on more than one hundred interviews conducted by the editors and others of current and former high-ranking civilian and military officials. One hopes that these interviews will be made available to others doing research on this period of history. The Bailey-Immerman volume adopts a broader scope and includes chapters focusing on not only the political, military, and diplomatic aspects of the two wars but also the

combatants' experience, the opposition to the wars, media's involvement, popular culture (novels, films, video games), and veterans' readjustment. Obviously, these are vitally important issues but beyond the narrower, strategic scope of the Hooker-Collins volume.

Both books, but in different ways, address the costs of these wars. Lisa Munday in Bailey and Immerman's collection notes that 2.6 million Americans served in Afghanistan and Iraq and that 40 percent completed multiple tours of duty; 300,000 of those who served were women (in contrast, only about 10,000 women served in Vietnam) (pp. 176-177). David Kiernan points out that an estimated one-third of veterans from these two wars have been diagnosed with mental health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, and/or posttraumatic stress, and 50 percent of the veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq have been awarded disability benefits. In addition, the Veterans Administration estimates that 7 percent of veterans have traumatic brain injuries, mostly from improvised explosive devices (p. 166). *Lessons Encountered* includes an outstanding appendix, "The Human and Financial Costs of Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq," which indicates that the ultimate financial cost of these wars will approach four trillion dollars.

Of course, the dearest cost of war is the loss of a country's citizens. In his memoir, former secretary of defense Robert M. Gates wrote: "During World War II, General George Marshall told his wife, 'I cannot afford the luxury of sentiment, mine must be cold logic. Sentiment is for others.' Icy detachment was never an option for me. Because of the nature of the two wars I oversaw, I could afford the luxury of sentiment, and at times it overwhelmed me." [3] Unlike Secretary Gates, most Americans were not overwhelmed; in fact, as David Farber points out in Bailey and Immerman's volume, "The great majority of Americans sacrificed almost nothing during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq" (p. 194). Many, if not most, of those in the army or marines, however, knew comrades who were killed or wounded. How can the sense of loss be shared to a greater extent by American civilians and members of the military services and their families?

Despite the material addressed in these two books, there are some topics that are not adequately covered. First, these two wars depended heavily on National Guard and Reserve forces to fight them; indeed, as Kiernan points out in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, more than half a million National Guard and Reserve forces served in Iraq between 2001 and 2007, and 13 percent of all National Guard forces had deployed

more than once (p. 274). In future conflicts will and can the United States depend so heavily on American citizen soldiers as opposed to full-time professional members of the military? Second, once the surge of troops to Iraq was implemented, there were 180,000 American military personnel in Iraq, and there were almost as many civilian contractors in Iraq at that time. [4] In future conflicts will and can the United States depend as heavily on civilian contractors? Third, a literal revolution in warfare has occurred with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) or drones. In Pakistan, George W. Bush authorized 45 drone strikes between 2004 and 2008. From 2009 through 2012, Barack Obama authorized 255 strikes (p. 92). Although Nicholas Rostow and Harvey Rishikof in Hooker and Collins's collection analyze the legal aspects of drone strikes, calling them "high-tech sniping" (p. 371), much more analysis of the use of these new, lethal weapons is called for.

Although several of the contributors to these two books comment on the unintended consequences of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, I believe that more emphasis should have been placed on this topic. For example, these wars caused American leaders to shift their attention from the long-term emerging challenge of China, and in the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan, China became the most active country seeking to exploit Afghanistan's mineral resources. In addition, the biggest winner from the war in Iraq was Iran, and that unintended outcome could have long-term implications.

Each book contains helpful appendices and ancillary materials. Both books contain helpful chronologies, and the Bailey-Immerman book is particularly helpful since it is presented as a side-by-side timetable. In addition, this volume includes a glossary of terms and a list of "notable persons," which helps readers sort out the principal players. By contrast, *Lessons Encountered* includes excellent maps; however, a shortcoming of this volume is the omission of an index.

Eliot A. Cohen, in his 2002 book *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, notes that the civilian-military relationship is characterized by an "unequal dialogue." [5] *Lessons Encountered* highlights the vital importance of mutual civilian-military understanding, cooperation, and appreciation, which was missing in a number of instances during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These books can help to bridge the civilian-military gap in the future. In their conclusion, Hooker and Collins emphasize the importance for senior military officers to gain an understanding of the political, diplo-

matic, and moral dimensions of the decisions that they will confront, and the editors note that advanced schooling at top civilian graduate schools contributed to such understanding for a number of senior officers who played a central role in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including General David Petraeus (Princeton), Admiral James Stavridis (Fletcher School, Tufts), General John Abizaid (Stanford), and Major General H. R. McMaster (North Carolina).

In their conclusion, Hooker and Collins wisely quote Sir Winston Churchill: “Let us learn our lessons. Never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter” (p. 416). Those who read these two books, be they civilians or high-level government officials, will be better equipped to deal with the “tides and hurricanes” of war that they may encounter.

Even though I have written a book on the subject of these two books, I learned a great deal from both collections and highly recommend them to anyone interested in contemporary American foreign policy and the conflicts in which the United States has been involved during the past decade and a half.

#### Notes

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[1]. The bibliography that I prepared on the subjects of these books was forty-three pages long; see Dan Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 288-331. On work that combines the two conflicts, see Terry H. Anderson, *Bush's Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); John Ballard, David Lamm, and John Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and Back: The U.S. at War in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012); Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and Al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011); and Seyom Brown and Robert H. Scales, *U.S. Policy in Afghanistan: Lessons and Legacies* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2012).

[2]. General Anthony Zinni, quoted in Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict*, xi.

[3]. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Vintage, 2015), 594.

[4]. T. Christian Miller, “Contractors Outnumber Troops in Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2007, A7.

[5]. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 10.