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BOOK REVIEWS

Major Blake I. Campbell, USAF, PhD

Life and Death at Abbey Gate: The Fall of Afghanistan and the Operation to Save our Allies. By Mikael Cook, with Robert Conlin. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2023. Pp. 192. \$24.95, paperback; \$14.95, e-book.)

Mikael Cook and Robert Conlin's book *Life and Death at Abbey Gate* recounts the tragic events during the final weeks of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in August 2021 at the conclusion of America's longest war. Afghanistan war veteran Cook, who served as a former U.S. Army staff sergeant, begins the book with a brief biographical summary of his life, his time in the Army, and his reasons for serving. After this introduction, Cook explains the events of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, including the military's withdrawal from Bagram Air Base in the Parwan Province and the Taliban's early victories in northern Afghanistan and its swift advance on Kabul.

Cook provides a firsthand account of his efforts, along with a network of other Afghanistan war veterans, politicians, and U.S. State Department employees, to evacuate the thousands of Afghan special immigrant visa (SIV) allies, now threatened by the Taliban's resurgence and advance on Kabul. Cook's efforts, along with this network of Afghanistan ally advocates, became known as #DigitalDunkirk, named after the famous 1940 evacuation of Allied soldiers from France during World War II, in which hundreds of civilian boats assisted the British Royal Navy. Cook reveals the behind-the-scenes heroism of hundreds to influence operations during the Afghanistan evacuation operations. These grassroots efforts, independent of military or other official channels, are credited with

rescuing thousands of Afghan allies and their families from the clutches of the Taliban in this unprecedented humanitarian mission.

Although this conglomerative and amalgamative effort to rescue our Afghan allies was significantly successful, Cook provides a raw and unfiltered assessment of the final days of the withdrawal. Cook's scathing criticism focuses on the failures of the U.S. military withdrawal, in particular events at Bagram Airfield, and the ensuing abandonment of our Afghan allies. Specifically, Cook explains how one of the prisoners released from the Bagram prison when the Taliban took over would become the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) terrorist to attack the Abbey Gate at Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) just weeks later. Cook warns that these failures have yielded humanitarian and geopolitical consequences for the United States on the global stage.

Beyond the situation of the Afghan allies, Cook provides an intimate examination of the final moments of the U.S. servicemembers, particularly the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, who were stationed at HKIA to assist in the Operation Allies Refuge evacuation efforts. The immediate events leading up to and during the Abbey Gate attack are collected from firsthand accounts and recorded in vivid detail. Cook avoids the all-too-common practice of sterilizing war and records the unadulterated horror of the attack on Abbey Gate. He provides vivid detail of the carnage of the attack, which resulted in 13 Americans killed in action and 45 wounded. The reader is invited into the hearts and minds of some of the survivors. These accounts, combined with the stories and experiences of

Chaplain Maj Blake I. Campbell is the wing chaplain at Grissom Air Reserve Base, IN. His past assignments include North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the Air Force Wounded Warrior Program, and Scott Air Force Base, IL. He has served as a pastor and professor for 11 years, has published more than 70 works, and earned his doctorate in military chaplaincy in 2023.

his fellow veterans, and the stories of two of his Afghan SIV friends, offer an extensive examination of America's darkest hours in the Afghanistan War and failures to our Afghan allies.

Cook repeatedly criticizes the State Department and U.S. government for what he perceives to be bureaucratic, administrative, and logistical failures in the SIV program. He argues that nearly two years later, the fate of these Afghan allies remains dire under the Taliban's resurgence to power. Understandably, Cook's frustration with these events as an Afghan veteran is palpable, feelings with which many American veterans will undoubtedly concur. However, there are points in the book when Cook's animus may have come through a bit too candidly.

However, although this book highlights many failures of the Afghanistan evacuation, Cook demonstrates the humanity and resilience of the U.S. and Afghan forces during this intense and chaotic evacu-

ation operation. Cook contends that his motivation for writing this book is to correct misinformation on the Abbey Gate attack and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and to honor the 13 servicemembers who lost their lives during the attack. Cook's concern for the Afghan SIVs who were unable to successfully evacuate during the operation is driven by his love and loyalty to the Afghan allies, most clearly notated in his relationship with his Afghan friends Abdul and Mohammed, whom he successfully rescued.

The reader will experience the raw realities of this conflict and its complicated withdrawal, as experienced by many of the men and women who served there. Woven into this book are touching personal stories, heroic actions, gripping recollections, and tragic recounting of the Afghanistan withdrawal and the fate of America's Afghan allies. The events detailed in this book will surely be studied for many years to come as America's longest war came to an emotional end.

Adam Givens, PhD

Hueys Over Khe Sanh: Missions with VMO-6. By Peter Greene. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2024. Pp. 288. \$34.95, cloth; \$20.95, e-book.)

The memoir *Hueys Over Khe Sanh* offers a compelling view of Marine Corps helicopter operations during the Vietnam War. In 28 short chapters organized chronologically, author Peter Greene details his tour of duty from December 1966 to January 1968 as a Bell UH-1E Iroquois crew chief in Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO-6). Greene's war was unique to most Marines on the ground, as he experienced it from the rear of an armed "Huey." His reminiscences, however, are representative of what many Marine helicopter crewmen in the handful of gunship squadrons experienced during Vietnam. They were dedicated to their aircraft, conducting early morning preflight inspections, flying exhausting daytime sorties as gunners, and fulfilling maintenance and repair duties sometimes late into the night. Rotary-wing operations relied on the professionalism of crew chiefs such as Greene. With a half century of perspective, this memoir looks back on the 13-month tour that was "probably the most valuable experience of" his life (p. 180).

Greene and a friend enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966 to avoid being drafted into the Army. Opting for Marine Aviation, Greene attended jet engine school and was slated to begin helicopter school directly after. He never completed any training on rotary-wing aircraft, however. His jet engine class suddenly received graduation certificates and orders to Southeast Asia to become helicopter crew chiefs. The first Greene had seen or even heard of Huey gunships was in South Vietnam. Such was the rapid development of helicopter warfare and the manpower demands on the Marine Corps. For lance corporals

like Greene, sudden and total immersion through on-the-job training was their introduction to helicopter operations. It was up to the replacements to learn as much as possible by observing the veterans they would replace. Each became a provisional crew chief before gaining a few months experience, eventually leading to certification and official crew chief status.

The author joined a unit with a pioneering heritage. VMO-6 was the inaugural Marine squadron reorganized to include helicopters in combat missions in the 1940s. It was the first such unit in the Korean War to conduct combat operations. Greene was present for some of the unit's most notable moments in Vietnam. As part of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 36, the squadron was headquartered at the newly built Ky Ha Air Facility at Chu Lai on the coast in I Corps. With much of the base surrounded by water, it was mostly safe from enemy action compared to Marble Mountain and Phu Bai, the other two Marine helicopter bases in South Vietnam at the time. On paper, the squadron was intended to have between 21 and 27 aircraft, but attrition, maintenance, and spare parts availability meant only half that number were typically available.

Greene's reminiscences thoroughly describe his squadron's various roles in the southern portion of I Corps. Normal missions for VMO-6 while at Ky Ha involved escorting transport helicopters for resupply, flying protection for medevacs, and supporting the insertion and extractions of recon teams. Armed UH-1s were the most ideal gun platforms in the Marine helicopter inventory at the time, equipped with rocket pods and multiple M-60 machine guns. They could generally fill close air support roles, observation and assault support duties, enemy ground fire suppression, and command and control. Crew chiefs were typically

Dr. Adam Givens earned his PhD from Ohio University and specializes in the history of U.S. military helicopter operations, rotary-wing technology, and the helicopter industry since World War II. He is a research analyst at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

former mechanics who had been promoted. Flying in the back of the Huey and manning an M-60 along with an enlisted gunner, crew chiefs were assigned an aircraft and were responsible for keeping it in good working order through inspections and maintenance.

The author provides excellent insights into common menial duties, but also unique experiences. Beginning in March 1967, he worked with U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Special Operations Group (USMACV-SOG). Throughout the spring and summer, VMO-6 helicopters flew to northern I Corps close to the borders of North Vietnam and Laos to escort and protect special forces teams during their information-gathering missions. The work was so secretive, Crews were ordered to conceal their personal and unit identities. Details of their duties remained classified until 2005. Each mission was different, but Greene's aircraft and a handful of others from his squadron typically operated out of Khe Sanh escorting South Vietnamese transports carrying SOG teams. After returning to Ky Ha after two or three days up north, they resumed normal duties. It was during these SOG missions that Greene witnessed the famous Hill Fights around Khe Sanh in spring 1967.

The tone of the book shifts when the author begins recounting the squadron's relocation to I Corps. In October 1967, VMO-6 temporarily moved north to Phu Bai in response to increasing enemy activity in the border area. A month later it relocated more permanently to a new helicopter base just west of the town of Quang Tri. From here, Greene and his fellow Huey crews routinely flew in the Khe Sanh vicinity, where enemy activity was increasing. The author notes how life changed for VMO-6. Quang Tri's proximity to enemy strongholds meant a more dangerous area of operations. Their base was also now vulnerable to mortar, rocket, and artillery fire. The squadron's move also meant facing better-equipped Viet Cong along with North Vietnamese Army regulars. The area's rugged terrain affected the character of operations, with thick jungle and heavy foliage obscuring friend and foe alike. For the reconnaissance teams that the squadron supported, the omnipresence of the enemy in the Khe Sanh area, along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and in

the highlands typically resulted in emergency extractions under fire.

By the end of his tour, Greene recognized that the war was escalating. Daily attacks against Khe Sanh, Leatherneck Square, Camp Carroll, and Camp Evans kept everyone on edge. Constant operations and battle damage took a toll on the squadron's helicopters and crews and its ability to provide aviation support. By late 1967, only 3 or 4 aircraft were available per day compared to the normal 10 at Ky Ha. The author points out how this affected the acclimation of new crew members, as their opportunities to gain experience were limited. Greene experienced the steady and extraordinary enemy buildup for the Tet Offensive but returned overseas just before the Communists launched their coordinated attacks; he heard the first reports of the massive offensive only a day and a half after returning to the United States. Within three months, Greene separated from the Marine Corps.

Common themes run throughout the book, illustrated in anecdotes and occasionally vivid reminiscences. The command culture in VMO-6 was relaxed. In the air and on the ground, enlisted were often treated as equals to officer pilots, as part of the same team. Readers will learn of the effects that high-tempo operations had on crews. While officers could walk away from the aircraft following missions, the work for Greene and his fellow crew chiefs continued. Their work greatly relied on ground crews, who labored through the night to complete repairs and scheduled maintenance. The professionalism of these combined efforts is an often-overlooked component of helicopter operations. Interactions between crew chiefs was also an important aspect of daily rituals that strengthened camaraderie. Coming together in the evenings was a crucial way to reconnect with friends. It was during one such occurrence that Greene and others heard firsthand about the extraordinary heroism of Captain Stephen W. Pless and his crew on 19 August 1967 from fellow VMO-6 crew chief Corporal John G. Phelps, actions for which Pless received the Medal of Honor and the rest of the crew Navy Crosses.

Greene's book is more than a collection of his own memories. In a sense, it is a way to connect fur-

ther with his squadron mates, some of whom may have flown on the missions he describes. In Vietnam, crews were often separated from one another, either carrying out maintenance tasks, waiting near their aircraft on standby, or out flying missions. After the war, the author recognized unit reunions were a valuable way to reconnect with old friends and make deeper connections. This book continues those efforts.

Many readers will find much to celebrate in *Hueys Over Khe Sanh*. The inclusion of a generous number of color photographs taken by the author

during the war is exceptional. In addition to fellow veterans, this is a valuable work for students of the Vietnam War, helicopter warfare, and Marine Aviation. The book is useful for the insights it provides about Marine helicopter enlisted crewmen, as so few memoirs from those personnel exist. Additionally, it augments a modest list of book-length works on the VMO squadrons in Vietnam. In the main, this book is an acknowledgement of the special quality of VMO-6 and its men, one that rightly reflects the author's sense of pride for having been a member.

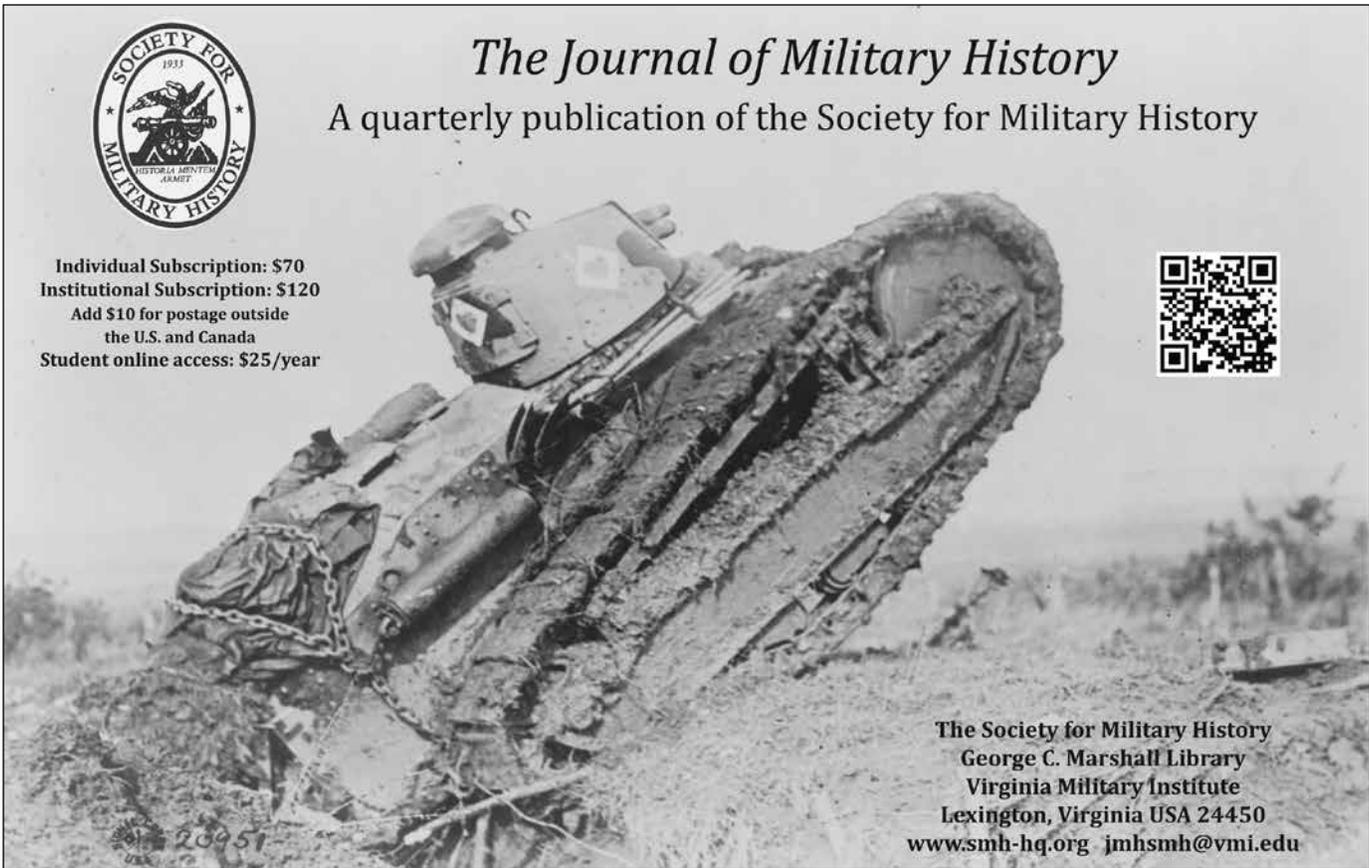
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Lieutenant Colonel Jason Kemp, USMCR

What It Means to Be a Man: How to Become a Better Person. By MajGen Bill Mullen. (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2023. Pp. 208. Open access, paperback, e-book, audiobook.)

Major General Bill Mullen's recent work, *What It Means to Be a Man: How to Become a Better Person*, is an adept exploration of self-reflection, integrity, and personal growth. The potentially provocative title is an attention-getter. Spoiler alert: the book is not intended just for men but explicitly aims to draw in both men and women to explore the topic of character development and self-improvement. Drawing from his extensive military career and personal experiences, Mullen crafts a narrative that challenges conventional definitions of manhood while steering readers toward a more reflective, meaningful, and purposeful existence. This book serves as a universal call to all individuals seeking to cultivate integrity and become better versions of themselves. The narrative and background stories resonate particularly with Marines or those who have served in the military or a similar institution.

Mullen begins by dissecting the traditional ideals of masculinity, which have often been narrowly defined by traits such as strength, stoicism, and dominance. He argues that these outdated notions can be detrimental not only to men but also to society at large. By reflecting on his own journey and the lessons learned along the way, he encourages readers to reevaluate their understanding of what it means to be a man. Mullen asserts that true manhood is not about power or aggression but rather about fostering compassion, respect, and responsibility.

The book is structured around key themes that form the foundation of Mullen's philosophy on masculinity. Each chapter offers insights into the quali-

ties that contribute to being a better person, such as humility, empathy, and courage. Through a combination of personal anecdotes, historical references, and practical advice, Mullen crafts a narrative that is both engaging and enlightening.

The book's organization lends itself to convenient reading periods of 10–15 minutes. The short and focused chapters make for easy night-time reading or while on board an airplane; one could consume a chapter in one sitting. Two features of the book added depth and value. First, each chapter concluded with a handful of self-reflection questions that, for this reviewer, made for substantial dinner conversation with friends and family. Second, the bibliography and recommended readings are valuable resources. To quote retired Secretary of Defense James Mattis, "If you haven't read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent because your personal experiences alone aren't broad enough to sustain you."¹ Major General Mullen provides a healthy, targeted reading list that led me to expand my personal reading list and offered motivation to pursue learning the specific contributions of great thinkers and practitioners of the topics within the book.

One of the most compelling aspects of Mullen's work is his emphasis on integrity as a cornerstone of being a good person. He argues that integrity is not just about honesty but also about aligning one's actions with their values. In a world that often rewards manipulation and deceit, Mullen challenges readers to stand firm in their principles, even when it is inconvenient or difficult.

LtCol Jason Kemp, USMCR, is an infantry officer by trade and currently serves as a combat field historian in the Field History Branch, History Division, at Marine Corps University. He works in the private sector in the electrical utility construction industry.

¹ Jim Mattis and Bing West, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2019), 237.

Mullen provides numerous examples from his military career, illustrating how integrity played a crucial role in leadership and decision-making. He recounts stories of challenging situations in which he had to choose between personal gain and doing what was right. These anecdotes serve as powerful reminders of the importance of ethical behavior and the long-term consequences of one's choices.

In addition to discussing integrity, Mullen highlights the significance of reading good books as a pivotal means of personal development, serving as a gateway to new ideas, perspectives, and self-reflection. Mullen underscores the importance of literature in shaping one's understanding of masculinity and integrity. Through reading, individuals can explore the complexities of human behavior and morality, gaining insights that foster empathy and critical thinking.

Books challenge our preconceptions and encourage us to question societal norms, much like Mullen

does in his exploration of manhood. Engaging with diverse narratives allows readers to learn from others' experiences, cultivating a sense of connection and shared humanity. Moreover, reading promotes emotional intelligence—an essential quality Mullen advocates for in redefining masculinity and for people who intend to contribute meaningfully in the community and our nation. By immersing ourselves in literature, we equip ourselves with the tools to grow, evolve, and ultimately become better versions of ourselves, making reading an indispensable element of personal development. Each of the 14 chapters includes a list of recommended books to further explore that chapter's topic.

I enjoyed Mullen's book, as it provoked me to consider questions of integrity in my own life experience, challenged me to deliberately reflect on my own thoughts, words and behaviors, and also expanded my personal reading list.

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Anthony Marcum, PhD

The Tormented Alliance: American Servicemen and the Occupation of China, 1941–1949. By Zach Fredman. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022. Pp. 334. \$99.00, cloth; \$34.95, paperback; and \$22.99, e-book.)

Security cooperation requires more than politicians, diplomats, and military officers. The everyday interactions of soldiers and citizens—such as communicating, working, training, eating, socializing, etc.—can influence whether cooperative efforts succeed in fulfilling military objectives. In *The Tormented Alliance*, Zach Fredman explores how everyday interactions between American soldiers and Chinese citizens undermined the two countries' efforts at security cooperation during and after World War II.

In 1941, the Nationalist Party of the Republic of China (ROC) and the United States began to coordinate their efforts against the encroaching Japanese forces. Each side brought differing expectations to the relationship, and Fredman explores how those expectations strained efforts at cooperation between the two states. The Nationalist government, led by Chiang Kai-shek, wanted to end imperialism and begin building a new nation. The Americans wanted a partner to help defeat the Japanese and to forge their new world order after the war. Unfortunately, American efforts to realize these goals were undermined by the harsh reality of American racism. American soldiers from the lowest rank to the highest commanders brought their bigotry to the ROC and to every interaction with Chinese citizens. Rather than approach Chinese officials and civilians as peers, Americans viewed them with disgust and contempt. The Nationalist government risked domestic illegitimacy were it to tolerate American racism and ultimately lost everything in 1949.

Fredman explores these arguments by examining the American military interaction with Chinese soldiers and civilians. Through the interaction of the two countries' militaries, Chiang and his government sought to reform their nation and American perceptions in three ways. First, the hostel project offered to house American soldiers, at Chinese expense, was a contribution to the war effort. More broadly, the ROC wanted to demonstrate the achievements of Chinese culture and show how the country could follow American standards. Second, the interpreter program sought to improve communications between the two militaries, while also demonstrating how the Chinese could learn “American values, technology, and habits” (p. 49). Third, the Chinese military sought to benefit from “military advising, technical training, and army building” (p. 81) to create a modern fighting force. That army would be essential in defeating Japan and eventually the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Unfortunately, none of these efforts succeeded.

Americans brought their racism to these everyday interactions, undermining the alliance and Chinese efforts at nation building. First, the hostel program disturbed American senses by pushing them into “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching” the poverty of China (p. 12). Instead of perceiving the Chinese as equals, the hostel program unintentionally reinforced American racist beliefs that the Chinese people were somehow less than themselves. Second, the interpreter program failed on all fronts. The American soldiers continually mistreated the interpreters by insulting, excluding, and/or segregating them. At the same time, the Chinese government failed to keep up its commitments to interpreters from the beginning of the program to its end in 1945. Instead of instilling American values, the program convinced interpreters to turn

Dr. Anthony Marcum is a lecturer in the program in international and comparative studies at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on postconflict reconstruction, democratization, and conflict resolution.

against both the Nationalists and the United States. Third, the military training programs had American soldiers—from the lowest to highest rank—treating the Chinese military as junior partners. American soldiers were distrustful of Chinese capabilities and intentions. Instead of creating a modern military for the government, U.S. Army general Joseph Stilwell openly challenged Chiang, seeking American authorization to put himself in full command of the Chinese Army. The next Army commander, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, improved relations with ranking Chinese officials. However, he offered few solutions to the rising tensions and increased violence between the soldiers of the two armies.

Interactions between the American military and Chinese civilians did not fare better. Fredman explains how American soldiers often acted with reckless abandon toward civilians, and the Chinese government suffered multiple violations of its sovereignty as a result. For their part, American servicemembers engaged in several dangerous behaviors, including reckless driving and indiscriminate shooting that proved injurious or deadly to civilians. Chinese law enforcement had few remedies for crimes committed by Americans. During the entirety of the war and for some time thereafter, the American military retained complete jurisdiction over all criminal matters involving their soldiers. Chiang and the Nationalist government formally approved of this arrangement, allowing for extraterritoriality and its humiliating effects to continue. At the same time, theft of goods and supplies had become a problem for the American military. As theft increased, American soldiers conducted their own searches for missing property and even authorized the shooting of unarmed civilians without due process. ROC officials did little to stop these actions. Instead, Chinese authorities imitated the Americans with similarly harsh measures against Chinese civilians. The inability of the Nationalist government to protect its civilians or to reign in American soldiers further diminished its legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

Fredman also explores the two narratives about “Jeep Girls” that emerged among the Chinese popula-

tion. The first narrative held that Chinese women who had relations with American soldiers betrayed their country while losing their womanhood. The second narrative held that American soldiers—using their Jeeps—were kidnapping Chinese women and sexually assaulting them. The two narratives turned women’s bodies into “territory to be recovered, living embodiments of national sovereignty” for the Chinese population (p. 136). American commanders understood that the emerging narratives were detrimental to their continued relations with China. Rather than discipline American soldiers, however, American commanders pressured Chiang into propagating a counternarrative. Fredman explains that these efforts to repress the narratives cost Chiang significant political support within his regime and among the population.

The final chapter explores the American military intervention after Japan’s surrender in 1945. The introduction of the intervention force did not change the unequal relations between the two allies, and racism continued to influence everyday interactions. Vehicle accidents, shootings, and the absence of justice combined with the fear of rape and Jeep girl narratives gave the Chinese people reason to loathe their ally. The CCP took advantage of these sentiments, offering a narrative of continuing imperialism. The rapid emergence of the Anti-Brutality Movement provided the Communists an opportunity to unify the population against the Americans. The exit of the last Marines in May 1949 precipitated the eventual defeat of the Nationalists later that year.

As part of these discussions on how everyday interactions influenced cooperation, Fredman attempted to categorize and theorize about the overarching relationship that existed between China and the United States. He focused on China becoming part of the emerging American empire. Within this imperial context, the book contends that the relationship started as an alliance between the two states and developed into an occupation of Chinese territory by American soldiers. Fredman’s discussion on empire (pp. 10–16) does offer some interesting insights, such as tutelage between the dominant power and the dominated power. Several chapters demonstrated how American

soldiers certainly attempted such efforts, but their racialized expectations negatively influenced relations with Chinese soldiers and civilians. While the historical accounts and transcultural approach offer valuable insights for understanding the influence of everyday interactions on security cooperation, the descriptions of the relationship between the two states created some issues.

One such problem throughout the book is the confusing designation of the Sino-American relationship as an *alliance*, an *occupation*, or some combination of both within an American *empire*. Fredman never defines these terms or explains how they apply to China and the United States during this time. These ideas—*alliances*, *occupations*, *empires*—are different types of hierarchy that denote various levels of investment, influence, and control between states.¹ One can debate these differences and the ways to distinguish between the relationships. Regardless of how a scholar defines these hierarchies, distinguishing between *alliances*, *occupations*, and *empires* provides foundations for understanding them, recognizing when changes occur, and exploring the consequences that emerge.

Without explaining the differences, Fredman claims that “a military alliance with the United States means a military occupation by the United States” (p. 1). That statement generates some problems for the arguments and evidence in the book, such as identifying critical moments when the relationship changed and the consequences that emerged from those changes. For example, Fredman suggests that the Chinese government lacking police power to enforce their criminal jurisdiction over American troops “turns them into an occupying force” (p. 206). The claim of a change in the relationship raises two issues. First, the change occurring in May 1943 means that the alliance initiated in May 1941 was not an occupation. This shift suggests that alliances and occupations are distinct relationships, yet that distinction is not explained. Second, Fredman claims simultaneously that this arrangement constitutes the “alliance’s transfor-

mation into a military occupation” (p. 133) and that this agreement in May 1943 was “effectively continuing the extraterritorial system supposedly abolished” (p. 129). These two passages suggest some confusion on how to interpret the events of May 1943, as China continued to have little to no authority over American soldiers before and after this event.

The absence of policing power over U.S. soldiers suggests that American officials did not perceive China as an equal. The book demonstrates how that lack of equality resulted from and subsequently reinforced American prejudices against China. Unfortunately, the absence of any definitions makes it difficult to understand whether a change in the relationship did occur between the governments. This confusion complicated any claims that the events of May 1943 altered everyday interactions between American soldiers and Chinese citizens. While Fredman demonstrates how bottom-up relations influenced security cooperation, his arguments on hierarchy between the two governments needed further development.

In *Tormented Alliance*, Fredman theorizes that expectations are influential for understanding security cooperation. However, the discussion of the two sides’ expectations does seem incomplete at points. For example, the book misses an opportunity to talk about Chinese expectations regarding an “alliance” with the United States. Fredman asserts that the alliance between the two countries constituted a tacit arrangement initiated in April 1941 with the lend-lease program (p. 27). An unexplored question in the book is whether the Chinese government (or even the Americans) expected just a tacit arrangement for security cooperation. The evidence suggests that such an arrangement was not their preferred outcome. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Chiang proposed to the American ambassador in China the need for an alliance among states who opposed Japan and the other Axis powers.² That idea eventually became a multilateral alliance. Yet, the Chinese government also wanted a bilateral alliance with the United States, and the

¹ For example, see David A. Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 1–33, on the discussion of different types of hierarchies.

² Xiaohua Ma, “The Sino-American Alliance during World War II and the Lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Acts,” *American Studies International* 38, no. 2 (2000): 41, https://doi.org/10.1163/2468-1733_shafir_sim130100177.

two countries never signed a such treaty.³ As Xiaoyuan Liu notes, the Chinese expressed disappointment that the Americans did not seek a bilateral security arrangement with them.⁴ That disappointment likely influenced how Chiang and others viewed the emerging security cooperation with their supposed ally. The absence of a bilateral alliance and resulting Chinese dissatisfaction would better support Fredman's arguments than asserting that the two countries accepted a tacit arrangement.

Everyday interactions between citizens and soldiers play an influential role in whether governments can achieve grand security objectives. The book is an invaluable read for understanding how everyday interactions can serve to undermine high-level diplomacy. Policymakers and academics alike can find lessons to learn here on how soldiers engage with host populations.

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³ For datasets on alliances for the absence of a formal arrangement, see Douglas M. Gibler, *International Military Alliances from 1648 to 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2009); and Brett Leeds, Jeffrey Ritter, Sara Mitchell, and Andrew Long, "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815–1944," *International Interactions* 28, no. 3 (2002): 237–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620213653>.

⁴ Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511529214>.

Commander Daniel J. McGrath, USN

Duty to Serve, Duty to Conscience: The Story of Two Conscientious Objector Combat Medics during the Vietnam War. By James C. Kearney and William H. Clamurro. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2023. Pp. 237. \$34.95, hardcover.)

'Twas the Summer of '69, but not all of America's youth were on their way to Woodstock. For James Kearney, William Clamurro, and tens of thousands of their generation, it was a time of existential crisis. The clash between the Free World and the Communist World was playing out in a fearsome proxy war between North and South Vietnam. When American ships came under attack in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1965, America's direct participation continually escalated. This led to the draft, with tens of thousands of young Americans thrust into combat regardless of their personal feelings toward the war. This book is a timely examination of the dynamics of the Vietnam War Era, now that 50 years have come and gone since America's withdrawal, and the corporate knowledge of that generation begins to follow World War I, World War II, and the Korean War into the mists of time.

The title of the book combines two ideas that do not often appear together: conscientious objector and combat. Those who are familiar with the history of conscientious objectors in our country may associate them with Quakers, Amish, Mennonites, and others from historically pacifist traditions. As these groups are opposed to all bearing of arms, our nation has provided alternative service for them during times of war, often in hospitals, schools, or other public institutions. When facing a draft board, it was best if you had been born into one of these traditions rather than join during wartime and be suspected of doing so for the sake of expediency. By 1965 however, a Supreme

Court decision in *United States vs. Seeger* had loosened the requirements for conscientious objectors to include nonreligious beliefs. Kearney and Clamurro did not come from the pacifist religious traditions, nor were they opposed to bearing arms in general. Rather, as college graduates, and being a little older than most draftees, they had developed their own political beliefs on the war as well as the ability to articulate those beliefs. The U.S. Army designated this type of political conscientious objector 1-A-O and they entered the battle space as unarmed medics. As the book shows, this created some tricky situations the military did not always know how to handle, for example, when unarmed 1-A-Os actually stood guard duty.

The writing of this book unfolded in several stages over many decades. First there were military documents gathered from Kearney's draft board and other proceedings. Then there were many letters written over the time Kearney and Clamurro spent in Vietnam, revisited years later. There were poems written by Clamurro along the way. There were live tape recordings made by Kearney of some of his actual experiences, including in combat. Kearney further honed his thoughts by teaching a course at the University of Texas and by telling his stories in an award-winning podcast series for the Texas State History Museum in Austin. Finally, the book came to fruition, the refining of all these components in a cohesive volume. The two authors each provide something unique and special to the book. Kearney serves the function of historian, recounting dates, events, stories, and locations. Clamurro serves a poetic function, not only through his actual poems but also in his recounting of what it felt like to be there.

Cdr Daniel J. McGrath, CHC, USN, is command chaplain of Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA. He has earned a doctoral degree from the University of California at Santa Barbara, the JPME 1 Diploma from the Naval War College, and is a Fleet Marine Force Qualified Officer.

Kearney and Clamurro document many angles of the American experience in Vietnam, usually from behind the wire, although both men had their share of kinetic experiences. As first-line providers of medical care, they dealt with all sorts of battle trauma as well as the processing of the deceased. They provided more routine care at daily sick call. Common medical cases included sexually transmitted infections and drug addiction, as American boys from the heartland were ingested by the marketplace of sex and drugs in Southeast Asia. Added to the generous dispensation of pharmaceuticals at the hands of minimally trained medics, drug addiction became a significant concern. Kearney and Clamurro are judicious in their rendering of what they saw, giving the reader a glimpse but sparing us the worst of it. The processing of the deceased was also a big part of their experience. Often extracted from the combat zone in haste, the bodies of the dead needed to undergo further preparation before being flown back to the United States. One experience that particularly moved Kearney, and which also moves the reader, is the story of a body bag containing the remains of a young officer who had only been in country for two weeks. He had taken a machine gun round to the chest and died instantly. From a respected military family and recently graduated from West Point, his military bearing was still evident in the starch of his uniform and the polish of his boots.

While not all draftees saw actual combat in Vietnam, the complexity of the situation for conscientious objector medics made for a more difficult experience than for many on the combatant side. Not only were they involved in a war they objected to, but they were constantly on the receiving end of the carnage without being the actual war fighters. Thus, it is even more interesting that the two came to accept their circumstances to such a degree that they ended up extending their combat tours by several months. It was during this extension that Kearney was on the receiving end of a burst of North Vietnamese machinegun fire during an attempted hot extraction. The nature of Kearney's wounds required extensive surgeries, treatment, and convalescence, but he recovered and received the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism from Brigadier

General George W. Putnam, commanding general of the U.S. Army 1st Air Cavalry.

The subject of the draft is an interesting thread that runs through the book. Without the draft, there would have been no need of conscientious objector status or alternate service in the first place. The draft brought large numbers of young Americans into the conflict who otherwise would not have been there, and within this large group was manifested some of the uncomfortable tensions of American society. The authors document some of the divisions that were present within the U.S. military in Vietnam. Black and White servicemembers were divided along racial lines; southern Whites were divided from other Whites; career military personnel, "lifers," kept away from draftees, whom they also generally despised. Violence and even killing occasionally erupted from some of these tensions. Perhaps this factored into the decision by Richard M. Nixon and Congress to allow the draft to expire, opting for an all-volunteer military going forward. Kearney touches on some of the arguments that have been made for a continuation of the draft. Some have argued that our all-volunteer force makes it too easy for elected leaders to engage in military adventures around the world without fully mobilizing the American people behind these efforts. Others have admired countries that have an established culture of compulsory military service. If Kearney and Clamurro had more space in the book, I would have liked them to write more on the subject of how future generations of Americans can be encouraged to serve their country in ways that fully align with their principles.

The year 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, and many have relived the tense scenes of helicopters and refugees on the embassy rooftop that define this war's unhappy ending. As the surviving Vietnam War generation continues to make sense of their experiences, this book stands out as a compelling part of the story that few even thought possible. *Duty to Serve, Duty to Conscience* is a case study in how some Americans attempted to perform their duty while protecting their conscience—something that should be important to us all.

Colonel John C. McKay, USMC (Ret)

Indochina Hand: Tales of a CIA Case Officer. By Barry Michael Broman. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2024. Pp. 288. \$34.95, cloth; \$20.95, e-book.)

And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain.¹

One cannot use spies without sagacity and knowledge, one cannot use spies without humanity and justice, one cannot get the truth from spies without subtlety. This is a very delicate matter indeed. Spies are useful everywhere.²

Although posed, the jaunty photograph on the dust jack of Barry Broman's recent *Indochina Hand: Tales of a CIA Case Officer* nicely captures the author's persona and élan while reflecting authorial essence in a very engaging book. A combat veteran of the Vietnam War, he is inured to the harsh travails, the vicissitudes and the verisimilitudes, of life. He possesses an inborn sense of empathy for the downtrodden and for victims of violence and conflict. Early on, Barry opted

for a career with the CIA, where he performed with distinction from 1971 to 1996, as a case (clandestine) officer. (Full disclosure: the author and I served together in Vietnam.) As in his first recounting of an adventurous and often dangerous career, *Risk Taker, Spy Maker: Tales of a CIA Case Officer*, in *Indochina Hand* Broman superbly portrays the excitement, travails, disappointments, betrayals, and double dealings of clandestine service. Broman is a true "results count" operative, easily comparable to many of John le Carré's fictional fellows. Their titles' similarity notwithstanding, Broman's books are refreshingly distinct from each other, although comparable in narrative style and geographies traversed.

In today's tumultuous world, we all too quickly lose sight of what preceded the current day's challenges. William Faulkner's prescient words carry a strong current of resonance: "The past is never dead. It's not even past. All of us labor in webs spun long before we were born, webs of heredity and environment, of desire and consequence, of history and eternity."³

Broman joined the CIA in 1971 amid the throes of the Cold War. His keen interest in Southeast Asia, sparked while his father, a U.S. Air Force officer and World War II glider pilot was posted to Thailand in 1962. He suggested his son take a year off from a Naval Reserve Officers Training Course (NROTC) scholarship at the University of Illinois and spend it in Thailand. A firm stipulation was that Broman work during this sojourn. Through chutzpah and real talent, he was taken on as a photographer by the Associated Press. Another of Broman's very admirable faculties is a seemingly inherent ability to master foreign languages. He returned to the NROTC unit at the University

Col John C. McKay enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1962. He deployed with combat elements during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, received a Secretary of the Navy appointment (from the ranks) to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1964, served two tours in Vietnam as an infantry officer, and was twice wounded, losing an eye. He was a U.S. naval attaché to El Salvador during that country's civil war. An Olmsted Scholar (Spain), he holds master's degrees from Georgetown University and the National War College. Col McKay provided sworn depositions during the Iran-Contra hearings, and has commanded infantry units up to a Joint Task Force. Post-retirement assignments have included time with the Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State, and Drug Enforcement Administration. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, he was an adjunct professor at California State University, Sacramento. At present, he is a key prosecutorial witness in two ongoing war crime trials. He is married to Margo, née Pace; they have three sons, all veterans.

¹ Numbers 13:17 (KJV Compact Reference Bible).

² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1988), 170.

³ William C. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 73.

of Washington, where he met his charming wife, Betty Jane (BJ) Apilado, a woman of equally remarkable accomplishments and talents. Fittingly, a short chapter in *Indochina Hand* is titled “BJ and the CIA.” Following graduation from The Basic School, Broman and BJ were married in the Quantico, Virginia, chapel in November 1968. Vietnam beckoned.

Risk Taker, Spy Maker details Broman’s involvement in the Vietnam War. *Indochina Hand* is a series of vignettes, generally in chronological order, but more focused on spycraft. Passing reference is made to the Vietnam imbroglio, with a short chapter on an outstanding Native American Marine, Cletus Foote, whom I had the privilege of having in my platoon. There is also a short chapter on the unsung heroes of the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program.⁴ CAP was one of the very few success stories to come out of a misbegotten war. That General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV), 1964–68, intensely disliked and criticized the program is but a seal of approval. As a Marine brigadier general, Gary Brown, a company commander under whom Broman and I served in Vietnam, observed: “If the CAP concept had been implemented and fully supported [country wide] early in the war, the outcome could have been much more positive than the April 1975 TV debacle.”⁵ The CAP concept has relevance in today’s challenging world environment.

Indochina Hand tracks Broman’s fascinating journey through a sphere that is rarely understood or appreciated often touted but only facially comprehended (multiple movies and television features notwithstanding): life in the clandestine service. In actuality, the men and women who practice the trade in earnest are quietly unique, often multilingual, and pos-

sess a sense of self, dedication, and a focus of purpose that clearly distinguishes them from the vast majority. That is not to say there are not notable stand-out characters, as Broman skillfully recounts. Recognizing that the manuscript of *Indochina Hand* was cleared for publication by the CIA, the level of detail revealed in *Indochina Hand* on planning, operational implementation and execution surpasses anything I have previously read.

“In 1962, one of CIA’s best Soviet agents, Colonel Oleg Penkovsky was arrested, tried, and executed. The military intelligence officer had provided vital intel to the West, including valuable information on Soviet missile installations in Cuba that allowed President [John F.] Kennedy to face down Soviet leader [Nikita] Krushchev and avert a nuclear war. Penkovsky was credited with altering the course of the Cold War” (p. 133). Cuba today, quite mistakenly, is taken as a minor nuisance a hollow shell of its former self. Cuba possessed, and possesses, a well-trained, professional intelligence service, often characterized as “punching above its weight.”⁶ One cannot but ponder what role Cuban intelligence, *Dirección de Inteligencia* (Directorate of Intelligence), might play in the current U.S.-stated intent vis-à-vis the Panamá Canal or in the ongoing tiff over tariffs with Mexico.

A focused role of clandestine services worldwide is recruiting human intelligence sources. As Broman notes, “Espionage is more an art than a science. The key to espionage is the successful recruitment of spies. It is not easy, hence the small number of successful “headhunters in the Clandestine Service of my day at the CIA” (p. 213). To be sure, the same applies today. Barry continues, “The most coveted recruitment is a spy from a ‘hard target’ country, typically Chinese, Russian, or terrorists; someone who can provide crucial information on plans and intentions” (p. 213).

As some nonexperts might imagine, the clandestine exploitation of any adversary relies largely on the frailties and foibles of humankind, and to whom or what they ultimately owe fealty. The exploitation bit,

⁴ The paucity of serious books on the CAP program is disappointing. One of the initial post-Vietnam War histories to pay tribute to the program is Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 116–17, 183, 439. See also, Michael E. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons: The United States Marines Other War in Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989); and Al Hemingway, *Our War Was Different: Marine Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994).

⁵ The fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army, and the demoralizing evacuation of the U.S. embassy was televised worldwide.

⁶ “America Has Had a Cuban Agent in Its Midst for 42 Years,” *Economist*, 7 December 2023.

like recruiting high-level targets, is an art rather than a science, as Broman notes. Identifying human frailties and foibles and subsequently successfully exploiting them is truly a skill possessed by few. It requires a level of keen understanding of human nature and a finesse grounded in an innate ability to read, get into the mind, of the target. Perspicacity is a rare attribute that can pay incalculable returns.

John le Carré is said to have coined the term *honey trap*, the operational practice of using a covert agent (usually a female) to create a romantic or sexual relationship to compromise a target. As Broman notes,

It is sometimes said that espionage is the second-oldest profession, the oldest, of course, being prostitution. Sometimes one profession helps the other. . . . The Soviet intelligence service, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, the Committee for State Security, which existed from 1954–1991 and was known as KGB, perfected the ploy. The Russians made many recruitments through honey trap, often by blackmailing the men (and women) involved. “Work for us, or else!” is a common pitch. Senior foreign officials, including Americans,

were coerced into cooperating with the KGB or its successor, the Federal Security Service (FSB), some of them for decades. . . . Unlike the Russians, the CIA does not include the honey trap in its playbook to attract spies. But that does not mean that prostitutes are completely off limits. I knew an officer who made the best recruitment of his career with the assistance of a few ladies of the night. The irony of the story is that the officer was a churchgoing, all American boy, and an upstanding citizen (p. 79).

As further described, Louis (a pseudonym) is a character.

Aside from being entertaining—and it is entertaining—*Indochina Hand* is a serious work that warrants the attention of those in the current presidential administration who are involved in ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of the United States.

Two minor quibbles: like its predecessor, *Risk Taker*, *Spy Maker*, *Indochina Hand* would benefit from the inclusion of an index and from more editorial attention to detail in proofreading.

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Michael Westermeier

How to Lose a War: The Story of America's Intervention in Afghanistan. By Amin Saikal. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024. Pp. 320. \$30.00, cloth and e-book.)

The Taliban entered Kabul, Afghanistan, on 15 August 2021, ushering in the end of America's 20-year intervention in that country. During those 20 years, the U.S. Marine Corps added to its already impressive military history, notably as part of Task Force 58, the first conventional U.S. military forces to enter Afghanistan, the grueling counterinsurgency operations conducted in Helmand Province, and as a part of the evacuation from Kabul. Over the course of those two decades, there have been many books debating the pros and cons of counterinsurgency, Afghan culture, ways ahead, and lessons learned. However, in the three years following the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, there has been little written on why America's attempt to build a democratic nation in Afghanistan failed. Professor Amin Saikal's book *How to Lose a War: The Story of America's Intervention in Afghanistan* is a solid foundation on which the next generation of Afghanistan war historians will be able to complete a more thorough examination.

Professor Saikal is internationally recognized as an expert on the history, politics, and economics of the Middle East and Central Asia. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1950, Saikal is an Australian national and adjunct professor of social sciences at the University of Western Australia. He is also the emeritus professor of Middle Eastern and Central Asian studies and founding director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (Middle East and Central Asia) at the Australian National University and served as a visit-

ing professor at a number of universities around the world, including Princeton University, Cambridge University, the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), Indiana University, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, and was a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow in International Relations from 1983 to 1988. He has authored or coauthored 18 books on Middle Eastern or Central Asian history and politics, contributed numerous articles to international journals or news organizations, and has served as a commentator on radio and television programs.

Saikal presents a well-balanced argument as to why the United States and its allies ultimately failed to bring a permanent end to the Taliban in Afghanistan. He points to Afghanistan's history and culture, Pakistan's duplicity, the United States' inability to create a coherent strategy toward defeating the Taliban, and rampant corruption within the Afghan government. While it is said that victory has a thousand fathers and defeat is an orphan, Professor Saikal has shown that the United States' defeat in Afghanistan in fact has partible paternity.

First, America's inability to capture Osama bin Laden until 10 years after the invasion of Afghanistan led to mission creep and to the second contributing factor to America's loss, conflation of the Afghanistan campaign with larger U.S. foreign policy goals of "democracy promotion" and "war on terrorism." Third, Afghanistan's ruling elites engaged in massive corruption and poor governance under the U.S. watch. Fourth, Pakistan's "Janus-faced" stance against terrorism undermined the U.S. and allied campaign in Afghanistan by paying lip service to their support of the antiterrorism operations while also supporting the Taliban and their terrorist partners to maintain their influence in Afghanistan. Finally, the United States'

Michael Westermeier was a U.S. Army field artillery officer from 2004 to 2011 and later worked as a park ranger at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park after receiving his master's degree in military history from Norwich University. He served as a historian with the Marine Corps History Division from 2017 to 2020 and currently serves as the exhibit curator at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, VA.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8833-0237>

lack of a strategy to handle the variables confronting them in Afghanistan along with their failure to fully comprehend the historical complexities of Afghanistan and the region surrounding it doomed their efforts to failure (p. 7).

According to Saikal, President George W. Bush's administration had three options to respond to al-Qaeda's 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The first option was to treat the attacks "as a criminal act" and use Interpol to "hunt down its masterminds" instead of declaring war (p. 7). While this might have been an option, it certainly could never be a politically viable one in the United States due to the widespread outrage engendered by the attacks. Bush's second option "was to lean decisively on Pakistan to curtail all links with Al Qaeda and the Taliban" (p. 7). Saikal says the United States was aware that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) "operated as a 'government within a government'" in Pakistan, "facilitated the Taliban-Al Qaeda alliance, and used radical Islam as a foreign policy tool" (p. 7). This approach alone would most likely not have been enough to whet America's appetite for vengeance but certainly should have been combined with U.S. military action in Afghanistan to deny the cross-border safe havens enjoyed by the Taliban for most of the war. The option adopted by the United States was to conduct an "intervention" using their military assets as the most effective way "to achieve its Afghanistan-related" objectives and further the Bush administration's global strategy (p. 8). Military action was, realistically, the only politically viable option open to President Bush at the time, however, the failure to identify limited, achievable objectives would set the stage for the ultimate failure of the American effort to build a democratic Afghan nation.

President Barack H. Obama, according to Saikal, realized that America "was entangled in an endless and unwinnable war" and decided to reset U.S. strategy. During Obama's administration, the United States moved away from its counterinsurgency and counterterrorism focus in Afghanistan and sought to "Afghanize" the war while pressuring Pakistan to prepare for a political settlement (p. 213). However, the military realities on the ground precluded America

from creating a conditions-based timeline and instead set a time-based withdrawal plan. This gave a clear signal to the Taliban that the United States was ready to withdraw and that they merely had to keep the pressure on until the withdrawal date (p. 213). The U.S. drawdown in 2011 from 147,000 combat troops to 20,000 advisors dedicated to training and supporting the Afghan security forces in 2015 severely undercut America's ability to negotiate a viable political settlement between the Taliban and what they perceived as the puppet government in Kabul (p. 214).

Professor Saikal is highly critical of the settlement negotiated by President Donald J. Trump and Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. He characterizes the negotiation of the Doha Agreement between the United States and the Taliban as an "impulsive and impatient quest for an urgent, total pull-out" and further emboldened the Taliban as they saw that the negotiations would soon deliver Afghanistan to them (p. 214). The fact the United States negotiated the settlement without Afghan president Ashraf Ghani completely undermined his legitimacy as a leader and, despite Ghani's efforts to resist the Doha Agreement's implementation, left him a furious but impotent leader of a house of cards (p. 216).

Although the Trump administration may have negotiated a bad deal, President Joseph R. Biden ultimately chose to follow through with the U.S. withdrawal despite warnings that the Afghan military was incapable of resisting the Taliban and that the Afghan government would undoubtedly collapse. The American withdrawal, one of the largest noncombatant evacuation operations undertaken by the U.S. military, devolved into chaos as the Afghan government fled Kabul and the Taliban took over. While the tragedy played out on television screens across the globe, the Biden and former Trump administrations took turns blaming each other for the outcome of America's 20-year war in Afghanistan (pp. 214–17).

Saikal places blame for the collapse of Afghanistan on the shoulders of the Afghans, as well. According to Saikal, "[Afghan leaders] had unprecedented opportunities to move Afghanistan towards a functioning state; instead, they personalized, ethnicized,

and polarized politics to bolster their power” (p. 219). The United States may have been naïve to think they could turn Afghanistan into a Western-style democracy, but the cynical leaders of Afghanistan used positions that might, under honest leadership, have created a country that—while imperfect—might have been able to stand against the Taliban’s resurgence. Instead, leaders engaged in corruption on a massive scale while local warlords remained in control of most areas outside of Kabul. Their moral failures collapsed Afghanistan back into a fundamentalist Islamic regime, undoing almost two decades of social progress, and led to the deaths of thousands of Afghans who had supported the government at the hands of the returning Taliban.

According to Saikal, there are lessons to be learned from America’s war in Afghanistan. First, state-building in Afghanistan should be developed according to its specific social, cultural, and political traditions that are deeply rooted in its ethno-tribal and Islamic landscape. Second, the United States should have recognized the need to conduct a “bottom-up” state building process rather than creating “top-down” government institutions that lacked popular support. Third, democratic institutions and processes will always come second to security objectives, which in turn ultimately undermines the democratic government (p. 227). In this case, the United States tried to build democratic institutions while also conducting large-scale military operations when they would have

been better served by establishing security under a more authoritarian government followed by creation of democratic institutions in a more stable environment (p. 226). Finally, the rampant corruption that was a feature of the Afghan government could have been avoided by the creation of a well-regulated and transparent aid organization. Without this, aid provided to a post-conflict state is essentially wasted as it is siphoned off by corrupt officials (p. 228). Saikal writes in summary, “If Afghanistan’s history and the U.S. intervention tell us one thing, it is that no single group, with or without the support of an outside player, can succeed in creating the necessary conditions for modern statehood in the country” (p. 228).

Although Saikal did not use military archival sources, most likely because the U.S. government has still not declassified most of the documents concerning military operations during the Global War on Terrorism, he assiduously cited academic sources, contemporary articles about the war in Afghanistan, and personal notes from interactions and interviews with key players that he used to write his book. His long experience in writing about the history of Afghanistan and Central Asia is evident in his smooth writing and the progression of his argument. Although this book will not be the final word on the U.S. war in Afghanistan, it is certainly worth reading for students of the conflict and those interested in the overall strategy of America in Central Asia in the early twenty-first century.