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Counter Jihad: America's Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria

Counter Jihad: America's Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria by Brian Glyn Williams. University of Pennsylvania Press (<http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/>), 3905 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112, 2016, 400 pages, \$39.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-8122-4867-8.

Two images have been circulating together around the Internet in recent months. The first picture is of a young boy waving an American flag; the second, a young Soldier holding the same flag. Above the child are the words "We were just kids on 9/11." Those below the Soldier read "We're not kids anymore." As time goes on, more and more military personnel are too young to remember or were too young at the time to understand this critical event. A 2014 demographic study of the military determined that almost 50 percent of enlisted members and 13 percent of officers were younger than 12 on 11 September 2001 (p. iv). This generation is in dire need of an honest history of the wars since 9/11 and of a detailed analysis of today's terror threats. Not only could they use this for their personal edification but also they deserve to know whom they are fighting and killing—and why. Prof. Brian Glyn Williams's *Counter Jihad* provides just the account they have been lacking.

A professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, Williams offers a detailed view of a complex chronicle to which many millennials (and even some late Generation X individuals) may have never been exposed. In his words, "This history of counterterrorism and warfare in distant lands and tragedy in the United States is not intended for experts alone. It is meant to be a guide for all those who want to learn from the mistakes and successes of the wars in the Middle East and Central Asia and apply them to the future and present" (p. xii). Although Williams's target audience includes the undergraduate students he instructs daily, another group requires such an education: young military professionals. No other assemblage has a greater need for an account of the conditions and decisions that brought about these wars than today's junior combatants. These are the people who have been called upon to win this war and who may bear the burden of taking enemy lives in order to protect coalition and civilian lives. It is important that the average citizen understand these events, but it is paramount for our military members, especially those who are now coming of age to fight and lead. *Counter Jihad* will provide them a better understanding of the war their superiors have spent their careers fighting, thereby equipping our millennial warriors with comprehension of how the current state of affairs in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria came to be.

Williams's analysis includes a plethora of quotations from many senior government officials, highlighting what older Americans were hearing from their political and military leaders as they tried to transform their lives into a new normal after 9/11. The author also supplies information about misunderstandings in the American government and intelligence community; for example, Secretary of State Colin Powell once claimed that Saddam Hussein was working to build nuclear weapons, but none were ever found (p. 103). Although Williams presents the content with all of the rigor and discipline one would expect from an expert in this field, *Counter Jihad* explains this history in a way that is both interesting and understandable to someone with minimal knowledge about the Middle East. The result is an excellent resource for the junior Airman, Marine, Sailor, or Soldier desiring to learn more about the complex world in which he or she fights. From explanations of mid-twentieth-century conflicts around Israel to an analysis of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) strength in early 2016, this book offers the reader a thorough and balanced summary that is neither strictly pro-American nor pro-Middle East but pro-truth.

All armed forces members, active duty or otherwise, should have the kind of education about the Middle East and the United States' recent involvement that this study provides. Additionally, it gives the reader insights into ISIS, one of the foremost national security threats of our time. Williams writes that "until the Shiite-dominated governments in Baghdad and Damascus overcome years of mistrust and warfare and win the trust of the Sunnis in both Iraq and Syria, ISIS will be able to exploit a deep pool of support in both countries. This will make it incredibly difficult to defeat without U.S. troops on the ground" (p. 317). This fight against ISIS will not conclude in the foreseeable future, and its success will fall on the shoulders of those too young to remember the day that this struggle against terror began. It is critical that military leaders of tomorrow attempt to understand both the enemy of today and the lessons of yesterday. That journey of comprehension can begin in *Counter Jihad*, making this text a worthwhile—even necessary—addition to any professional warrior's bookshelf.

2nd Lt Briana N. Dutcher, USAF
Randolph AFB, Texas

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