

***Counter Jihad: America's Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.*** By Brian Glyn Williams. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8122-4867-8. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Index. Pp. xix, 367. \$39.95.

All Americans should read Brian Glyn Williams's provocative new book, *Counter Jihad*. Williams, who teaches Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, laments that many Americans today fail to comprehend the historical development of the War on Terror and its three most significant theaters of war: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Often, Americans do not make important historical connections, but are manipulated by the politicization of key foreign policy issues. Williams is concerned that there is a "shocking ignorance" among young Americans with respect to "wars that have dominated the news all their lives" (p. i). These, too, were not only wars, but conflicts partially based on what Williams calls "one of the biggest lies in American history" (p. 104). Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria are still active combat zones, but Americans seem less and less aware of the historical development of these conflicts. In *Counter Jihad* Williams provides clarity with a provocative account that brings together the complex issues involved in the War on Terror and demonstrates continuity in the historical development of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

*Counter Jihad* is, more than anything else, an indictment of the George W. Bush administration's Iraq War, which eventually led to the emergence of Al Qaeda in Iraq and then, following the Syrian Civil War, to the development of the Islamic State. Williams demonstrates that the Islamic State represents blowback primarily from Paul Bremer and Donald Rumsfeld's clumsy and misguided de-Baathification of Iraq that alienated Sunnis and sent many down the path to jihadi extremism. The author emphasizes that the United States' operation in Afghanistan, which unlike Iraq harbored a legitimate terror threat, was frequently given secondary status in favor of the operation to overthrow Saddam Hussein, a leader with no meaningful ties to terrorism or the 11 September attacks.

After the United States and its allies accomplished stunning initial victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, they were unprepared for the emergence of an intense insurgency in Iraq and the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Obama troop surge in Afghanistan eventually ground the conflict into an unfinished stalemate while the Islamic State has created a pseudo-state in Northern Iraq and Syria. This twenty-first-century reality Williams sets up with a detailed analysis of the longer history that established key precedents for the conflicts of the War on Terror. The Israel-Palestine conflict, the Soviet-Afghan War, the Gulf War, and the emergent influence of the Neo-Cons, he insists, rest at the core of the events and decisions that gave rise to the modern terrorism problem and to the War on Terror.

*Counter Jihad* is an eye-opening myth buster that brings clarity to the confused and muddled memory of seemingly disparate conflicts. From the "truther" conspiracies to the United States allegedly training bin Laden to Saddam's WMD program or his alleged affiliation with Al Qaeda, this book shines light on a con-

fusing and complicated history that Americans need to better understand. *Counter Jihad* joins a series of relatively recent works that demonstrate the longer history behind the emergence of the War on Terror and the conflicts that have dominated the present century.

The book is generally chronological, but organized into six thematic chapters. The chapters are lengthy, but broken into subsections that make it a smooth and thought-provoking read. The narrative is built on a wide array of sources from interviews, archival records, news coverage, contemporary scholarship, and, of course, the author's first-hand experience in these war zones. *Counter Jihad* also provides a nice balance for readers who are interested in both military activities and foreign policy matters. The core of the argument deals with the course of U.S. policy, but it also offers descriptive accounts of what combat was like for the thousands of soldiers that served.

The reality that Williams so eloquently paints is one that will likely shock many readers, while also providing an understanding of this history that may point to better solutions to the critical problems facing the United States and the world today. I recommend this book not only to students and academics, but also to anyone interested in gaining a more complete understanding of the historical developments that created the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

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*Jihad and the West: Black Flag over Babylon.* By Mark Silinsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-2530-2712-2. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xviii, 258. \$22.00.

Ripped straight from today's headlines, *Jihad and the West: Black Flag over Babylon* by Dr. Mark Silinsky provides an excellent primer on the life of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as ISIL, Daesh or, as he deems it, the Caliphate. It is also an excellent backgrounder for military, political, and policy professionals struggling with a radical Islamic state responsible for murdering over 19,000 innocents, creating nearly 12 million refugees (1 million trying to get into Europe) and fomenting security challenges in Europe and the United States.

A quick read, the book employs the Karl Kraus style from *The Last Days of Mankind*, "offering readers personal and social profiles to present the Caliphate in a still unexplored light," and places "the Caliphate at the center of the Western-Muslim contest for world power" (p. 5). Unlike Kraus's work, Silinsky's stories are true, and many are emotionally disturbing. Using narrative, topic placement, and a pattern of case files, he expertly weaves the story of the current conflict through the points of view of perpetrators, victims, and nations as gathered from public sources. The work contains a bibliography and over 1,200 endnotes. Each chapter contains an introduction and summary to capture the main points.

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