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Our Latest Longest War: Losing Hearts And Minds In Afghanistan



Synopsis

The first rule of warfare is to know one's enemy. The second is to know thyself. More than fifteen years and three quarters of a trillion dollars after the US invasion of Afghanistan, it's clear that the United States followed neither rule well. America's goals in Afghanistan were lofty to begin with: dismantle al Qaeda, remove the Taliban from power, remake the country into a democracy. But not only did the mission come completely unmoored from reality, the United States wasted billions of dollars, and thousands of lives were lost. Our Latest Longest War is a chronicle of how, why, and in what ways the war in Afghanistan failed. Edited by historian and Marine lieutenant colonel Aaron B. O'Connell, the essays collected here represent nine different perspectives on the war—all from veterans of the conflict, both American and Afghan. Together, they paint a picture of a war in which problems of culture and an unbridgeable rural-urban divide derailed nearly every field of endeavor. The authors also draw troubling parallels to the Vietnam War, arguing that deep-running ideological currents in American life explain why the US government has repeatedly used armed nation-building to try to transform failing states into modern, liberal democracies. In Afghanistan, as in Vietnam, this created a dramatic mismatch of means and ends that neither money, technology, nor the force of arms could overcome. The war in Afghanistan has been the longest in US history, and in many ways, the most confounding. A few who fought in it think it has been worthwhile. These are difficult topics for any American or Afghan to consider, especially those who lost friends or family in it. This sobering history—written by the very people who have been fighting the war—is impossible to ignore.

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Customer Reviews

This book is incredibly verbose. I read over 100 pages and still felt like I was reading a very long winded forward. There is essentially zero "meat" to this book. I was hoping this book would be a concise explanation of the strategic and cultural reasons we lost the war. Instead I got a book that talks and talks and talks without imparting any knowledge. I prefer "A cultural and political history of afghanistan" by barfield.

After reading this book, which clearly illustrates that we have learned nothing. We continue in attempts to change a culture and views that have persisted over hundreds of years with little to no success (corruption, tribalism and incompetence rule the region) The old adage of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is a sign of insanity is certainly true of our efforts in Afghanistan as it was in Viet Nam. It seems that over and over again we are led by fools. It is time to leave-Get the Hell Out!!

LtCol O'Connell (USMC) provides a quality collection of essays that examine the historical and cultural challenges between US/NATO forces and the Afghan populations to include: the Taliban, various local tribes, the Afghan National Security Forces and police. The war itself--an endless stalemate costing billions of dollars and human lives--is a result of failures in counterinsurgency and follow-on state building efforts by the US and its coalition forces. This book will serve well for historical analysis of repeated failures in US COIN operations and state building efforts as well as an analysis of lessons learned for military officers and policy makers at all levels.

Excellent and insightful overview demonstrating and clearly explaining the complexities of Afghanistan

Excellent!

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