



John R. Ballard, David W. Lamm, and John K. Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and Back: The US at War in Afghanistan and Iraq*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012.

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From Kabul to Baghdad and Back, written by John R. Ballard, David W. Lamm, and John K. Wood, chronicles the conflicts that the United States undertook in Afghanistan and Iraq following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This book sets out to discuss the strategic and operational actions the United States took in its efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, paying close attention to the critical decisions that went

into planning each of the combat operations and how those decisions affected the outcomes in each of the respective campaigns. Methodically researched and well written, the authors provide in-depth analysis and valuable insight into the complex nature of fighting a two-front war. While the book is not a complete or all-inclusive study of the successes and failures of America's decade-long war, the authors present a clear analysis of how conducting a two-front war affected the outcomes in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Their premise is that much would have been different in America's war in Afghanistan had the choice not been made to simultaneously go to war with Iraq. This book is full of great detail and covers a topic that is massive in scope and complexity, giving the reader much to absorb and ponder. The layout of the book, however, makes it more manageable with each chapter broken down further by subtitles. The selected bibliography and extensive footnoting of the book are valuable assets and ensure the reader access to a plethora of additional resources.

To begin, the authors outline the development of what took place in both theatres. Ballard, Lamm, and Wood devote the first two chapters to a historical discussion of American war fighting, and laying out a history surrounding the attacks of September 11 and the decision to go to war. Fighting two wars simultaneously is nothing new for America and the authors identify the American Revolution, the Civil War and World War II as examples of American experience in fighting two-front conflicts. Additionally, *From Kabul to Bagdad and Back* offers a needed and necessary, albeit short, military history of Afghanistan in which the authors highlight the difficulties that both the British and the Russians had while involved in the region. The same vulnerabilities those forces experienced "continued to exact their toll in 2001 when the United States embarked on its own war in Afghanistan" (19).

In the chapters following, many of the challenges that presented themselves as the United States prepared for and invaded Afghanistan are highlighted. Beyond the scope of geographical and intelligence difficulties that military planning operations experienced while planning operations in Afghanistan, American commanders faced coordination difficulties within the military command structure - the authors examine such challenges as the complex command and control process. These difficulties not only involved internal coordination of the US military, but coordination with NATO, various NGOs, and the government of Afghanistan. The authors claim that while

General Franks and CENTCOM were clearly in the military lead, “there was no forward command-and-control capability” (41), and questions consistently arose as to who exactly was in command in Afghanistan. Additionally, the authors bring up the point that outside of regional experts, none of the American commanders or planners fully understood the ethno-political and historical complexities of Afghanistan.

As any student of strategic studies will testify, fighting multiple wars simultaneously is hard in all aspects of its execution and makes success a more difficult achievement to define and obtain. From Kabul to Baghdad and Back demonstrates how the outcomes of the war in Afghanistan would have been different had the choice not been made to go to war with Iraq. In shifting focus from Afghanistan to Iraq, senior commanders in Afghanistan admittedly were no longer able to focus on the tactical aspects of their mission. A drawback in forces caused the leadership in Afghanistan to focus their efforts on such things as civilian-military operations, Afghan capacity building, and local governance. Ballard, Lamm, and Wood emphasize that although combat operations in Afghanistan were successful and much had been accomplished, more needed to be done to “ensure the Taliban and its Al-Qaeda partners could not someday regroup and return to Kabul” (78). However, in a move of extreme self-confidence, the United States turned its attention to Iraq and by doing so, left Afghanistan with much unfinished business.

The final chapter presents a last assessment of the topics discussed throughout the book. Though this section could have used a bit more depth compared to the commentary throughout the rest of the book, and is at times repetitive, it is worth the read. The authors note that the war in Afghanistan was a significantly different kind of conflict than the United States has fought in the past. Comparatively, it is a conflict in which a nation-state directed combat maneuvers not against another nation-state but against a specific network of individuals. The authors correctly assert that the Enduring Freedom campaign warranted different combat approaches and also introduced new and unforeseen problems. The security environment of the twenty-first century introduced an entirely new complex system of adversaries. Past the introduction of non-state actors and rogue individuals who claim no allegiance to any specific government or country, it is a system that has allowed terrorist groups a higher degree of anonymity and greater accessibility to materials. The book briefly mentions the

changes in warfare in terms of technological advancements and combat maneuvers that were seen at both the operation and tactical levels. However, a larger discussion of the new technology and tactics American forces adopted as a means of catering to a balance of both conventional and irregular warfare practices would have been a welcomed addition to the book. The authors close with the opinion that the United States should not willingly undertake any future two-front conflicts. In the event that the decision is made to do so, leaders of the US must understand and work to ensure that “priorities be established and resources kept in order so that the two efforts can develop the desired security outcomes” (302).

In summary, this is a thoroughly researched and well-documented book on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Along with identifying key strategical decisions, this book highlights the changing characteristics of war that fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan introduced to the United States. From a military point of view, it offers up perspective and a good synopsis along with commentary on the major policy, strategic and tactical decisions that followed the attacks of September 11 and how these decisions reflected the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. It offers insight into the inner workings of the planning by US senior staff. Despite these strengths, the book is missing large portions of the regions’ rich history, which plays a large role in how combat efforts in the region have been lost and won. More discussion on the cultural, ethnic, regional, and sectarian complexities of the region, along with a more detailed examination on the history of foreign invasions in the region, would have been an important addition to the book, seeing as the authors mention a general cultural ignorance among US senior command. *From Kabul to Baghdad and Back* is highly recommended to any reader interested in strategic studies, national security, military history, and Middle East politics.

Megan Johnson, a native of Sandy, Utah, is currently pursuing a M.S. in Defense and Strategic Studies at Missouri State University and working on her thesis, “Jihadist Extremism and its Roots in Religious Terrorism.” Her areas of interest include US foreign policy, international security, US military history, and US - China relations.

