

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East*, (New York, Random House) pp. 453**

America's War for the Greater Middle East is a detailed narrative of the various US operations and policies in the Middle East from the time of the Cold War. The author, Andrew J. Bacevich, is a retired American Colonel and celebrated academic and historian, with several books concerning US politics to his name. He is well-known for his strident views regarding the US foreign policy following the WWII and is critical of US' overreliance on the military to achieve its foreign policy goals. He draws his analyses from his personal and professional experiences over the years and offers informed judgements about the various questions he raises.

In the very beginning, the author cites the first ever operation in the Middle East undertaken by US President Jimmy Carter, Operation Eagle Claw in 1980, which was an utter failure. Of this, he says, that it should've served to dissuade any notions of future involvement in the region, but that "humiliation is a bad teacher." This serves as the main hypothesis of the book; getting militarily involved in the Middle East was a bad idea from the start and has created more problems than it has solved over the years. Although the justifications for each involvement have evolved according to the situation at hand, but military means has remained as an attractive solution to any problems in the Middle East throughout the years, in leaders and masses alike.

The author's target in the book is twofold: one, a critique on the approaches of different US presidents to the problems emanating from the Middle East from the 1970s to present, and two, a detailed insight into the major operations undertaken by the US inside various Middle Eastern countries in pursuit of its "national interests". The book presents a comprehensive account of Presidents' perspectives and visions for tackling each problem that arose from the highly volatile region. The book is useful for anyone, layman and scholar alike, who wants to understand exactly how the US got involved in the Middle East, what

mistakes it made on the way and how each major event unfolded into the present situation.

The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with a specific era and the target regions of US policy during that era. The author includes several African and the Balkan states as a part of the “Greater” Middle East, as these constitute a large part of the Islamic world.

Part 1 of the book titled “Preliminaries” outlines how America’s Middle East project started after US’ underwriting of Israel’s security in the Palestine conflict and the ensuing Arab suspension of oil and America being hit by the worst, unforeseen and never experienced before oil shortage in 1973. So, in the late 1970s began a campaign to legitimately revolutionize warfare for the purpose of acquiring oil from the Middle East, with an evident sense of “self-entitlement”, as the author puts it. In the beginning, these ideas garnered little attention as the US was just pulling out of Vietnam and the army was in tatters. The national military advisors did not consider Middle Eastern oil a matter of priority, despite the oil shock and despite the stated goals of Nixon to secure oil for all time, until Jimmy Carter in 1977. Carter’s emphasis was on Iran, but the 1979 Revolution and later, Russian involvement in Afghanistan interfered with those initial goals. This is when President Carter’s Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), later rechristened CENTCOM, came into being, with the purpose to maintain a presence in the Persian Gulf to oppose the increasing Soviet presence in the region. This spurred the assumption that the Persian Gulf lacks the capacity to defend itself and that use of America’s military might is the only way to do so.

America’s presence in Afghanistan stopped being a good enough reason when Soviet president Gorbachev proposed to end Afghanistan occupation. Nonetheless, with the end of the 1980s, Afghanistan was left in shambles and the US “created a monster”. However, by this time Saddam Hussein had taken the place of Soviet Russia as the new threat in the region. But getting engaged with Iraq, again, was imprudent because the US was ignoring the greater implications of the region, such as religion and the history of occupation.

Book’s part 2 “Entr’acte” explores the foreign policies of George H. Bush and Bill Clinton during the 1990s. At this point, with the end of the Soviet threat and, soon after, as well as Saddam Hussein, America now could shift its focus to other

regions. The American foreign policy in this era was focused in even farther off regions, such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Turkey, countries which were suffering turmoil, from domestic sources. America's decision to assist the domestic situation in these countries was driven by a sense of goodwill, such as Provide Comfort in Turkey and Restoring Hope in Somalia. The 1990s were also the decade when Al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, came to the fore and attacks against various US (started in 1992) targets forced Clinton to take action against Al Qaeda in 1998. The author criticizes Clinton's decision to declare war against Al Qaeda as imprudent, giving it a status and legitimacy that did not help the American cause. It ended in a "phony" war in Afghanistan that mainly served to display US military might and created further rifts within the Afghan society, fostering anti-American sentiment and the cause of whatever calamity might befall America next.

Book's third part "Main Card" is a scrutiny into the Global War on Terror that followed the events of 9/11. The author describes Bush's terming the Global War on Terror as "unhelpful" and "misleading"; nevertheless, a global war ensued. From his targets, all chosen rather irresponsibly, all of them resulted in grave repercussions, (such as the ISIS, which, despite the Obama administration's initial assumptions of success, resurged in 2015). "Main Card" examines closely and explores the shortcomings and mistakes made by the Bush and Obama administrations. None of the places, where the war that started in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, or the Libyan intervention in 2011, have yet seen peace.

The author raises two important questions in the end; why has America, despite being the greatest military power in the world, not been able to win or leave the war that it started in the Middle East yet? He offers a deep insight into these compelling questions. The US objectives and use of their military in Middle East have never been synchronized; somehow, the US need to indulge in war and employ its military strength has surpassed its need to form a coherent idea about what it entails from the Middle East and that is why, it is stuck with the chaos that now plagues the region.

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