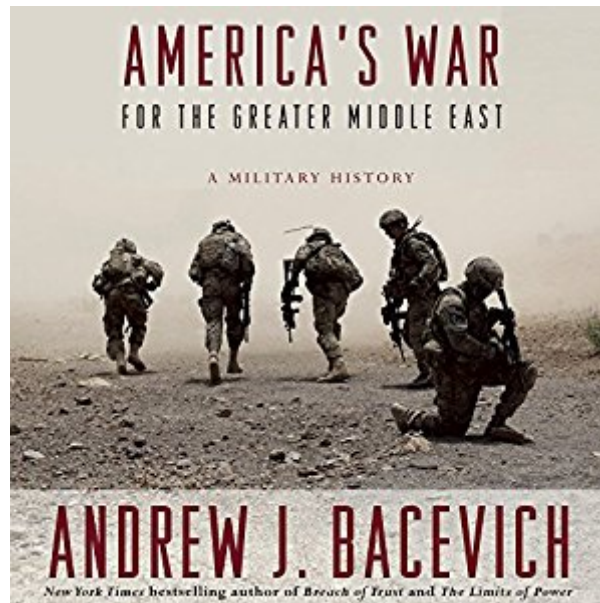




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America's War For The Greater Middle East: A Military History



Synopsis

Retired army colonel and New York Times best-selling author Andrew J. Bacevich provides a searing reassessment of US 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 30 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, US 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 20-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.

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Customer Reviews

Professor Bacevich has to cover a lot of ground here in a relatively few number of pages. He uses excellent examples to support his conclusions. It is fascinating how much blood and treasure has been spent without any apparent National Interest except for briefly keeping low price oil flowing to Europe. Like the British and the Romans and Athenians before them, the debts from these imperial adventures may someday hamstring our country. Praise to Professor Bacevich for detailing what we have been wasting our treasure on for no appreciable gain. Reads very much like our own version of those long past Peloponnesian misadventures.

Andrew Bacevich was a history professor at Boston University and a former army colonel. The book starts in 1980 and summarizes American foreign policy and the various military campaigns in the Middle East since then. Bacevich is controversial and brutally honest, which makes the book a fun read. He makes a good case for abandoning the Middle East. Over the years, Bacevich claims that our policy-makers and military leaders in the region have often proved clueless and incompetent. He particularly dislikes Donald Rumsfeld and Tommy Franks. Bacevich believes that U.S. policy in the Middle East has become incoherent and questions whether we still need to be there. He argues that U.S. policy is now on auto-pilot and blames the military industrial complex. He claims that there is a bi-partisan consensus in favor of perpetual war. Nothing will change unless the public becomes wise to what is going on. He argues that one of the drawbacks of having a professional military is that the public is no longer invested in the wars. As a result, there is no anti-war movement. Most people want to be seen to be patriotic. Prior to 1980, the strategy was simple; keep the oil flowing. However, Bacevich suggests that Gulf oil is no longer essential to maintaining the American way of life. A weakness of the book is that Bacevich rarely backs up his arguments with data, so he can sound like an opinionated uncle giving you a lecture. My limited research indicates that on this issue he is right. In 2015 the Persian Gulf only provided about 16% of America's oil,

while Canada provided 40% (according to the EIA's website). The U.S. has become an oil exporter again and no longer needs oil from the Gulf. In 2015, the U.S. was importing 1.51 million barrels per day from the Persian Gulf, but it was also exporting 4.74 million barrels per day to the world. Bacevich suggests it is time to revisit our Middle East strategy. He argues that the Middle East is an unnecessary distraction and America is taking its eye off the ball in other parts of the world. After the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, the Saudis decided to punish the U.S. for its support of Israel with an oil embargo. This caused economic chaos in the West and long lines at gas stations. Bacevich does not mention the embargo or that Henry Kissinger told the Saudis the U.S. would take over their oil fields unless the embargo ended. The embargo ended. The U.S. has since developed a good understanding with the Saudis probably because it was mostly about oil. Washington has used a mixture of carrot and stick but left the Saudis to manage their own internal affairs. Washington also provides protection in various ways. It has discouraged the press from investigating the country's links to terrorists or its human rights abuses. The Shah was viewed as a reliable ally and U.S. policy makers remember the chaos that occurred when he was ousted in 1979. All presidents since then have wanted to preserve the House of Saud and have cut it a lot of slack. After the Shah was overthrown and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the fear was that Tehran or Moscow might invade the Gulf and seize the oil. When Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, he became a U.S. ally. The U.S. did not want Iran to become the dominant power in the region so it provided guns to Iraq. Rather confusingly, the Reagan administration also provided weapons to Iran. Two years later, America's ally, Iraq, invaded Kuwait. Saddam became a villain. America's mission in the region broadened. Reagan attempted to sort out the mess in Beirut and put pressure on Libya. These efforts proved costly in terms of American lives. Reagan, despite his reputation for being a tough guy, backed down and did not retaliate. Bill Clinton supported the UN's peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, but after the Black Hawk Down tragedy, the U.S. walked away from the country. Desert Storm in 1991 was a major success and led to a considerable amount of hubris. By 2002 it was received wisdom in Washington that the U.S. had the most powerful military in history and it wanted to use that power to "shape the world order." After 9/11 the Bush Administration adopted, what can only be called, an imperial agenda. It wanted to invade countries who did not play ball. Iraq was to be a test case. Bacevich claims that Wesley Clark, a former 4-star general, was told by the Pentagon that the Bush administration wanted to invade 7 countries in 5 years, including Iran. Bacevich claims that Bush wanted to Americanize the region. The Bush team and its supporters saw the U.S. as a global hegemon. Resistance was futile. Bush believed that America

was an exceptional country and its destiny was to impose its will and democracy on the rest of the world. The backward peoples of the Middle East had to "change the way they live" and get with the program and forget Islam. If they resisted, the American military would sort them out. This sounded eerily similar to Hitler's concept of a master race, who because of their innate superiority, could do whatever they wanted. The brutal tactics of Ricardo Sanchez, the top U.S. commander in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, also shared similarities with the Nazis. Bacevich prints an excerpt from a report written in 2004 by the International Red Cross which are shocking. American troops would smash down doors in the middle of the night and beat up ordinary people in front of their families. They would smash their houses and whisk them away to torture factories like Abu Ghraib. This behavior helped destroy America's moral standing in the region. It was also stupid because it just created a new generation of insurgents who hated America. Iraqis became increasingly hostile to the foreign occupation. Its people did not seem to want what America offered. Bush's strategy was a dead-end and was abandoned because it became too expensive in terms of blood and treasure. Occupying countries and forcing the people to abandon their culture was a tall order in the Islamic world. According to Brown University, both wars cost the U.S. over \$4 trillion. After the financial crash, the U.S. could no longer afford to carry on invading countries it disapproved of. It has created a number of failed states. The armies it trained at massive expense proved useless. The U.S. is still trying to put Iraq back together and is retraining a new army. The strategy now seems to be to assassinate troublemakers using drones and special forces. Eliminating potential threats before they emerge. Bacevich seems excited about the prospect of the US moving into Africa. Bacevich views European colonialism, especially British colonialism, as a root cause of the world's problems. At this point he seemed to contradict himself and appears to have learned nothing from Vietnam and the Middle East wars. Fighting in Africa could be disastrous. The former British colony of Nigeria is 41% Muslim and 58% Christian. The country has been independent since 1960. There is tension between the two religious communities. The Nigerian terror group, Boko Haram is inspired by ISIS. Nigeria's population is 180 million and is expected, by the UN, to grow to 730 million by 2100. Why would the US want to send troops to Nigeria and get involved in an African civil war? How many refugees would it generate and where would they go? What would America's end game be? Nigeria was relatively peaceful during British rule. They built schools, introduced Christianity, and ended slavery. Bacevich loves the U.S. military and blames its leadership for its shortcomings in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Lebanon. He also claims that the U.S. is trying to be the world's policeman on the cheap. That is debatable, it could be that

it is not very good at fighting insurgencies. The US has been spending more than the next 10 countries combined on defense. Not that long ago the British controlled Somalia, Sudan, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen with a fraction of the troops that America has to deploy. It now seems that China and Russia are stepping up their game and Bacevich may be right perhaps that the U.S. should now focus its attention on meeting that potential threat and forget about the Middle East.

Basevich writes with great economy and purpose. He focuses on grand strategy and operations, using public documents, published memoirs and Congressional testimony. His evaluations are numbing to the point. But it is also likely he will be overlooked...the arrogance and anxieties of America are not likely to accept his wisdom. It has taken some 30 Years of wars to get to this point..It will be a 100 Years War comparable to the Crusades before it is close to being over...the underlying historical currents are too fundamental.It is a very important book and solidly researched and argued most succinctly.

Author Bacevich opens by contending that our military involvement in the greater Middle East began with the failure to rescue the American hostages in our Tehran embassy. Mechanical breakdowns, very limited visibility due to stirred up dust, and a chopper accidentally hitting a stationary C-130 resulted in the mission being canceled and the deaths of 8 Americans. While President Carter quickly took responsibility, Bacevich points out that the myriad errors in design and execution were attributable to the military professionals involved.Bacevich also points out that Carter's predecessors going back to WWII had done him no favors with their forging ill-advised relationships and foolhardy commitments. Nonetheless, Carter had launched America's War for the Greater Middle East, compounding those inherited errors. That war continues today, with no end in sight.America's War for the Greater Middle East was a war to preserve the American way of life, rooted in an abundance of cheap energy. In 1969, imports already accounted for 20% of American consumption, and the next year U.S. domestic oil production peaked. By 1973, in retaliation for U.S. support for Israel in the October War, Arabs suspended oil exports to the U.S. and the West. Eventually, oil imports resumed, but the availability and price of gasoline had now become a matter of national concern. The hierarchy of national security priorities was beginning to shift from nuclear weapons and the Soviet Union.President Nixon launched a plan to insure that Americans would not have to rely on any source of energy beyond our own (Project Independence), but the idea that retrenchment was needed did not sit well with some. There was a strong sense of entitlement,

notwithstanding Britain's prior experiences. However, the just-concluded war in Vietnam effectively dampened any enthusiasm for further military adventurism. From the end of WWII to 1980, virtually no American soldiers were KIA in the Greater Middle East. Since 1990, virtually no American soldiers have been killed in action anywhere except in the Greater Middle East. When Carter became president, he first had to confront what he called an 'inordinate fear of communism' that had found the U.S. in bed with corrupt, repressive regimes. However, he hadn't figured on the Iranian Revolution. Previously the CIA helped engineer a coup that returned the Shah to his throne while overthrowing a democratically elected Iranian government. Nixon sold top-line American weapons to Iran, now flush with cash thanks to booming oil exports - envisioning Iran as ensuring stability in the gulf, along with Saudi Arabia. The Shah, however, was losing his grip on power - having previously alienated segments of society ranging from secularized liberals to religious conservatives. All saw the Shah as an American lackey, the U.S. as parasitic. Both the Shah and Washington dithered. On 1/16/79, he fled into exile. The Iranian Revolution that overthrew the Shah triggered a second 'oil shock' as Iranian production fell off sharply, and OPEC announced a succession of price increases. Carter's ratings sank. Prior to addressing the nation, he concluded that America's oil addiction was the underlying problem and had led to losing our moral bearings. 'Too many of us now worshipped self-indulgence and consumption.' Carter saw one path - constant conflict between narrow interests ending in chaos and immobility, and another with us united in control of our destiny via conservation. It became a conflict between self-interest and self-sacrifice. Eventually, the speech became known as Carter's "crisis of confidence" (malaise) speech. With that refusal, the Persian Gulf and its environs acquired massively heightened significance. Carter had just previously signed off on a memo committed the U.S. to assist Afghan insurgents warring against the Soviet-supported regime in Kabul. The amount was small - only \$500,000, and material provided primarily medical supplies and communications equipment. Brezinski saw this as needed to dissuade the Soviets from meddling in the Persian Gulf. On 11/1/79, Brezinski met with Iran's prime minister, in an effort to forge a new positive relationship. However, on 11/4, Iranian students opposed to Carter's allowing the Shah to enter the U.S. for medical treatment, overran the U.S. embassy in Tehran. The Carter administration had no intention of another coup, feared by the students, and the Ayatollah had not ordered the seizure or even prior knowledge of it. Unfortunately, he soon endorsed what the students had done and transformed a difficult problem into a much bigger one. Carter then switched to a goal of maintaining a military preponderance in the region. Adding the Persian Gulf to the list of U.S. strategic priorities added to defending Western Europe and Northeast Asia. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Reagan's election combined to revive the Cold War. The task,

however, was complicated by the fact that states receiving U.S. 'protection' such as Iran, did not want or cooperate with it. The U.S. began with upgrading ports and airfields to which it had been promised access in Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Oman, and Somalia. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia undertook building bases far beyond its needs or ability to operate. A series of training exercises was programmed to cycle U.S. forces through the region - aimed to acclimate U.S. troops to conditions in the region and promote an increasing tolerance for their presence. The U.S. also began pouring billions in military aid into the area - \$9.1 billion in 1984, \$11 billion the next year. It was assumed that memory of prior upheavals dismantling the Ottoman Empire after WWI, creation of Israel in 1948, overthrowing Iran's government in 1953, the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973 would fade away. It was also assumed that Kremlin leaders would play their assigned role as bogeymen - that changed with Gorbachev becoming leader (March, 1985) and working to call off the Cold War. While Weinberger continued to warn of Soviet military threats, Gorbachev accepted U.S. terms in 1987 for a treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe, and announced plans to end occupation of Afghanistan. In February 1989, the final contingent of Soviet forces left Afghanistan. By end of 1989, our army found itself with more tanks and tank crews than it knew what to do with - made redundant by the sudden end of the Cold War. We then quickly fingered Saddam's Iraq as the new Public Enemy #1, and the peace dividend never materialized. To this point, U.S. containment efforts had been directed against states. Reality was that religion (Sunni vs. Shiite), and resentment over Western meddling, including border changes, which the U.S. had become heir to were to play a far stronger role than ever imagined. Iraq, Israel-Palestine, and Pakistan were prime examples of the latter. U.S. assistance to the mujahedin during the 1980s totaled between \$4 - \$5 billion, matched by Saudi Arabia. The Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon (had been placed there as a poorly thought through means of ending conflict in Lebanon) was not avenged, nor were additional Marine deaths by Syrian artillery fire at the Lebanon airport, or the two U.S. aircraft shot down by Syrian air defenses east of Beirut. Thomas Friedman wrote that the Marines had 'accomplished virtually nothing.' Hezbollah could reasonably claim to have inflicted a decisive defeat on the world's preeminent superpower - a conclusion not lost on other U.S. opponents. By 1979, Libya's efforts towards liberating Palestine etc. had earned it a place on our list of state sponsors of terrorism. Reagan concluded Gaddafi needed to be taught a lesson. In 1973, Gaddafi had claimed ownership of the Gulf of Sidra. The U.S. had rejected Gaddafi's claim without pressing the issue. Reagan changed that by having the U.S. Navy progressively challenging Gaddafi, dispatching carriers Forrestal and Nimitz across the 'line of death.' Two responding Libyan fighters were shot down. A later attack in response to the

West Berlin disco bombing and against Gaddafi personally at Benghazi (18 F-111s from Britain - 2 turned back due to equipment failures, four aborted while on target approach, a 7th missed its assigned target, and an 8th shot down; 15 A-6 Intruders from aircraft carriers destroyed the airfield) - overall achieving little, as Gaddafi was apparently warned in advance. That was the inauguration of an extended and futile experiment in employing military might to defeat terrorism - even though Reagan was pleased.

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